

# BROKEN BY DESIGN

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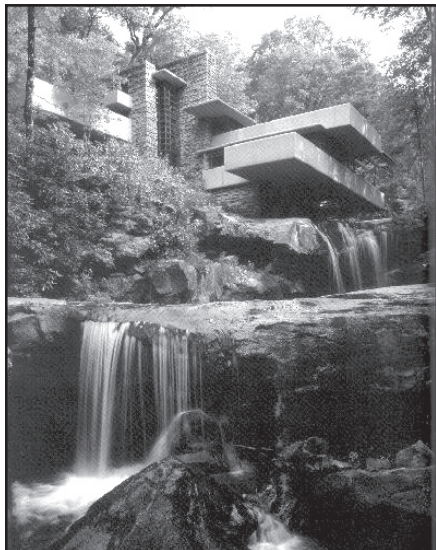


*A Church with no walls, shining bright for the world to see.*

**What church architecture reveals about the misguided heart of modern Christianity.**

## THE JOURNEY BEGINS!

Ever since I was a child, architecture has captured my imagination. From countless hours spent building colossal structures with Legos <sup>TM</sup> to the many dream home designs drawn on paper, I have lived with a passion for architecture. My earliest recollection of caring about architecture dates back to a stamp I received for my collection. The U.S. postal stamp commemorated the work of Frank Lloyd Wright; it had a picture of the famous Fallingwaters house design. Even at a young age, I thought the idea of a home built over a waterfall would be a really nice place to live. I liked the way the home blended into the landscape, connecting man and nature. According to the official Web site for Fallingwaters, “It is a supreme example of Frank Lloyd Wright’s concept of organic architecture, which promotes harmony between man and



*Fallingwaters by Frank Lloyd Wright*

nature through design so well integrated with its site that buildings, furnishings, and surroundings become part of a unified, interrelated composition.”

You may be wondering where this discourse on toys and architectural landmarks is going. You may be curious how it connects with God. Well, my passion for architecture has followed me as I have grown up in the Church. From gothic cathedrals with beautiful stained glass windows to an all-glass church to a small chapel in the woods with no walls, I have seen many peculiar and awesome designs constructed in the name of God. More than just a link to the past — church architecture points to the religious activity, both good and bad, of a particular era. Buildings do not evolve or happen by accident. Church and religious architecture reflects the heart and culture of a particular time, place or people.

A meditation on the subject of church architecture deals with the very foundation of modern Christianity. More than some might think, it encapsulates the inner workings of a church fellowship, not just the outside of the cup. This is not a historical look into Christian architecture as much as a modern day, personal meditation on the heart behind Christian architecture.

**If you are a pastor or elder considering changes to a church building, this meditation is for you. If you want to know how your fellowship can be a more shrewd and strategic steward of resources, this meditation is for you. If you want a greater understanding of what it means to be a part of the Church, this meditation is for you.**

Please be aware. This meditation contains some very strong rebukes to the Church. Every word was written in love for the mutual edification of the body of Christ. Be ready to challenge everything you ever thought about ‘going to church.’ When you live by God’s design, the ways of men make little sense.

Since Christians tend to speak in ‘churchy’ terms and religious code words, it is necessary to start out with a few basic definitions. People throw around words such as church, Christian and religious without really being worried about how others may define these terms. But for this meditation, a proper understanding of these terms is critical to the success of the mission. Let’s begin with defining a few basic terms.

## **DEFINING THE CHURCH?**

Have you ever heard someone say, ‘I just came from church?’ Were they talking about the building, the people, the service, or possibly a combination of these? Is there a difference between our modern day understanding of church and how God views the Church? For starters, the Church is not a place or a building. Actually, the Church is not primarily physical but spiritual. It is singular and plural at the same time. The Church transcends borders, denominations and culture.

At its base, the Church is founded on relationships with other Christians and, most importantly, deep communion with Jesus Christ. Many people mistake the Church for a building or particular fellowship of believers. In truth, it is the body of Christ consisting of all true believers everywhere from the resurrection of Christ to the rapture. I am the Church. If you are a Christian, you are the Church. Paul described the Church in 1 Corinthians 12 as “one body.” Universally connected with each other through Christ’s blood, each part belongs to the others. The Church, based on Christ, exists with no division. All true Christians are one in spirit. In reality, there are no Catholics, Baptists, Pentecostals, Methodists or Presbyterians. There are only Christians.

In this meditation, ‘Church’ refers to the corporate body of Christ as defined above. It can get real confusing from here if you are not paying attention. Particular groups of people who worship, study and serve together are commonly called a church. But for our purposes, we will call them a

‘fellowship.’ The actual building or facility where a fellowship meets is known as a church too. In this meditation, these facilities will be called ‘church buildings.’

Another word that can confuse people is ‘Christian.’ By simply attaching the word ‘Christian’ to something, the term impacts how people look at it. From movies to music to buildings, many people try to automatically purify things by calling it ‘Christian.’ But reality is never that simple. Sometimes we call things Christian that Jesus would be offended to have associated with His holy name. What makes something Christian? Is it the message behind the thing? What makes one song Christian while another is considered secular? Is something necessarily Christian just because someone who has a personal relationship with Jesus created it? For this meditation, the word ‘Christian’ used in connection to architecture relates to a building designed for the assembly of people who call upon the name of Jesus as Lord and Savior and believe in the holy trinity. From Protestant to Catholic, a wide variety of denominations and sects would fall under this description.

Having set the basic foundation, let’s jump right into the blueprints of modern church buildings. We will put modern Christian architecture through the examination and see if the structure is up to code (God’s standard).

## CHRIST — THE CHIEF CORNERSTONE

Any thorough discussion of a building must include an analysis of its foundation. No matter how the rest of the structure is constructed if the foundation is faulty, the entire building has a strong chance of collapsing. According to the Bible, there is only one firm foundation. Only those things built on Christ will last forever. Everything else will burn away on Judgment Day. In the following Scripture passage, Paul explains the centrality of Christ as the foundation of the Church.

### I Corinthians 3:9-15

For we are laborers together with God: ye are God’s husbandry, ye are God’s building. According to the grace of God which is given unto me, as a wise master builder, I have laid the foundation, and another buildeth thereon. But let every man take heed how he buildeth thereupon. For other foundation can no man lay than that is laid, which is Jesus Christ. Now if any man build upon this foundation gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, stubble; Every man’s work shall be made manifest: for the day shall declare it, because it shall be revealed by fire; and the fire shall try every man’s work of what sort it is. If any man’s work abide which he hath built thereupon, *he shall receive a reward*. If any man’s work shall be burned, he shall suffer loss: but he himself shall be saved; yet so as by fire.



**Christ and His Word must be the cornerstone of any work done by the Church. Before you start a building project, the Lord should be consulted through steadfast prayer.**

Many fellowships never stop to consider God's plans. They simply see a space need or another fellowship down the street breaking ground on a new facility and feel the right thing to do is to build. The guidance of the Holy Spirit not space concerns must be the driving force behind any church building program. Practical concerns can be the basis for prayer. But ultimately, God calls the shots. Leaders should pray, seek the heart of God and listen for His direction.

Today, many church buildings plans are based on the appetites of men. The 'McChurch' mentality of giving people what they want gets in the way — keeping local fellowships from being part of God's real plan. Why not seek the face of God for the design? Unfortunately, many leaders look to everything else but God. Similar to a franchise concept, they look for 'McChurch' models that have 'worked' elsewhere and try to repeat them in their community. This sends the wrong message to God.

**We never want to attract people at the expense of offending God. Why do something in the name of being culturally relevant that will end up causing God to pull His anointing from the fellowship?**

The apostle Paul cautions Christians to be careful how they build on the foundation of Christ. Scripture makes it clear that all work will be tested by fire. No matter what you do. Anything done outside of the will and power of Christ will burn up. If you want your work to make an eternal difference, seek, listen for and obey the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Jesus said, "I am the vine, ye are the branches: He that abideth in me, and I in him, the same bringeth forth much fruit: for without me ye can do nothing" (John 15:5).

Just in case you missed the point, consider this warning from Psalms, "Except the LORD build the house, they {labor} in vain that build it" (Psalm 127:1 - KJV). Are you building God's kingdom or your own idea of what God wants? Or even worse, are you trying to please man in the name of God?

Stop now and let the Spirit test you and your ministry. Pray the following prayer:

*"Father, search me and reveal to me anything that I have done based upon any foundation other than Christ and Your will. If I have acted out of my own power or without Your call, forgive me and lead me to true repentance. Open my eyes to Your plan. Show me how to cor-*

*rect my sins. Give me the faith to follow and obey Your direction. Protect me from the fear of men. Strengthen me to hear Your voice and obey. Be glorified in my life, in my family, in my ministry and Your Church. You alone are worthy of all praise, honor and glory. Amen.*

If the Holy Spirit shows you anything as you seek the Lord, write it down and share it with someone you trust to encourage you to follow the direction of the Holy Spirit.

## **FORM FOLLOWS FUNCTION!**

Buildings are designed and constructed for a specific purpose. Usually, the designers learn about the people who will use the building, especially their needs and desires. Depending on the locality, there are specific standards required by the government. In many places, the law calls for a building to have a particular number of bathrooms, handicapped parking spaces, fire exits, etc. The architects must consider the budget of the project, community concerns and the amount of land allotted for the structure. All of these are factored into the final design.

Ultimately, the purpose of the building dictates the final design. A building's purpose comes from the heart and intentions of its designer. Any project to construct a new church building reveals the heart of the fellowship and its leaders. Where is the focus? This can be seen in how space is allocated and how the building is designed. Did prayer or the aspirations of men guide the blueprint?

When you stop to look at many church buildings, the architecture tends to be either traditional or modern. The traditional style includes a steeple, sometimes stained glass windows or church bells, possibly a pipe organ, ornate pulpits, and maybe even paintings or chandeliers on the sanctuary ceiling. Made out of either brick or stone, the building has a solemn look causing all that enter to bow their heads and worship in quiet submission. Somewhat starchy and cold, these buildings tend to give off the same vibe as libraries. This environment can be a great place to get away and to listen for the voice of God when the building clears out and you are all alone. Yet traditional architecture tends to create a poor environment for meaningful connections with God and others in a large group setting.

The other major style is modern architecture, which is typically designed around more of a platform-centered, theater style design. Complete with orchestra pit, mammoth video screens, large balconies, complex lighting and sound systems, and bright color schemes, the modern design offers the perfect place to put on a show. It lends itself well to powerful group worship through music and can be a good setting for preaching. But it does not work well for small group interaction. And the platform-centered focus can make people feel more like they are watching a show than participating in a living

act of worship.

Some church buildings combine these two designs. And many others are a storefront, simple metal building or even a home. Next time you walk into a church building consider some of the following:

- Does the environment seem warm and inviting or cold and impersonal? From the color scheme, decor and lighting to the presence of couches in the foyer for people to socialize, little things can make a big difference.
- Does the main sanctuary use pews or chairs? Pews are more traditional and almost expected by some. But chairs tend to give more flexibility, even making it possible for people during a service to break out into small group circles. Pews can be uncomfortable and appear less personable to the more modern set.
- Is the building used most of the time? Many church buildings exist for two or three days of use per week at the most. What a waste of space!
- Does the fellowship allow those outside of its membership to use the facility?

**If the church building remains vacant for most of the week, your fellowship could adopt other gatherings as a way to give back to the community or support other Christian ministries.**

- Does the building have a prayer room or chapel where intercessors can pray? You can always tell how important corporate prayer is to a fellowship by the number of people that regularly attend weekly prayer meetings. Another sure sign is the space reserved for prayer gatherings. Does your church have a prayer closet, a prayer chapel or a prayer sanctuary? The smaller the space, usually the smaller the focus.
- Does the building have some unique feature, which helps the fellowship carry out its unique mission to the community? Some church buildings come with basketball gyms, health centers, coffee bars, food courts, prayer centers, banquet halls, lounges, libraries, youth facilities or other spaces designed to help the fellowship fulfill its unique mission.
- Is there a place for people to go for prayer/counseling during or after services? Many times people make a connection with God during a service and need to find a quiet, private place to pray or talk with a loving lay counselor. Where can these people go in your facility? Is there someplace more private and less intrusive to the rest of the service than just the altar?
- Is the facility visitor friendly? Some structures seem like a maze and can be confusing. Is the design intuitive? The building should be

designed with welcome centers near major entrances to enable visitors to know where to go?

- Does the facility get in the way or enhance people's ability to connect one-on-one with God? Does the facility really matter? Many contend the building has little to do with whether or not a fellowship creates an environment where people can experience God. Others believe the facility plays a role. Some believe the building to be a key component in the entire church 'experience.' Just as each fellowship is different, the church building should be different, reflecting the values and mission of its users. How well your building plays its part can only be seen through the revelation of the Spirit and your experience.

For some, a facility can certainly enhance or get in the way of experiencing God. Many people go to a service and come away with a good experience yet never really encounter God. The facility and how it serves the mission of the fellowship can impact the end result. Although anyone truly set on seeking God will do so in the middle of a white box if need be, the more mature believers should love their brothers and sisters by considering the needs of those who are weak in faith.

## THE MONSTER

"Hurry, hurry, we are going to be late for the meeting," barks Bob Fowler. "I hate to be late."

"We're not that late," replies David Drumond as he steers the Ford Explorer through the freeway traffic. Crossing over two lanes in a flash, David asks what is on the agenda for tonight.

Bob says, "We have to discuss the finances for the building project, problems with the sharing groups and plans for the upcoming revival."

"It sounds like we are going to be busy. Pastor Davis has really been pushing hard lately since he came back from that minister's conference," remarks David.

"Well, Pastor Davis picked up a lot of good ideas about programs and successful planning for church growth. It all starts with a good plan. Plus, our new family life center will be twice the size of the facility built last year by First Baptist," says Bob. David spots the right exit and signals to get over. A few minutes later the vehicle pulls into the church lot. Both men console each other in the fact that it looked like a few of the other leaders were just getting there.

Danny Barber calls out to David and Bob as they open the door to the administration offices. "Hey guys, wait up. Danny pats David on the back and asks, "How has your day been gentlemen?"

"Good all except for David making me late because his son's soccer game went long," replies Bob.



“We’re not that late,” says David. “Anyway, my son scored the winning goal. He’s becoming a real good athlete just like his ole man.” The three men enter the conference room where Pastor Davis and four other men are waiting for them. As the men exchange greetings and the stragglers grab refreshments, Pastor Davis calls the meeting to order.

“We’ll be two men shy tonight because Tim is out of town on business and Charlie Miller’s wife has taken a turn for the worse. The cancer continues to grow, and the radiation treatment is not working. Please remember to keep her in your prayers,” says Pastor Davis. “David, will you start us off with a quick prayer?”

All the men bow their heads and David prays, “Dear God, we come before you asking that you would bless these plans that we have been working on for several weeks. We thank you for the growth and prosperity that you have given us this year. We are expecting even greater growth as we launch these new ministries. May our discussion be fruitful and lead to resolution of many of the issues facing us. Please be with Annette Miller and provide her your strength. We thank you for your divine guidance. In Jesus name we pray, Amen.”

“Thank you David, says Pastor Davis. “I want to keep the meeting moving tonight and try to stay on schedule even though we started fifteen minutes late. I know that Morgan said that he still has to go home and prepare an opening statement for a case he has to defend tomorrow. As you all are aware, our contractors have revised the estimates for the new family life center. It seems that the raw material costs continue to increase. Plus, the county has added a bunch of new hoops that we must jump through before they will let us break ground. We will need an additional \$200,000 to complete the project. We can divert \$100,000 from the general discretionary funds, but the remainder must be made up with additional giving. I suggest we really push the fund raising campaign into high gear as quickly as possible. Wilson, will you tell us how the strategy session for the fund raising campaign went?”

“Ten people from the fund raising campaign committee met last Saturday to brainstorm approaches and to develop a strategy,” says Wilson. “We have selected a name and slogan for the campaign — Families First: Investing In Our Community’s Future! I will work with the church’s fine arts department and recruit a few people from my pr firm to assist us. We are working on a logo design now. It should be finished soon. We will promote the campaign with a mass mail appeal plus a video and regular announcements from the pulpit. The bulletin will carry announcements regularly including a run down on our progress once a month. Also, we may need to call a few of the usual big donors and see if they can help us make up the difference. Are there any questions?”

“That all sounds real good Wilson,” says Joel Nelson. “But do we have the artists depiction of what the new facility will look like? People don’t really take a building campaign seriously until they can see a blueprint or drawing.”

Wilson responds that he has seen some mock drafts. He directs the comment to Bill who heads up the construction committee. Bill pulls out a tube from under his chair and unwraps the final drawing. All the leaders jump up to get a good look. “Wow, what a structure,” comments Danny. The others echo his sentiments.

Pastor Davis says with a grand smile on his face, “This sure will help get the congregation excited about this project. I want it framed and set out for display this Sunday. Danny can you see to it that this gets framed in time?” Danny nods in affirmation to the pastor’s request.

Bill describes the problems they have run into with the county. “The fine folks down at the Environmental Quality Department and the Zoning Board doubled the size of the wetland we must develop to offset the land we are disturbing to build the facility and the necessary parking. They have also insisted that we put an elevator in the facility and increase the bathrooms to comply with the Americans With Disabilities Act. I tried to see if they would go easy on us. I pulled every string possible. If only Mayor Jackson attended this church, then I could have gotten somewhere!”

“Well, we want to be good citizens, and I think this is only a minor problem,” says Pastor Davis. Jim Myers chimes in and asks about the construction budget. “Do we really want to tap into the general discretionary funds? After all, this money is used for benevolence giving to poor families and urban missions as well as other projects that come up throughout the year. There has to be a better way?”

The head elder, Paul Bailey leans forward in his chair and answers. “Sometimes you have to make tough choices. The family life center will help thousands of people in just the first year. I firmly believe it is a much better use of our resources. We know that God has laid the vision for this project on our hearts. There are other places these benevolence needs can be met besides our church.”

“That may be true,” responds Jim. “But we haven’t spent any time praying about this decision. I believe one of the reasons that God has blessed this church is its commitment to missions and willingness to take care of the poor. I would rather put the building project on hold than jeopardize such a foundational need.”

Pastor Davis’ eyes open wide in shock as he hears Jim’s comment. His brow furrows; he stands to intervene. “Gentlemen, let’s not get carried away. Make no mistake, this project will help carry on the mission to the poor and needy in our community. We are not abandoning our efforts in that regard; we are simply refocusing the funds for a short time to build a brighter future. We will build this new family life center; it will become a testament to God’s goodness.”

“Yeah, God will love the basketball courts, the gym, the game room, and the theater complete with stadium seating,” says Jim. “I can cancel my membership at the health club and just spend all of my time here. Forgive me

gentlemen, but I believe the Almighty would rather us use the money in more practical ways.”

Upset by the opposition, Pastor Davis and Elder Paul interrupt each other as they seek to regain control. Pastor Davis yields to Paul who says, “Well, I appreciate your sentiments, and we all know that you have done some incredible work downtown with the urban mission house. But our membership expects us to expand to meet the needs here. In the interest of harmony, we must press on with the plans of God. And we want your support. Let’s vote on the funding issue and table discussion. All in favor of voting on the fundraising proposal raise your hand.”

Every man except Jim supports the motion. The group votes seven to one in favor of moving the money from the general discretionary funds to support the building project. Also, the board votes to approve the campaign name and slogan. Elder Paul opens discussion on the two remaining topics – sharing groups and the upcoming revival.... the monster continues to roll on its merry way.

— THE END —

## **DISSECTING THE MONSTER**

The short dialogue above may seem familiar to anyone experienced with squabbles over church building projects, budgets or God’s vision for a local congregation. Let’s take a minute to study and consider what can be learned from it. Answer the following questions:

1.) What are some of the reasons for the board’s decision to approve the plan to build a new family life center? Are these good or bad reasons? Why?

2.) Describe the tone of the meeting and the approach of the board toward completing its goals?

3.) How could Pastor Davis and Elder Paul have handled the comments from Jim Myers better?

4.) Was Christ the focus of the board and its activities?

5.) What is the monster? What can you learn from the monster that will impact your life or Christian fellowship/ministry?

## MY TAKE ON THE MONSTER

Notice the businesslike manner in which the meeting was run. Everything kept to schedule and on point. The board was filled with accomplished men from the business world including those with political connections and economic power. Not that any of these facts are necessarily bad.

**One leader talked about the planned structure compared to the one built by a different fellowship across town. Some view different fellowships in the same area as competition for members and the building as a key drawing card.**

Comparisons can foster a negative mindset where the body of Christ falls into a ‘us versus them’ mentality. Even the token prayer focuses on the plans of the men not the presence of God. These leaders seemed distracted by the mission, working off target from kingdom purposes.

Very little time was spent in prayer or listening for guidance from the Lord. Instead, they focused on zoning issues, funding and marketing. This could just as easily have been a meeting for a major corporation. They talked about pulling strings to bypass laws and raiding the benevolence fund for achieving their goals.

When Jim Myers talked about the need to keep priorities straight, the head pastor and elder jumped in to protect their project. They never really stopped to listen and see if the other leader was making a point worth prayerfully considering. They ramrod their decision through the voting process. The reasons for the building project were the perceived need, the desire to remain competitive and a genuine desire to please the members. They feared man more than God. Taking care of donors and members ranked as the highest priority over following the instruction of the Bible, caring for the poor or reaching the lost.

Maybe you think I am judging too harshly the leaders in the story. Just remember their actions showed little concern over finding God’s will for the decision. They rushed to act without consulting God or His Word. They made decisions in the name of God without listening for the guidance of the Holy Spirit. Discerning good and evil for themselves, these church leaders made the same mistake that Adam and Eve did in the Garden of Eden. The real problem can be traced back to their hearts not the building. There is nothing necessarily wrong with the building project itself. Sin arose as men sought to serve God without His blessing, guidance and power. God is not impressed with massive building projects. Consider what he said to the disciples who pointed out the size and grandeur of the temple in Jerusalem. Jesus said, “Do you not see all these things? Assuredly, I say



to you, not one stone shall be left here upon another, that shall not be thrown down” (Matthew 24:1-2). The Lord predicted the destruction of the sacred temple — a horrible thought to the Jews of that day. In your ministry, are you building the kingdom of God or your own kingdom? Only you and God can know for sure.

## BEING A SHREWD MANAGER

The parable of the shrewd manager has always been one of those stories in the Bible that has left me wondering if God really meant to include it in His Word. Is God encouraging us to cut deals to get our way? Does God want us to cheat our employer to make a better future for ourselves? Should we make deals with other people’s money? What was God thinking?

Well, let’s look at the story to try to make sense of it all.

Luke 16:1-14

<sup>1</sup> And he said also unto his disciples, There was a certain rich man, which had a steward; and the same was accused unto him that he had wasted his goods. <sup>2</sup> And he called him, and said unto him, How is it that I hear this of thee? give an account of thy stewardship; for thou mayest be no longer steward. <sup>3</sup> Then the steward said within himself, What shall I do? for my lord taketh away from me the stewardship: I cannot dig; to beg I am ashamed. <sup>4</sup> I am resolved what to do, that, when I am put out of the stewardship, they may receive me into their houses. <sup>5</sup> So he called every one of his lord’s debtors unto him, and said unto the first, How much owest thou unto my lord? <sup>6</sup> And he said, An hundred measures of oil. And he said unto him, Take thy bill, and sit down quickly, and write fifty. <sup>7</sup> Then said he to another, And how much owest thou? And he said, An hundred measures of wheat. And he said unto him, Take thy bill, and write fourscore. <sup>8</sup> And the lord commended the unjust steward, because he had done wisely: for the children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light. <sup>9</sup> And I say unto you, Make to yourselves friends of the mammon of unrighteousness; that, when ye fail, they may receive you into everlasting habitations. <sup>10</sup> He that is faithful in that which is least is faithful also in much: and he that is unjust in the least is unjust also in much. <sup>11</sup> If therefore ye have not been faithful in the unrighteous mammon, who will commit to your trust the true riches? <sup>12</sup> And if ye have not been faithful in that which is another man’s, who shall give you that which is your own? <sup>13</sup> No servant can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon. <sup>14</sup> And the Pharisees also, who were covetous, heard all these things: and they derided him.

I have heard a number of possible explanations for this parable. Some claim the villain in the plot is the rich man because he falsely accused the steward. Others suggest that the steward could have acted mercifully because the rich man originally charged the debtors very high interest, which would have been illegal according to Jewish law. Some believe Jesus was not commending the steward's dishonesty but his foresight to plan ahead and shrewdness in carrying out his plan.

The key comes in verse 8 where the Lord commended the unjust steward. What did the steward do right? Jesus said, "The children of this world are in their generation wiser than the children of light." Jesus appears to praise the steward's awareness of the situation and creativity in finding a solution. The steward showed street smarts. He found a way to work the existing situation for the greatest benefit.

Jesus connected the story to using money (mammon) to create lasting riches in heaven. Jesus said that we must first prove ourselves good stewards of money on earth if we expect God to reward us with eternal riches. Jesus cut to the heart of the matter when he talked about loving either God or money. Jesus said, "No servant can serve two masters."

Has the majority of Christian fellowships today tried to serve both God and money? Are most Christian fellowships wise stewards of their financial resources? Does the money go to things that make a difference in the kingdom of God? Don't answer too quickly. Stop to consider how the New Testament Church worked.

The first churches met mostly in the Jewish synagogues and private homes. Very little money was spent on facilities or trained leaders. Many of the early Christians were devote Jews, who continued to pay temple tithes. As the Christian Church grew, wealthy believers came forward and donated money to be shared among the group. Leaders were designated to take care of the poor and distribute funds. The early Church spent most of its money taking care of needs within the Church body, helping the poor and supporting missions outreach. The church at Jerusalem existed in a state of faith where no one claimed property for their own. They shared all things in common to care for the needs of their fellow brothers and sisters in Christ. No wonder the early Church evangelized the entire known world in one generation. Today, our attempts to reach the lost and disciple believers are nowhere near as successful as what occurred during the early Church era. The early Christians were known for their love for one another. The world today sees a divided Church squabbling over money and petty things.

Notice the difference?

**Church fellowships today act more like spoiled children each wanting their own sandbox full of toys. There is very little unity or sharing of resources.**

Many church fellowships look at each other as competition. You just might hear one elder say, ‘We don’t want to do events with them because that church is known for sheep stealing.’

In the effort to give the people what they want — a place to call their own, a dynamic service on Sunday just like the fellowship down the street, massive facilities, programs for everyone in the family, or the best music in town — have Christian leaders compromised their devotion to God? By worrying about the budgets and the fat donations that keep everything rolling, have many pastors and church boards prostituted themselves to the almighty dollar?

Since this is a heart issue, only the Lord knows for sure. But we can just look at the fruit and see a real lack of unity within the institutional church. Prayer vigils meant to unify the local Church must be held at a public arena not due to size constraints but because of spiritual pride. Some fellowships will not show up if held at a church building because it will be viewed as so-and-so’s effort to unify the Church.

Many denominations and church fellowships are not good managers of resources. While driving around town this evening, I noticed many vacant church buildings. Why do so many Christians spend millions of dollars on facilities that are used only a couple of times per week? The world does a better job of using its resources than the Church. Consider what would happen if the Church became more strategic in its resources including finances and facilities? More money could be used to mobilize missionaries, care for the poor, setup inner city outreaches or translate the Bible. All it would take is for three church fellowships to agree to share one facility. One fellowship meets on Sunday morning, one on Saturday night and one on Sunday night. They could each hold mid-week services throughout the week. These fellowships could combine resources to develop a nicer facility than any one could build on its own plus have more money leftover for building the kingdom of God. The only thing typically standing in the way is pride and selfishness.

Jesus said, “Behold, I send you forth as sheep in the midst of wolves: be ye therefore wise as serpents, and harmless as doves” (Matthew 10:16). Is the modern church system either wise or harmless?

**It appears as if the devil uses the current system to divide and conquer. The more resources are tied up in infrastructure the less that is available for evangelism and discipleship.**

Who gets harmed? Those that never hear the Gospel are impacted, or those that run away from Christ because they view ‘organized religion’ as a business. The Church could reach so many more people if we became less selfish and worked together for God’s glory. Some fellowships would have

to sacrifice the Sunday morning time slot, but many are not willing to pay the price. The show must go on as scheduled!

What would happen if one church fellowship blessed another by opening up its facility for the other to use? Some would grumble and worry about the other fellowship ‘tearing up the place.’ Simply throwing out the suggestion might cause a split in some Christian fellowships. Why are people so enamored with buildings? Yet this is nothing new. The twelve disciples were amazed at the temple in Jerusalem. “And as he went out of the temple, one of his disciples saith unto him, Master, see what manner of stones and what buildings are here!”

Jesus answering said unto him, “Seest thou these great buildings? There shall not be left one stone upon another that shall not be thrown down” (Mark 13:1-2).

Christ quickly dismissed the importance of the temple. God desires to dwell within His people. Even Solomon understood the original temple only served as a landmark. No building can contain the glory of God. Solomon said, “But will God indeed dwell on the earth? Behold, the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee; how much less this house that I have built?” (1 Kings 8:27). Despite God’s majesty, He had put His Spirit in the hearts of His people. Remember the question that Paul asked the Church in Corinth, “Know ye not that ye are the temple of God, and that the Spirit of God dwelleth in you?” (1 Corinthians 3:16).

God is building a Body with many parts. Each person is a living stone making up part of the structure. Yet Christians today suffer from the lone ranger syndrome. Just hear the message in these Scriptures:

Ephesians 2:22

In whom ye also are built together for a habitation of God through the Spirit.

1 Peter 2:5

Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.

Matthew 12:25

And Jesus knew their thoughts, and said unto them, Every kingdom divided against itself is brought to desolation; and every city or house divided against itself shall not stand:

**The real temple of God is the human heart, which can only be built up in relationship with Jesus and others. Unfortunately many modern church fellowships spend so much effort on the earthly temple and programs that they end up ignoring the real temple.**

Parents are too busy with their careers and even ministry to lead the family in studying God's Word and prayer at home. People come and go through the revolving door without anybody knowing their real pain. Too many fellowships are full of people with shallow relationships. Many do not fear the Lord or revere His name. They get upset when the service goes over the allotted time.

*Father, forgive us a divided people. We have divided hearts and minds. We are divided in the eyes of the world. We have sullied Your name. Restore the foundations of old. Repair the breaches in the wall. Guide Christian leaders in setting aside pride and selfishness for the good of Your kingdom. Unify our hearts. Lead us unto the way everlasting and help us to build deep relationships. Even though many come together on Sunday mornings, we have forsaken the true fellowship of believers.*

*Shake the churches across this land. Raise up men who will lead their families in righteousness. Turn the hearts of men back to their families. Destroy the Jezebel spirit attacking so many families.*

*May we be good stewards of the time, talents and financial resources You have given us. Use a united Church to reach the lost. You alone are worthy of all praise and glory. You can accomplish this transformation and even more as the last days draw near. Thank you for revealing the truth to me. I pray all of these things in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen!*

## OFFICE HOURS

One Saturday, I came along a church building. Beautiful on the outside, I marveled at the structure. Lights illuminated the exterior as the night sky danced around the steeple. My spirit invited me inside. But I was shocked to find the doors locked. I don't know why I was surprised. Most church buildings are locked except on Sundays and a few moments throughout the week. But I thought there was just a chance that the doors would be opened.

Is this really how God intended it to be? Should His house ever be closed? Like a centurion guarding the wall, should there always be someone there keeping watch? Oh, that's impractical some may say. But a crisis rarely comes at convenient times. Crises come at midnight when a husband burns with lustful passion, a son considers ending it all, or a daughter consents to gain the favor of a boy. But the church building doors remain locked. Beautiful exteriors and locked doors are these part of God's master plan? No, the building should be open. Believers, interceding, worshipping, crying out to God, they need a place to gather, to inspire and to comfort. Yet the doors remained locked.

Why do we relegate the Church to the culture of man? Should the Church



have office hours? Locked doors say to the needy parishioner, we're too busy come back some other time. People feel shunned and alone. Then the Christian leaders wonder while the parishioners lock up their hearts when the doors are open. For men are so worried about keeping people from stealing the material goods inside the church building that we lock others out in times of need. As a result, we sacrifice the mission of the Church to protect the building and its contents.

Some may say that I mistake the building for the people, the body of Christ. But I contend that the state of the building reflects the hearts of the leadership and the parishioners.

**As I search myself, I find that I lock the doors to my heart. I only want to let others in when it is convenient for me. I keep most at bay by simply locking the door and putting on a pretty facade.**

Then I wonder why my ministry roots only go just below the surface. To really be useful to God, the doors of my heart should be opened at all times to learn and love. The bigger question is not whether the Church locks its doors but if I lock mine to the Lord and others. It would be easy to claim that I simply live out the attitude that has been modeled to me by so many in the Church. But God holds each man accountable for his own actions.

*Oh, God may my heart always be open to You and to those You desire for me love and encourage. God may I not follow the example of the world and keep office hours when it comes to loving and experiencing a deep, deep relationship with You. Amen!*

## REMODELING TIME

While writing this meditation, I have been drawing in my mind a blueprint for how the Church should function and what the best design for a church building might be. I cannot come up with one concrete answer. Each fellowship will be different depending on how it fits into the Body. But here are some ideas of what a Jesus-based fellowship and its facilities might look like.

## HOME FELLOWSHIPS

Many home fellowships are popping up all across America. People, who are tired of the problems in the mainstream denominations, have opted out by gathering in small home-based fellowships. This follows the example used by the early Christian Church and may be the right answer for you. There are some pitfalls to home church fellowships. These gatherings can sometimes

become just as controlled and dangerous as a dead denominational fellowship (not that all denominational churches are spiritually dead). What happens if a charismatic leader takes center stage and uses his/her influence to manipulate the fellowship? What happens when the home fellowship becomes judgmental and does not love the Body as a whole (including those in denominations and large church fellowships)? What happens when the love of money divides close friendships? Being small can lead to gossip and deep emotional scars if the fellowship consists of busy bodies.

Yet home gatherings can be leaner and meaner, focusing more money and time on real kingdom business. Smaller group settings make it easier to develop close relationships. People tend to really view themselves as ministers, especially when different people facilitate the gathering from week to week. Home fellowships can offer a degree of liberty unavailable in a tightly managed denominational structure. Gatherings in homes may seem less threatening to non-believers than going to a big church building. Many home fellowships meet for extended periods of time and include a meal, which can encourage more interaction.

Home fellowships tend to lack the facilities to foster big meetings. This can be a good thing. Size constraints can lead the group to establish another home fellowship leading to the multiplication effect. If a family feels called to be part of a home fellowship, it could remodel the home to be more meeting friendly. A home fellowship may develop a large room for people to gather by knocking out some walls. A basement might be finished off to include a place for children to play or youth to interact in a safe environment. The basement could be opened up for neighborhood children to come during the week. Maybe a family might hear the call to finish off the basement and create a mini-apartment for a needy person to use. By taking a single mother into their house, they are actively showing the love of Christ. A family with land could turn part of it into a prayer garden for others to use. The possibilities are limitless... just be open to the leading of the Holy Spirit.

## **LARGE FELLOWSHIPS**

Please do not go away thinking that I am criticizing all large church fellowships or denominations. The bride and the whore exist everywhere. It all comes back to the heart. Actually, I happen to fellowship with both a large, denominational assembly and a small home fellowship. And I have meaningful relationships in both fellowships.

When it comes to large church facilities, the buildings tend to be designed for large group gatherings such as major Sunday morning services, youth group meetings, musical productions, or mid-week worship services. These gatherings can be great or spiritually dead depending on the heart of the people. But even the best large group settings lack the intimacy of small groups. Progressive design should allow for both large group gatherings and

small group interaction. This can be accomplished by having places with comfortable chairs and sofas for hanging out. Consider a coffee bar, reading room or mini café. Even mini rooms off to the side of the sanctuary allow someone to share in a corporate service yet find a place of solitude for counseling, intercession or private contemplation.

Flexible facilities allow the fellowship to change as the Lord grows the people within it. This should take away one excuse that people use to avoid the work of God.

**We must never be dependent on facilities to share the love of Christ. Many believers want a special building in place before they feel free or released to minister.**

Some Christians hide behind facilities and programs because they are afraid to let their light shine before men in their everyday life. Must a church building have coffee bar before the fellowship can minister to postmoderns? What if the church fellowship took the Word to the lost by regularly hanging out at public coffee houses and sharing Christ through casual interaction? Which should come first the building or the commitment from the people of God to act?

The focus on facilities reveals the potential flaw in the modern way of doing ministry.

**Instead of taking people to church as a way of ministering to the lost, why don't Christians simply be the Church to a desperate world?**

Being the Church requires sacrifice and submission to the will of God, which can be a painful thing for carnal-minded people. This approach puts the focus back on Jesus where it belongs.

When designing a mega church building, one interesting space to include in the plan might be a part of the building designated for 24-hour access by the public. Called the 'Waiting Room,' it would be a place for people to pray or study the Bible. It would include one large room designed to be a prayer chapel with many little rooms off to the sides. These rooms would be mostly sound proof with sofas, comfortable chairs, tables, CD players, etc. The Waiting Room offers the public an environment for small group prayers in the little side rooms while larger groups can gather in the main room. A stained glass window and altars line the front of the main room. A map of the world covers the back wall. Chairs and tables are used to fill the room, giving flexibility in design. Phones in the rear automatically dial a 24-hour prayer/counseling line where people can turn for help. The church fellowship would strive to staff the Waiting Room for most of the morning and evening hours.

Completely self-contained with bathrooms, there would be no need for visitors to access the rest of the building. The Waiting Room might include a prayer garden out back, a nice place to listen for the voice of God when weather permits.

There have been many days when I would have loved to visit a place like the Waiting Room, a space designed for small groups or just one person to seek the face of God. At times, musicians could come and fill the main room with worship music — a sweet aroma of praise to the Lord. I believe if a church fellowship created such a place, the anointing of God would rain down on the fellowship because God values prayer. Jesus never did anything significant without praying first. When the disciples could have asked Jesus to teach them anything, they asked Him to teach them how to pray. The disciples understood the power of prayer. Today, Jesus stands at the right hand of the Father interceding for His bride. Jesus said, “My house shall be called of all nations the house of prayer” (Mark 11:17).

Isaiah 56:7

Even them will I bring to my holy mountain, and make them joyful in my house of prayer: their burnt offerings and their sacrifices shall be accepted upon mine altar; for mine house shall be called a house of prayer for all people.

## THE HOME

The family has become the forgotten church in America. Regardless of where you fellowship on Sundays, your family should be the base with Christ as the firm foundation. The Word gives the responsibility to the man of the house to lead his family in righteousness and service to God.

**Parents are called to disciple their children. Men are called to love their wives and wash them with the pure water of the Word. But too many have pushed this responsibility onto the local church fellowship.**

All believers are called to be priests not just those with the title ‘pastor.’

Do you regularly get together as a family to study the Bible, pray and worship? Do you model the Church in your home? If the answer is no, you should consider setting aside one night during the week to seek God as a family. Make it fun and genuine. Your children should be given a chance to actively participate. If you encourage interaction, you may be surprised how much your family grows through the process. Remember — the church starts at home.

## ARE YOU LIVING UP TO CODE?

This meditation may leave you thinking that all is lost. Don't be deceived into thinking, 'There are way too many problems to overcome.' Be encouraged. We serve a mighty God. He holds the universe in the palm of His hand. Jesus has overcome the world, and the Lord is preparing His bride for the last days. Are you watching? Are you ready? Revival starts with you!

The culmination of all history will take place as God fulfills His promises. Just stop and consider the vision seen by the apostle John, "The tabernacle of God is with men, and he will dwell with them, and they shall be his people, and God himself shall be with them, and be their God" (Revelation 21:3).

It can be easy to get overwhelmed by all the things wrong with the world or even the Church. Yet the plan of God marches on even though many church fellowships are not in line with the perfect will of God. Many religious people rejected Jesus during His earthly ministry because He did not fit with their preconceived ideas. Jesus is the cornerstone that the builders rejected. Today this still takes place. Just like the people during the construction of the tower of Babel, many strive to make a name for themselves. They seek to reach heaven (serve God) on their own with their own plans (Genesis 11:4-9). This is rebellion against God.

As the truth comes forth, it is easy to start pointing fingers. Modern Christianity is full of hypocrites. Some grow up in a church fellowship and become disillusioned by the hypocrisy. They end up turning their backs on God due to the sins of so-called Christians. They believe the lies of the enemy and end up missing out on the REAL LIFE.

Who is to blame?

**The truth is that we all take part in the rebellion as we fear man more than God. Instead of trying to fix everyone else, hear this as a call to individual repentance.**

What will you do with the truth revealed in this meditation? You cannot claim to be ignorant of the facts. Stop and take time to see if you have built anything in your life on a foundation other than Jesus Christ. Repent and seek the powerful hand of God.

People like you are the key to reclaiming 'mainstream' church fellowships for Christ. Will you keep on going through the same revolving door? By your lifestyle will you teach crooked foundations to the next generation?

Even though the reconstruction project may seem impossible, you can live up to code. Be encouraged! Remember that with God all things are possible for those who believe (Mark 9:23).



**Church With No Walls** *(pictured on the cover)*

*A monument to the Polegreen Church destroyed by Confederate troops during the 1864 campaign of the U.S. Civil War. The building burned to the ground after being hit by cannon fire. Just like the nation in 1864, many within the Christian faith today are divided, yet God calls the Church to exist with no division, no walls.*

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