

4. Building the Church God's Way

by Chuck Smith

The key to building a healthy and effective church is to trust in God's sovereignty and rely on the power of the Word, rather than trying to build or grow the church through human effort.

Scripture: Psalm 127:1, Zechariah 4:6, Matthew 16:18, John 21:16, Acts 2:47, Romans 12:2, 1 Corinthians 3:6-7, Ephesians 4:11-12, 2 Timothy 3:16-17, Hebrews 4:12

Topics: "Building the Church", "Trusting God's Plan"

Description

Chuck Smith emphasizes that building the church should be done through the Holy Spirit rather than human effort or hype. He reflects on the journey of Calvary Chapel, highlighting how reliance on God's guidance and provision led to the acquisition of their property and the growth of the church. Smith reassures that it is God's responsibility to build His church, and leaders should focus on caring for the congregation rather than succumbing to pressure or gimmicks. He advocates for a relaxed ministry style rooted in the Word of God, which remains effective without the need for constant innovation or excitement. Ultimately, the message is about trusting in God's plan and the importance of spiritual authenticity over superficial growth strategies.

Transcript

"Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the LORD of hosts."

Zechariah 4:6

Another distinctive characteristic of Calvary Chapel is our relaxed casual style. We don't get involved in a lot of spiritual hype. We don't try to motivate people carnally, and we aren't apt to shout at the congregation. I believe this stems from our belief and trust in Jesus Christ and in the Holy Spirit. We are of the belief that if the Lord doesn't build the house, they labor in vain who build it, so all of our hype and pressure aren't really going to do the job. We simply trust in the work of the Holy Spirit, and of Jesus Christ who is building His church as He said He would.

If we have complete confidence that it's His church, that He's going to build it, and that He's going to do His job, then all I have to do is be faithful. I simply need to watch His work, and then the pressure isn't on me. I don't get all hyped or pressured because the work of God isn't my responsibility. It's not my church. It's His church. I believe that it's very important to remember this, because if you try to carry the load and bear the burden, you'll find that it's too great for you. You'll find yourself under pressure to create schemes

and hypes, and then you begin to push and manipulate people. That isn't the Calvary Chapel style.

Back in 1969, we purchased an acre and a half of land just a block from our current site, on the corner of Sunflower and Greenville. There was an old country school there. We dismantled it and used the materials to build our little chapel. Because we used the existing materials, we were able to build the chapel for \$40,000.00, including the pews. After two years the chapel was totally inadequate. We were into triple services, setting up five hundred chairs in the patio, and people were parking all the way up past the Los Angeles Times building up to the freeway on Fairview. So we knew that we had to do something.

At that time, the parcel of property that Calvary Chapel occupies today came up for sale. One of the fellows in the church was a Realtor. He had put together a group that bought this 11-acre property, planning to turn it for a profit. They were speculating on it and had several deals pending, but the city of Santa Ana rejected all of the proposed uses. They had a balloon payment of \$350,000.00 coming due on the property and weren't in a position to pay it. They had actually stopped making the monthly interest payments to the lady who owned the property, and finally lost it.

The Realtor who was involved in our fellowship came to me and suggested that the church obtain the property. My response was, "Well, what in the world will we ever do with eleven acres?" He suggested that we could always sell off half of it. Then another fellow in the church came to me and said he was certain we could get the land for \$300,000.00. I said, "Ridiculous! There's no way she'd sell it for \$300,000.00 because she just foreclosed on a note for \$350,000.00. Why would she sell it to us for \$300,000.00?" Then he said, "Well, I happen to know a few things about the lady's situation. She had been paying the taxes with the interest payments that these guys were giving her. Because they hadn't made any payments, she didn't really have the money to pay the taxes. She's close to eighty, she needs the cash, and I think that if we made a \$300,000.00 cash offer, she would take it."

I said, "That sounds great, but where in the world will we get \$300,000.00 cash?" He replied, "If we can buy it for \$300,000.00 then you can borrow half that amount from the savings and loan. They'll loan fifty percent on property, we have \$110,000.00 in the bank, and I'll loan the \$90,000.00 interest free, for a year." So I said, "Well, she'll never take it." Then he said, "Will you give me the permission to offer it to her in the name of the church?" "Sure," I replied. A short time later he called me up and said, "Well, Chuck, she's accepted." My first thought was, "Well, great! But what do I do now?"

At that time Fairview Street had just been completed through to Sunflower. I used to drive up to the corner of Fairview and Sunflower on my way from the other chapel. As I waited for the green arrow to turn left, I'd look over at this big huge field, and begin to panic. I thought, "You know, God has been good to us. We've paid off all of the debts, and we don't owe anything. We have \$60,000.00 in the bank, we're running a surplus, and things are going so well. What am I doing to this flock of people, putting them into debt along with the potential of having to build on this? What am I doing? Where is my head?"

I would go into a cold sweat trying to figure the thing out. Then the Lord would speak to my heart and say, "Whose church is it?" I'd answer, "Well, it's your church." Then He'd reply, "Well, then, why are you worrying about bankruptcy?" I thought, "Why am I? I'm not the one going bankrupt. The Lord will be the One bankrupt, so why should I worry? Then He would say, "Who created the problem?" And I'd answer, "You did. You're the One that's brought all the people. You created this problem of needing more space." So He assured me that it was His church and His problem. He created the situation. Then I would get relief, until the next time I pulled up to the corner and looked at the property. I'm sort of hardheaded, so

this was a process that continued for a period of time.

Realizing that our fellowship was His church relieved me from the burden. I didn't have to carry the load myself, and I could stay relaxed. It was His church so He would take care of it. Jesus said, "Upon this rock I will build my church." (Matthew 16:18). He didn't say, "Upon this rock you will build my church." We need to realize that it's His church and He's the One who said He would build it. When Jesus asked Peter the question, "Lovest thou me?" (John 21:16), Peter answered, "Yea, Lord; thou knowest that I love thee". Jesus then didn't say, "Go out and build my church." He said, "Feed my sheep" - that is, "tend them and take care of them." It's His job to add to the church, His job to build the church. My job is just to love the sheep, take care of them, watch over them, feed them, tend them, and trust the Lord to build the church and add those that should be saved.

We've discovered that whenever you strive to gain, you must then strive to maintain what you've gained. If you really pushed and pressured to gain it, you have the pressure to keep it going. Maintenance is tough if it's a man-made, man-built program.

A long time ago, I was in a denomination and was under pressure to build the church. I was using every kind of device suggested and offered. There were church growth programs and various kinds of contests. I tried them all in an effort to build the church. I discovered firsthand that when you strive to gain, then you must strive to maintain. When you don't strive to gain, you don't have to strive to maintain. If it's the Lord's work, if He's done it, and He's added, then you don't have to strive to keep the thing going. It's that striving to maintain that creates ministerial burnout. It's the thing that'll kill you. It's the thing that'll run you into the ground. It's the thing that will lead you into all kinds of aberrant practices. Because you've striven to gain this crowd, you've now got a crowd that you must strive to hold, and that can be really tough.

Throughout the country we see many large churches that have resulted from tremendous growth programs. But you have to keep that program going. You have to keep it oiled and greased and moving, or the thing begins to fall. Then, all of the striving and all of the hype that it takes to maintain the program will absolutely kill you. There are a lot of super churches today, but there are also a lot of tired leaders, because of their striving to maintain what they've built.

Striving to gain doesn't just mean buying into the latest church growth program to come down the line. It can also happen in a hyped-up spiritual environment, where church growth is created by spiritual and emotional excitement and the hyping of the gifts of the Spirit. Again you've got a very difficult kind of situation, because if you use this spiritual hype to attract and draw your crowd, you've started down a one-way street that only gets more difficult as you go. You see, if you appeal to people through the supernatural and spectacular, and if that's your big forte, then you have to continue to get other, more exotic spiritual experiences to hold the crowd that you have drawn through these kinds of phenomena.

There is something about our human nature that, no matter how appealing or exotic an experience might be, we soon tire of it and want something else - a new twist, a new angle, a new attraction to power. It seems like it takes more and more power to maintain the same level of excitement and thrill.

A case in point: my boating experience began years ago with a little 12-footer and a Johnson 25hp engine. That was exciting. We learned to ski. Someone had to sit out on the end of the hull to keep the nose down to get the skier up, but we learned to ski with it. It was wonderful for the first summer. During the winter we bought a Javelin hull, fiber glassed it, and fixed it up. It was a 14-footer with a great hull! But then the little Johnson 25hp wouldn't do for the Javelin hull, so we got a Mercury 55E, and that was much better.

Nobody had to get out on the front to get the skier up. That was great! But, by the end of the summer there were boats passing us, so we traded in the Mercury 55E for a Mercury 75E. But then the 14-foot Javelin hull wasn't quite nice enough for the Mercury 75E. I thought, "Well, outboards are o.k., but you really need to go to an inboard motor," so we got a Chevy 354. When do you stop? Fortunately, I did stop, but there's always something more. It was just a little bit bigger, a little bit nicer.

It's the same with the attraction generated by spiritual hype. You can only hear so many "Thus saith the Lord's" before they don't have the same impact or rush anymore. So you have to keep doing something new, something different. You'll ultimately get to the place where you're laughing uncontrollably or barking like a dog or roaring like a lion. Look how some churches have gone from one bizarre practice to another, to another, and to another. It's an insatiable kind of thing. You run out of the legitimate, and you begin to revert to the illegitimate. You have to keep fanning that lust for novel, bizarre, and different kinds of experiences that will continue to give the same kind of a spiritual rush that people have come to desire and long for.

Calvary Chapels are minus the hype. We're not into the carnal pursuit of new programs or spiritual hype to try to appeal to people. It's the Word of God that we trust in, that we teach, that we rely on. It's the foundation upon which we are built. It's inexhaustible. There's no burnout with it. It just keeps going on and on and on.

For this reason, we have a relaxed, casual style that's reflected in our ministry. It's His church so we don't have to sweat it. We're not really into seminars on how to build a church, how to create a user-friendly church, or how to develop a five-year plan. Who knows if we'll even be here five years from now! Let's minister for today!

I was asked to speak at a leadership seminar in Phoenix to a group of social strategists who study various social trends and develop plans for the church as we enter the new millennium. Some pretty prominent fellows were on this panel discussing strategies. "How are we going to meet the needs for the future and develop the appropriate church strategies?"

Well, I upset the moderator because I said, "I have this philosophy, 'If it isn't broken, don't fix it.' God continues to bless the teaching of His Word, the church continues to grow, the Lord continues to add daily, and He honors His Word like He said He would. I'm satisfied that as long as God is blessing the Word, I will keep teaching the Word. Why should I change? Why should I try to remodel it when it's still working? If the day should come when it doesn't work anymore, then the Word of God has failed, so why even teach it?"

Of course, the moderator became very upset with that, and the rest of the day we were trading barbs back and forth. Interestingly enough, I've never been asked to speak again at those wonderful conferences.

I find that by the time I get through with the Old Testament, I am hungry and ready to get into the New Testament. By the time I am finished with the New Testament it's exciting to get back to Genesis in the Old Testament. It keeps building every time you go through it. You gain and learn so much more. You've been enriched, and so have the people. It never gets old. It never gets stale. It never gets to the place where you have to find some new kind of gimmick or angle or experience. It's just the Word of God, which is alive and powerful and ministers to the spirit of people.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/chuck-smith/4-building-the-church-gods-way/>

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