

Are you like me? Some times I'm amazed at what's in the Bible. But some times I'm amazed at what's **NOT** in the Bible. Please turn in your Bibles to Matthew 16:13-20 (p. 822). Did you catch what Jesus said in verse 18? *"And I tell you, you are Peter, and on this rock I will build my **church**, and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it."*

If you know your Bible and are familiar with the Old Testament, then you know that God or Yahweh was very specific and detailed when it came to the first building of worship we find in the Bible. If you read through the book of Exodus, beginning in chapter 25 through chapter 40, there are very detailed building plans for the Tabernacle. Some ten chapters are to give a very detailed description of the Tabernacle. **(Picture of Tabernacle).**

There was the Holy of Holies that housed the Ark of the Covenant, an outer chamber or the Holy Place with a seven-branched lamp stand, the table for showbread and an altar of incense. An enclosure containing the sacrificial altar surrounded these chambers. According to Exodus 26, the tabernacle complex was made in the shape of a rectangle with a flat roof with three sections: an exterior courtyard surrounded by curtains of goat hair and ram skins stretched over a wooden frame (vss. 7–25), and the tabernacle proper made of beautifully woven curtains (vss. 1–6) and separated into the two rooms — the Holy Place and the Most Holy Place (vss. 31–33). Since only the Levites could enter the courtyard, most Israelites never saw the inside of the tabernacle.

Incidentally, someone estimated what it would cost to build the Tabernacle today? Are you ready for this? With all of the precious metals (gold, silver, copper) plus the fine fabrics – this is not including the cost of construction, nor is it taking into consideration some 3 or 4,000 years of inflation. But it's estimated that the Tabernacle today would cost around \$60 million, just for materials.

Both the plans for the Temple (Solomon's) and then the second Temple that was rebuilt when the Jews returned to the Promised Land after the seventy year exile seem to essentially be a permanent structure for the Tabernacle which was a tent following the same basic building plans.

When we come to the New Testament the word church or *ecclesia* is used a little more than 100 times. Do you know what's missing? Any and all building plans. When the New Testament talks about a church, it's never talking about a building. We're the church. The believers that meet week after week, that are committed to being a spiritual outpost for Jesus and obeying His commands in a certain place – God's people are the church.

When someone says, "I think that a church needs a _____ to be a church." Or, "I believe that a church should have _____ to be a church." They have absolutely no biblical support. The church isn't a building. We're the church. A building is only a tool the church uses to accomplish the purpose God has called them to in that particular time and place.

So when a church talks about building, how do they determine what the building should be like? Well, I think that they need to ask what type of tool will help them best accomplish the Great Commission? Jesus said, *"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age"* (Matthew 28:19-20).

Have you ever noticed that a house often reflects the personality of the person who lives there? What does this house tell you about the people who live there? (**Slide of Transparent House**) Talk about people living in a glass house.

What does this house tell you about the occupants? (**1st Slide of Skateboard house**). Need another hint? Maybe this will help? (**2nd Slide of Skateboard house**).

Think that these people might be a little OCD? (**2 Slides of Sea Shell House**). I mean, I like the ocean but this is really over the top.

This was my favorite one though. Do you know what they're trying to communicate? (**2 Slides of The Flintstone House**) Maybe a little music will help? (**Flintstones Theme song**)

So what should our new church, our new tool be like? What do we want it to say about us?

1. Our new facility needs to communicate our DNA. Each church has a unique make-up that's essential to its life, health and future.

So what is a church's DNA? It's the unique essence or soul of a church. We can talk about what DNA does, which is to shape the face of how the church displays itself to the world. It's the often unspoken assumptions that shape a church's vision, values, and mission. It's subtly mirrored in a church's symbols, stories, and history. It is difficult to define because it's invisible, like the air we breathe.

Perhaps DNA is most easily understood when things are out of alignment, when something isn't quite right. In fact, a church incongruent with its DNA is often the single greatest cause of conflict. It creates more damage than clashes over worship styles or even theological differences. Incongruence with DNA can be highly destructive.

You may recall some years back when Sears launched "the softer side of Sears" campaign, it landed on deaf ears. Why? Because when people think of Sears, they think of tools and appliances, not nightgowns and dress suits. It didn't fit their DNA. Healthy churches have a clear sense of identity. They know their DNA and they don't readily deviate from it.

Our church's DNA gives us a sense of collective personality and uniqueness; it defines our church family as one of a kind. I read a lot about churches and go to various church seminars. Some pastors go to some church seminar and when they come back, they try to force their church into some formulaic model. So please hear me, we are not Purpose Driven or Willowcreek North or Elmbrook South. We're Grace Church of Burlington, Wisconsin.

When a church falls prey to a formulaic approach, they become McFranchises of something else. If a Quarter Pounder, fries, and Coke taste as good in Denver as they do in Dayton, then why can't a church in Charlotte do ministry just like a church in Chicago? The tendency to import church models and styles in an attempt to reach the same results as a church across the country contrasts with God's desire for each church to embody the gospel in its own historical/cultural context—to live by a defining and aligning code. And it usually has some negative outcomes in that it slides toward mimicry, rather than authenticity which inhibits true community. The church also has difficulty finding natural ways to bond folks in shared ministry. It loses the critical ingredient of local context to focus a church and it depersonalizes ministry as leaders spend most of their time keeping the machine running smoothly according to the "formula."

So what's our DNA? You may not know this but we're unique. To my knowledge, there's not a church like ours within a 30 minute drive or more in any direction. ***We're unique in that we're committed to clear, systematic Bible teaching balanced out by evangelism.*** That truly makes us unique. Please understand, there's nothing wrong with these other ministries. They're not better than us and we're not better than them, any more than your children are superior or inferior to someone else's. It's just our DNA, our uniqueness.

There are many churches that are very committed to evangelism. Sometimes they're what's known as seeker driven. They focus on their worship experience. Some have worship bands that could go on tour. Usually, they're pulpit teaching tends to be topical, light and short. Their normal menu consists of series on relationships, time management, problem-solving, etc...and there's nothing wrong with that.

At Grace, we just believe that going through God's Word systematically, like we did recently with Ecclesiastes, is what God has called us to do here. 2 Timothy 4:2 commands us to *"preach the word."* We're committed without apology to what the Reformers bled for, *Sola Scriptura*. It takes more time to share a systematic study of Scripture and it takes more effort on the listeners to process it. While there is one area church that is committed to a systematic study of God's Word, their denomination prohibits them from requiring baptism for membership. We can't get around the fact that the Bible commands baptism after salvation.

Churches though that are committed to systematic Bible study or what is known as expository teaching/preaching are usually not committed to outreach and evangelism. Every church talks about evangelism but, can I say the obvious, actions speak louder than words.

We're committed to evangelism. It's part of our DNA. That's why we recently did the Fall Festival. We're trying to reach our neighborhood with the Gospel. That's why tonight we're having a Harvest Celebration. It takes work and money to do these things. We are committed to putting our effort into lining up with our belief system. Those two aspects – systematic Bible teaching balanced out by outreach/evangelism give us a unique DNA. **Our new facility needs to communicate our DNA.**

2. Our new facility needs to communicate that we are committed to systematic Bible teaching. D.L. Moody said, *"The Scriptures were not given for our information but our transformation."* If we believe that the teaching and preaching of God's Word is important then that needs to be reflected in our building.

It's going to mean that we have teaching spaces that are conducive to what we believe. Our new facility has a plan for more and more usable and efficient classroom space. Right now we have classes meeting in the kitchen, the coat room, in the coffee café area...and in a very small office that we've converted into a classroom. It's work to teach and study the Bible. We want a tool that's more conducive to what we believe.

It means too that we have a platform and pulpit area that indicates that the preaching of God's Word is vital to our ministry. It bothers me that one of the growing trends in the Church today is multisite. While multi-sites have live worship bands, they have piped in video feed preaching. Personally, I think they'd be more biblical in their focus they piped in the music.

What does that say about what we believe about the supremacy of preaching and the place of the study of God's Word? What does it say too about our belief in the power of God...that He can only gift one man so that we have to pipe in across the country, some rock star preacher? If that was God's plan, don't you think He could have cloned the Apostle Paul?

The power is in the Word and in the Spirit NOT in the messenger. I love what 2 Corinthians 4:7 says, "*But we have this treasure in jars of clay, to show that the surpassing power belongs to God and not to us.*" What's that saying – the jar of clay is so-so; the message is out of this world! Video, drama, stories, anything else are only to help direct our attention to God and His Word.

One of the big problems that we had when we met at Cooper, and one that you're going to notice tonight at the dinner, was the poor audio quality. If you had any hearing issues, it was virtually impossible to hear there. Even this facility was not designed with a concern about audio issues. Isn't it a little silly to preach a clear Bible message, if a large percentage of the congregation can't hear it? **Our new facility needs to communicate that we are committed to systematic Bible teaching.**

3. Our new facility needs to communicate that we really care about all people. Have you ever had dinner with a famous person? If so, you probably paid dearly for the privilege. A fundraising dinner for President Obama last year hosted by George Clooney with over 150 of Hollywood's biggest stars at his Los Angeles mansion cost \$40,000.00 a plate. I was a little disappointed that our Deacons wouldn't authorize me going.

So who would you want to go to dinner with if you could go to dinner with anyone? Let me ask a more pointed question: *Who would you NOT want to go to dinner with?* Is there someone or some group that it would bother you; that you'd even work to keep them out or might consider moving if they moved into your neighborhood?

One of my heartbreaks from my childhood years is the extreme prejudice I saw growing up in the South. On one occasion, Tony Evans, then a student at Carver Bible College, applied for membership in my home church. They wouldn't let him join because he was the wrong color. I don't think that it's any accident that that church, for all practical purposes, no longer exists today.

So be honest, who do you NOT want in our church? Who would you rather we keep out? That's an unbiblical worldview. I love these words in Jesus' parable in Luke 14, "*And the master said to the servant, 'Go out to the highways and hedges and compel people to come in, that my house may be filled'*" (vs. 23). The book of Luke continually focuses on Jesus' love for the disenfranchised. Lord willing, we'll be working through the Gospel of Luke next year on Sunday mornings. Who do you want to cut out? Our current facility because of its design flaws cuts out a lot of people? **(Sit in wheelchair).**

a. Our current building tool is a barrier to the physically disabled. There are some 54 million Americans who have a disability. It's something like 19% of the civilian noninstitutionalized population. By age, that works out to be 5% of children 5 to 17. 10% of people 18 to 64 and 38% of adults 65 and older. As we age, those numbers are going to dramatically grow. Do we want to communicate to them that we don't care and that they're not welcome?

Have you seen this commercial? It brings tears to my eyes each time I see it. If a beer company gets it, shouldn't we? I don't know about you but I don't want to be the one

standing at our door telling a Vet who gave his legs serving our country in Afghanistan that he can't come into our church.

b. Our current building tool is very limited when it comes to ministering to the financially limited. I'm ecstatic that our leadership jumped on the Coat Drive that's part of our Harvest Celebration tonight. With our growing economic issues, these needs are only going to grow.

I just heard recently that our own school district has 40 homeless families that are a part of our school system. This is Burlington, rural Wisconsin. This isn't Racine or Chicago. And those are just the ones with children in the school system.

We must find more ways to minister to the economically disadvantaged. We need to be able to have a food pantry, clothing storage, even serving meals but it's very hard in this "tool." Now I'm not talking about handouts or entitlement programs. One of the wonderful things that happens when people embrace the Gospel is that they want to be a functioning part of society. That's where the term "Protestant Work Ethic" comes from.

Our community also has a growing Hispanic population. It's at least 10% of the population. Did you know that there's not a Hispanic outreach of any Bible-believing church of any kind within 30 miles? That's tragic!

Does cohabitation, does sexual immorality grieve you? Did you know that cohabitation is much more common among the poor than among those with college educations? My point is that when we make a spiritual difference, it is going to have social ramifications as well. You can't be an obedient Christian and be immoral at the same time. If there is new life, there will be a new lifestyle as well.

c. Our current building tool doesn't speak the language of our culture. If you're wearing clothing that has an athletic team's name on it, please stand. If you or one of your children is currently on some sports team, please stand. If you watched more than 30 minutes of a any game in the last seven days, please stand. If you have a hunting or fishing license, please stand. Do you see? Sports are major part of our culture.

And those are people who ARE in our church. Sports are a universal language. You may not like it. You may not care but it's a reality that has great implications for us as we share the gospel in this culture.

Last Monday night I went shopping. I had the place all to myself. Why? The Packers were playing the Bears.

Have you ever had to call for service for your computer or some other product, and the company has outsourced their service center? You finally speak to a real live person and you can't understand them and they can't understand you, because you're not really speaking the same language. Or, if you call for service at some big company and they ask, "If you speak English please press ___" And it frustrates you. You want someone who speaks your language.

Wisconsin, this part of our country, speaks *sports*. You may not care. You may not like it. It may even frustrate you. But it doesn't change the reality. Our current building doesn't speak the language of our culture and we can't get an interpreter with this tool.

Now you may be thinking: "Should we really use sports as an outreach tool?" I don't know...should we use food? Jesus used the language of His world to communicate His message. That's what it means to be incarnational like Jesus was. He used food, seed, water, even a dead body.

God has blessed us with ten acres. I don't know how we're going to do it with the slope of our land but we really need to put in a ball field. Sports are just another door to open to the lost for the Gospel.

Think about this. What's easier to invite to? "Come to our church and listen to a sermon." Or, "Come to our church and shoot some buckets." Or, "Have a free pre-Thanksgiving dinner." "Come to our church for a Bible study" Or, "come to our church for quilting or scrapbooking." Jesus used the language of His culture to communicate the Gospel. When we do that, we're following His example.

d. Our current building tool isn't really pro-family. Just getting in this building with a small child and navigating the stairs is a major hurdle. I'm thankful for our nursery but it's small. And if you have an infant, you have to go through the main nursery to take your baby to the back room. It's kind of like putting the baby in the closet.

Children need space. Our new building is going to have space. It's also going to be easier to instill more security measures.

10 acres is a lot of space to run and get rid of some of that excess energy. Right now children are pretty limited and try not to play bumper cars with vehicles in the parking lot. **Our new facility needs to communicate that we really care about all people.**

4. Our new facility needs to communicate that we are committed to community. Now if you keep this old geezer around as your Pastor once we move into our new facility...then I'm committed to continuing to having two services...most of the time.

Many of you know that I'm not a morning dove. I believe that if the Lord wanted me to see the sunrise, He'd have scheduled it later in the day. But many of you are. And that's fine...so if you're here, I'll be here. We'll continue the same worship schedule in the new facility. As long as you come and step up to serve in the various areas that we need to make a worship service effective, I'm all in.

There are times though when it's nice to just have one service so we can ALL be together. Do you know something that we need and really, really miss? Church family dinners. I'd love to have a church family dinner at least once a quarter, if not once a month where we can spend time together as a family. It'd be a time where we get to know each other so we can pray for each other and care for each other. But we can't do that in this building.

When our Sunday Morning Live dismisses and folk are trying to come to second service, it's nearly impossible to even get around in this facility. As we continue to grow, that's only going to get worse. There are times it's hard to find a seat, particularly during second service. First service is getting more crowded as well. Our church is typical in that 30% of the regular attendees miss each Sunday BUT what if they all came? What if that dropped to 20%? Do you see a problem?

Years ago I did three funerals in a three month period of some loved church members. People were standing in the aisles and in the foyer at those funerals. It's nearly impossible to have a funeral in this building. And if you want to have a funeral dinner for the family, you have to go somewhere else. Those are church family responsibilities that we should do but can't do in this 1955 building.

What about weddings? Other than a small wedding, this building is virtually impossible to have a wedding in. When someone wants to get married, they have to find another place.

Do we want to encourage marriage? Wouldn't having your wedding in your church with your church family as witnesses communicate a message? Wouldn't that be strategic in laying some boundaries against divorce? If your church family attends your wedding, are you going to be quick to bail out of those vows?

Just having fellowship, even a conversation in this facility is difficult. There's no fellowship area. That's one of the things that we caught in our blueprints for our new facility that we're going to alter. There's not enough room for fellowship. It doesn't encourage community. We value fellowship and community and family here at Grace. It's part of our DNA. **Our new facility needs to communicate that we are committed to community.**

Conclusion: So what's the bottom line? What's it going to take? Commitment, sacrifice, generosity, selflessness.

I don't know about you – those things are not naturally part of my DNA. Do you know what? The Lord keeps reminding me that I need to grow in these areas of commitment, sacrifice, generosity and selflessness. And I don't like it.

A little over a week ago, Jane and I went up to Watertown and took my adopted Mom out to dinner. I try to do that once a month. That night we took her to a restaurant called the Upper Crust. They're famous for their pies. They invented the term "finger lickin' good."

There was this Carmel Apple Pecan pie that was calling my name so I talked Jane into letting me buy it. Sometimes your wife can really be annoying. So we've got this pie and I'm trying to not dive into it before we get home. And then my spiritual, sacrificial wife says, "Wow! That's really cool that we got that! We can give that to the Harvest Celebration."

"What?" This isn't a pumpkin pie. It's not some yucky store bought one. This is a really good pie. And she wants to give away it so that it can be eaten by a bunch of pagans.

But Jane was right. So tonight you'll find one delicious, mouth watering Carmel Apple Pecan pie donated by Jane Carson and her selfish, stingy, preacher husband.

But that's not the end of the story. You see, God always rewards and God always blesses generosity. Fortunately, it's not usually in this world so we have our rewards for all eternity. When I paid for our meals and the pie, somehow...and I never do this...but somehow I left my wallet on the counter. So when we dropped my Mom off at her apartment, I realized what I'd done. By now, the restaurant had closed but I called and they told me that they'd stay open so I could get my wallet. Well, by this time, this selfish repenting preacher is also feeling really dumb so I did what all good husbands do, I sent my wife in.

And Jane comes out with my wallet and a grocery bag. It was the end of the night so they gave her a whole quiche pie and a couple of beef pasties – free!

God always blesses generosity. When we give, He always gives more...and we so please Him! Our Heavenly Father is supremely generous and we show that He is our Father when we are supremely generous too!

Building Changed Lives Together – will you give so that it happens? Will you give generously, sacrificially and in a way that honors our Savior? If you do, we can move forward in reaching this community for Jesus.

Jane and I are all in. Will you please join us?