

What I Learned From the Building Campaign

Wasn't last weekend off the charts? I think the thing I appreciated the most about last weekend was not simply the level of excitement that was present – people were excited and I certainly was extremely excited going down to the convention center and having so many of us together in worship. I mentioned to you last week down at the convention center that I couldn't sleep the night before. But it wasn't the excitement; it wasn't even the power of that corporate worship together that so caught me. It was the overwhelming sweetness, the extraordinary amount of affection that I felt from the Lord toward us and then that I saw communicated among people in the church. It seemed that everywhere I looked someone was hugging someone else. There was so much love present, I thought: This is what we are trying to do. We want to have the most biblical church possible, but we also want to have the most loving church, the most relational church, and a church where people feel incredible affection. I saw that displayed. It was just a marvelous time there.

Well, I promised you this week that I would report back to you regarding what the pledges were. For our guests here, we have been engaged in a building campaign the past two months. We are putting up a new auditorium and other rooms onto the back of this building. We asked our congregation to make three-

year pledges regarding what they would plan to give toward the construction of this new facility. Last weekend they made their pledges and I promised that I would tell you the total of our pledges, but now I am not so sure. I mean, I know something you don't know and I kind of like it that way! Nah...I'll stop teasing.

The entire project is going to cost about \$9 million dollars. And based on our annual budget and the size of the church, a really good campaign, I mean something that was really, really successful would have raised about \$4.5 million dollars. At the beginning of the campaign, I thought: Well, if we could get \$5 million dollars toward that \$9 million that would be phenomenal. Because we will be able to pay the building off then in maybe five years and live with a long-term mortgage. That would be just fantastic. And then when we had that Leadership Dessert and our leaders and largest givers pledged what they did, I revised my thinking upward and said, "Lord, if you would give us \$6 million dollars, that would be just incredible. But boy, it seems like the ball is rolling here and people are enthusiastic and are really committed. If the leaders are giving this much and our largest givers are giving this much, then maybe we will get \$6 million."

Well, we had pledged to this building campaign over \$8.5 million dollars toward the \$9 million. And cards are still coming in. Many of you didn't have the opportunity to make a pledge. We had a number of folks say: We are still praying. Some folks weren't there last week. It is really possible that that last ½ million dollars will be covered by the cards that are coming in today and over the next few weeks.

For a church our size, with our budget, what you pledged is simply off the charts. It is outstanding. It is just remarkable. All week long I have been walking around in a fog with an overwhelming sense of gratitude to the kindness of God.

I mentioned last week, those of you who were there, that I could barely sleep the night before our convention center celebration. I got maybe an hour's sleep. I just so anticipated the meeting and it absolutely came off flawlessly. I mean, every bit of the program and the sound and the set up and the children and the children's workers, it just came off without a hitch. There was so much grace on last Sunday. People had gone down and prayed over the place. I really believe that those prayers were absolutely answered regarding the presence of God. But all week long when I found out what the church had pledged, and as I looked back on the whole campaign, I have had such a sense of the kindness of God.

So as I said I could barely sleep Saturday night. Sunday night after the meeting I crashed and went to sleep really early. But then I woke up in the middle of the night with this profound sense of thankfulness to God. So I got up and went downstairs, which I have been doing quite a bit recently – just waking up in the middle of the night and going downstairs to pray. And I am thanking the Lord. Just praising Him for His goodness. And then I am thinking about the kindness of God, just how nice God is. That He is nicer than anyone I know by a lot.

I forgot to tell you, earlier in the evening I had said to my wife, Marlene: You know, we have been working pretty hard these last few months. It would be really nice if next week we could get away for a couple of days to a bed and breakfast, just you and me. Just to spend some time resting and not working and loving each other.

So I called a bed and breakfast place that we went to before. It is a Christian bed and breakfast, really romantic and out of the way. I told them the one day I was able to go and they said: Gee, Rich, we are sorry. We can't book you for that evening because we are all booked up. In fact, we are all booked up for the next month and a half. So I said: If you get a cancellation on that night, give us a call. Anyway, I am up in the middle of the night after having that conversation with the bed and breakfast about five hours earlier, and I am thanking God for all of you and for individuals who really put themselves out in terms of effort in the campaign. I am thanking God for people's hard work. I am thanking God for the extraordinary amount of giving. I am thanking God for the miracles that we have seen. And then I thought: Why don't I pray about this bed and breakfast thing. It's a little thing in light of all that God had done; it's a little thing. But I said: Lord, it's about 3:00 a.m. Lord, if you want Marlene and I to go to that bed and breakfast, will you have them have a cancellation on that evening? I got done praying and went back to bed. 8:30 a.m. we get a call. They said: You know, it's the oddest thing, but we just received a cancellation on the night you asked for. Are you still interested in coming? And I said: Lord, you are so kind. You didn't have to do that. You didn't have to provide that way, but you did. And I so much appreciate you.

Well, what I am going to do today is briefly talk about "What I Learned From this Building Campaign." Let's pray.

It says in 1Chronicles 16: "They brought the ark of God and set it inside the tent that David had pitched for it, and they presented burnt offerings and fellowship offerings before God. After David had finished sacrificing the burnt offerings and

fellowship offerings, he blessed the people in the name of the Lord. Then he gave a loaf of bread, a cake of dates and a cake of raisins to each Israelite man and woman. He appointed some of the Levites to minister before the ark of the Lord, to make petition, to give thanks, and to praise the Lord, the God of Israel.”

Then he listed a bunch of people who were appointed to worship the Lord. And then it says: “...They were to play the lyres and harps. Asaph was to sound the cymbals, and Benaiah and Jahaziel the priests were to blow the trumpets regularly before the ark of the covenant of God.”

The setting for the psalm of praise that we are about to read was the bringing into Jerusalem the ark of the covenant by King David. David is bringing the ark to Jerusalem and there was this great worship and celebration, music, people praying and thanking God, people playing cymbals and synthesizers and lead guitar.

What is the ark of the covenant?

The ark of the covenant very simple was the Old Testament symbol of God’s changeless grace. The ark of the covenant was a physical representation of the changeless grace of God. What David and the thousands of people who were with him were responding to, they were responding to the grace of God symbolized by the ark.

Let me tell you one lesson I have learned from our giving campaign. The importance of responding to God’s extravagant grace. When God pours out grace, we must respond to it. And when we respond, we receive even more grace. To him who has, even more will be given.

You say: How is the ark of the covenant a symbol of God’s changeless grace?

Let me describe the ark to you. It was a wooden box that contained inside the memories of God's former deeds, his great provision and miracle-working power in the past. Inside the ark was a pot of manna that had been saved from the manna that God gave the children of Israel in the wilderness, his heavenly provision of food for them as they wandered through the wilderness.

Inside the ark was also the Ten Commandments of God that Moses carried down from Mt. Sinai. You look at the pot of manna, but particularly you look at the Ten Commandments of God and what do we find there, but the grace of God?

You say: How can you find the grace of God in the Ten Commandments? The Ten Commandments are limiting. They are commandments. You shall; you shall not. How can we find the grace of God there?

With the Ten Commandments God is saying: Not everything goes. He is contradicting the spirit of our age that says: If it feels good, do it, even if it hurts someone else. Even if it hurts your spouse, your children or yourself. A lot of people think of the Ten Commandments as being the oppressive, stifling rules of some kill-joy God. The portrait of God that is popularly communicated in the media is of this old cranky man in heaven who is looking down to find out if someone is having fun. And then he just yells out: Stop it! Like the popular portrayal of a Puritan, the man in a black frocked coat and stiff white collar who has a frown on his face and is sucking on a lemon. That is what a lot of people think of when they think of the commandments of God. God probably gave them when he was in a bad mood and was sucking on a lemon.

But what we find in the commandments is the incredible kindness of the Lord that I spoke of earlier. A kindness that resulted in the kind of extravagant giving that we saw in our campaign. Because the commandments are simply God's desire to save us from a self-destructive life. God knows what will destroy us. He created us. He knows how we need to function. And he knows what will destroy us spiritually. He knows what will destroy us relationally. He knows what will destroy our marriages. He knows what will destroy us emotionally and physically. He knows that certain kinds of behaviors will only bring about addiction and bondage and then despair and complete hopelessness. He knows what happens to a country when we stop caring about truth telling; when what we do sexually is no big deal anymore. He knows what happens to a nation when we stop exercising self-control over our lusts and wants – when kids stop honoring their parents and people stop respecting authority and when people stop putting God first in their lives.

God knows the emptiness of life without him filling our beings. He knows the emptiness of life when he is not directing us. God knows that what the media is handing out, that if you are thin enough, famous enough, rich enough and sexy enough you will be fulfilled is just a total bunch of garbage and lies.

The other day in the Dispatch, I read a quote from a female pop singer who had a multi-million dollar CD in her debut album. I think she sold something like 16 million CDs. Imagine the royalties from 16 million CDs being sold. Her music was being played on every radio station and MTV constantly showed her, her music videos and her posters. And this singer said that after the success of her debut album, she nearly committed suicide from the overwhelming feeling of emptiness

that she had. She said: When I realized that I was on top of the world and still felt so totally empty and unfulfilled, my strongest desire was to kill myself.

As Stephen Covey put it: There is nothing worse than climbing the ladder of success, only to realize when you get to the top that the ladder has been leaning against the wrong wall.

The Ten Commandments help us to put our ladders on the right wall. In kindness, God says: Here is the way you build a successful, free, liberated life – a life that is not wracked with guilt and bondage, addiction, broken relationships and shattered marriages and shattered bodies and shattered children.

I asked you to send in testimonies of how God has been good to you. It has been amazing. We had hundreds of testimonies from people basically saying that as they began to obey the Lord, they discovered that he was so good, they found a freedom they didn't know before. When God says: Don't do something – as he does in the Ten Commandments, it is an expression of his grace.

Listen to a testimony that we just received a few weeks ago. This fellow writes:

"I was raised in a very conservative fundamentalist church and have attended church all my life. I always considered myself to be a pretty good Christian except for one dark secret. From adolescent through young adulthood and into my marriage I have struggled with sexual brokenness and addiction. All my struggles against it, including Bible memory and prayer, were met with failure and increasing addiction. Feelings of fear and shame drove me away from revealing my sin. All the secrecy only created a better environment for my sin to grow, resulting in more bondage and more shame. The excruciating pain my sin caused my wife, whom I

had vowed faithfulness to, is almost impossible to describe. I continued making promises to her nearly breaking every one. I know I will never fully comprehend the degree to which I have wounded her and our marriage has suffered tremendously, almost to the breaking point.”

He describes coming to the Vineyard a few years ago and hearing God’s Word taught and experiencing the power of the Holy Spirit. Seeing that he had nothing to offer God and the only way out of his sin and addiction was total dependence on the Lord, he writes:

“As I began to learn that my life is not so much about me as it is about God, I could feel a freedom I hadn’t felt before. The load began to shift from my shoulder to God’s. The process of letting go had begun. On January 1, 1997, I felt God saying, ‘This is the year of Jubilee’. In the Bible, that’s the year that the captives go free; how right He was. From that exact day, God set me free from bondage to sin and delivered to me my freedom to choose Him and the rest of the confidence that He brings. The stark comparison of walking in the light of freedom in Christ, able to hold my head up and look others in the eye, is indescribable compared to years of brokenness, shame, isolation and fear. God has also been washing waves of healing over my life, healing from the hurt I caused and healing from the deep wounds of the past. It is almost as though the sin I continued to walk in had prevented God’s blessing and healing in my wife. While God has brought much healing in our lives and in our marriage, we still experience the effects of my sin and past hurts. I thank God that He is faithful and continues to bring more and more healing into our lives. From the very deepest part of my heart, I am grateful for God’s grace to transform

my life, not just for me, but for my wife, our daughter and any other children God may give us. Just like the new building at Vineyard must be built on a solid foundation, our church body must be built on a foundation of pure hearts. I am thankful to God for the way that Vineyard is a safe place to bring our brokenness to God, whereby His grace, shown through others, He continues to heal and change hearts. He continues to set us free in Him, to be able to live in a healthy and effective way.”

The Ten Commandments are an expression of the grace of God. A grace that desires us to walk in liberty and freedom. But you know, the commandments in the ark were cracked and broken. The stone tablets that were stored in the ark had cracks in them. When Moses came down from Mt. Sinai and he saw the children of Israel worshipping a golden calf, he smashed the tablets in his hands down. And what was memorialized inside the ark of the covenant was the broken law of God. How God’s grace has been rejected by us. God offers us grace as He calls us into obedience, but there is a continual testimony to the people in the Old Testament about how we rejected His grace and turned our backs on Him. We live impoverished lives because we won’t turn fully into the light.

But then on the top of the ark, covering those broken commandments, was a cover of pure gold. This box was covered with pure gold and was called the mercy seat, or the atonement cover. On this gold cover, the high priests once a year sprinkled the blood of a slaughtered animal for people’s breaking of the law. And what God was showing us through this mercy seat cover was that He has made

provision to show us mercy and grace despite our sins – that His mercy triumphs over judgment.

Friends, David and the Israelites, when they saw the ark, burst out in worship because the ark is a testimony to God's changeless grace. And what we were doing in the course of the last couple of months was simply saying: Let's reflect on the changeless grace of God shown to us. Freeing and liberating us, blessing and healing us, bringing us into a church family and giving us friends, giving us prayer and teaching, caring for our children. Let's respond to the extravagant grace of God. That's what the campaign was about.

And then we read in v. 7, "Then David first committed to Asaph and his associates this psalm of thanksgiving to the Lord..."

By the way, the next ten or fifteen verses are taken from Psalm 105 and the chronicler just incorporates Psalm 105 at this point.

"Give thanks to the Lord, call on his name;
make known among the nations what he has done.
Sing to him, sing praise to him;
tell of all his wonderful acts.
Glory in his holy name;
Let the hearts of those who seek the Lord rejoice.
Look to the Lord and his strength;
Seek his face always."

The second lesson I have learned from the campaign is the importance of saying thank you to God and to each other. The campaign has been a wonderful

opportunity for me, and also I think for many of you, to say thank you to God and to each other. It is so simple to say thank you. It doesn't cost anything, but it seems that most of the time most of us are too busy to stop and say thank you.

We get a birthday gift, or someone has us over for dinner, or someone supports you in a really tough family crisis or stands in your corner when others turn against you – when your boss has turned against you, someone encourages you – and we are grateful for people's encouragements, their gifts, for their help and support. We are grateful and we intend to say thank you. We intend to write a note or a card. We intend to acknowledge a gift. But if you are anything like me, you have a 140 other personal agenda items that you need to attend to that you feel are more urgent than saying thank you. One of the lessons of this campaign for me has been that I need to push aside my other agenda items and pause to say thank you to God very often and thank you to many of you.

Why is it important to stop and say thank you? Because saying thank you causes us to recognize our dependence upon others for all of our achievements. Saying thank you underlines for us our dependence, that nothing that we have achieved is an individual effort alone.

There is a wonderful book out now that I want to recommend to you, especially to you who are in the process of raising kids. It is not just a child-raising book, but it is the book written by a Christian, Donald McCullough, on courtesy. It is called *Say Please, Say Thank You*. We'll try to order some copies for our bookstore. McCullough has a wonderful chapter on the importance of saying thanks. And he

points out that the Latin word for dependence literally means “hanging”. It means hanging.

Picture this. You have an office with all of your degrees on the wall, all of your trophies, all of your achievements noted around, your family photos, the plaques, signs of your success and suddenly the whole office is turned upside down. At that moment, you would recognize that you are just hanging on the goodness of God and the goodness of other people. The fact is saying thank you causes us to recognize that there is no such thing as the autonomous self-made man or the autonomous self-made woman. That everyone of our achievements is the product of a team effort. You won a Nobel Prize for Literature. There was that 7th grade teacher who taught you how to write. You have just won an Olympic Gold Medal in shot put. There are those good genes you got from your parents and the encouragement of a weight lifting coach. You just raised \$8.5 million dollars on your way to \$9 million dollars – I will just guarantee that this number is going up – well, that wasn’t achieved by one person or by five people. What we have going on here in this church is a massive team effort where lots and lots of people have committed themselves toward going in the same direction, toward building a great church that is going to influence this city toward Christ.

Thank you reminds us of our dependence on the Lord. And I want you to read with me, if you will just flip ahead a couple of chapters, I want you to read these words with me, 1 Chron. 29:14 so that we have the proper frame of mind concerning how it is that we together were able to give so extravagantly.

“But whom am I, and who are my people, that we should be able to give as generously as this? [I would encourage you to underline the next verse in your Bible] Everything comes from you, and we have given you only what comes from your hand.”

There is a wonderful statement of dependence. “Everything comes from you and we have given you only what comes from your hand. We are aliens and strangers in your sight, as were all our forefathers. Our days on earth are like a shadow, without hope. O Lord our God, as for all this abundance that we have provided for building you a temple for your Holy Name, it comes from your hand, and all of it belongs to you.”

We need to say thank you because it reminds us that we are dependent on each other and on the Lord for any success we have. We need to say thank you because saying thank you causes us to be content in a world that continually breeds dissatisfaction. The New York Times estimated that the average American is exposed to 3500 commercials messages each day from billboards, television, newspapers and magazines and the sides of buses and messages flashing through your internet provider. And they are all saying the same thing: You don’t have enough. Keep running. Keep striving to get more. To acquire more and achieve more.

How do you get off that treadmill of needing more and more and more and always being unsatisfied and always needing one more piece of furniture and one more item for my living room and one more pair of shoes. One more little dress and one more shirt and one more suit and one more CD. How about just stopping and

saying, “Thank you.” Thanking God and thanking others breeds contentment in our hearts. You will feel at peace. If you feel discontented and dissatisfied, you probably haven’t been practicing thankfulness.

Saying thank you also attacks that spirit of entitlement. I mentioned this a few weeks back when I did a full message on thanksgiving. But the fact is friends that when we say thank you we recognize that it is not a necessary state of affairs that things go well in our lives. Thank you reminds us that nothing good has to be. That there is no mustness about things working out.

There is a little book by John Claypoole called *Travels of a Fellow Struggler* in which he tells of the horror and tragedy of losing his 10-year old daughter to leukemia. A couple of years after her death when he was able to look back from a distance, he said, “It makes things bearable when I remember that my little Laura Lou was a gift, pure and simple, something that I neither earned or deserved or had a right to. And when I remember that the appropriate response to a gift, even when it is taken away, is gratitude, then I am better able to try and thank God that I was given her in the first place. The way of gratitude doesn’t alleviate the pain, but it somehow puts some light around the darkness and builds strength to move on.”

This man has learned a profound lesson that nothing in life had to be. That whatever we have, a precious relationship for even a brief time, was given to us as a gift. There is comfort in saying thank you to God. Thank you that I had mom or dad, or grandpa or grandma, or my child, or my spouse, or my boyfriend or girlfriend, or my fiancée or friend for so long. You didn’t have to give them to me, but you did. It didn’t have to be.

When I roll that around in my mind, my goodness...it is so easy to be thankful. It didn't have to be that our little church would fill up the convention center last Sunday. It didn't have to be. That was a gift from the Lord.

It didn't have to be that we pledged the amount of money that we did. It didn't have to be. As I told you I would have been thrilled at the beginning of the campaign with half that amount. I would have said, "That was really good." It didn't have to be that all the marvelous testimonies of God's goodness got written in the storybook of your lives, but God as a totally free agent out of his kindness, out of his goodness, chose to change our lives together.

David goes on in 1 Chronicles 16:12 to say:

"Remember the wonders he has done,
His miracles, and the judgments he pronounced,
O Descendants of Israel his servant,
O sons of Jacob, his chosen ones."

Along with pausing to say thank you, the campaign has caused me, and I think many of you, to pause and remember. Last Sunday's video – for those of you who weren't there, a video was put together by Dean Krueger who is a member of this church – didn't he do a marvelous job? It was a video that took us on a trip down memory lane. We saw some of the old locations where we met as a church family. And there was some great old photos, old baptisms taken from 15 years ago. One of the lessons of this campaign for me has been the importance of taking time to pause and remember. We need times to remember. That's why we have national holidays and birthdays and anniversaries. That's why we keep photo albums and make

videos so that we can flip through the pictures and watch the videos and reminisce together about vacations and old friends and relatives and special times. Memories are absolutely essential in our spiritual lives. Its not just something that builds us up emotionally. Having a good memory builds us up spiritually.

I remember being 18 years old and going to a Passover Dinner that was led by a Jewish believer in Jesus. I was a Jewish teenager coming from a virtually atheistic background, no knowledge of Christianity whatsoever. I remember being talked to about Jesus as the fulfillment of all the prophecies of the Old Testament regarding the Messiah by the woman who is now my wife, Marlene. And I remember being 18 and going to this Passover Dinner and having this Jewish believer explain the Passover meal in terms of what Jesus did for us. And I remember going out into the night and looking up at the sky and saying: Jesus, I don't know very much about you. But I believe you are real and I believe you really did die for me and I want to give you my life totally. I didn't understand a lot of what I was doing. I knew I was just surrendering to the Lord.

And I know that many of you have memories like mine, where you surrendered your life. You didn't know what it all meant, you just knew you were giving yourself to God. And he took you at your word.

The fourth lesson I have learned in this campaign is the importance of trusting in God's work in people's lives. David writes:

“He is the Lord our God;

his judgments are in all the earth.

He remembers his covenant forever,

the word he commanded, for a thousand generations,
the covenant he made with Abraham,
the oath he swore to Isaac.

He confirmed it to Jacob as a decree,
to Israel as an everlasting covenant:
“To you I will give the land of Canaan
as the portion you will inherit.”

When we say that God remembers His covenant, we mean that God is faithful to the promises He made and He enforces His covenant. What were the covenant promises that God made to Abraham?

God promised Abraham that He would be Abraham’s God and that He would be the God of Abraham’s descendants. And He would also give Abraham and his descendants an inheritance in the land of Canaan, which became known as the Promised Land. God remembers His covenant. And now He has made a new covenant with individuals today and with many of you, which He remembers and He enforces – a new covenant in which He promises an intimate relationship with Himself. As Jeremiah 31 says: This is the covenant I will make with the house of Israel after that time, I will put my law in their minds and write it on their hearts. I will be their God and they will be my people.”

God promises an intimate relationship with Himself. He promises, as part of the new covenant, that we would hear His voice. No longer will a man teach his neighbor, or his brother, saying: Know the Lord, because they will all know me from the least of them to the greatest.

He promises an intimate relationship with Himself. He promises that we will hear His voice. He promises under the new covenant that He will forgive our sins. “For I will forgive their wickedness and will remember their sins no more.”

One of the lessons of this campaign for me is that I can trust in, I can rely upon, the work of God in your lives, and to an extent that I never trusted in God’s work before. Do you know one of the reasons why churches get pushy and manipulative? Why they feel the need to twist arms and use high pressure tactics? It is because leaders in a church don’t trust in the work of God in people’s lives. They think that everything is being done by human energy and human striving and manipulation.

What I have heard from you, the response that you gave in giving and in worship and in unity and affection, and the testimonies that I read, I was continually struck by the disproportion between the efforts put in by this church and the response that occurred in someone’s life. Do you recall the testimony that I read last week where the fellow wrote that he had been in a 4-year homosexual relationship? Friends kept bugging him about going to church and so he came here just so they would stop bugging him? And he wrote:

“We went to one of the Sunday morning services and in the announcements there was a ministry that mentioned that it helped AIDS patients [which he had just been diagnosed with HIV]...Although I didn’t show it at the time, I was shocked that a church would have a ministry like this, but even more they weren’t afraid to announce it publicly. My previous experience of church was rejection not only for the gay life I was living, but for the fact that I would think of accusing their own leaders of such a possible act of sexual abuse. I was so blown away with the idea

that a church was willing to look at the truth regardless of its implications on their reputation that I went home and cried uncontrollably for hours.”

And so he turns his life over to Christ. And he leads three of his friends out of the gay lifestyle towards a relationship with Jesus. And what created this revolution in his life? The Lord used an announcement. My goodness, I wasn’t even preaching! We didn’t have a four-day prayer meeting. It wasn’t the result of months and months and months of intense psycho-therapy meeting three times a week exploring all the roots of his behavior and his unconscious. He heard an announcement for Project Compassion, our ministry to people with AIDS and who have been diagnosed with HIV. And God used that announcement and exploded his affection for this young man and his kindness into this man’s heart.

As I read the testimonies, I was continually struck by the disproportion between what we as a church did and the powerful extraordinary response that what we did created in a person’s life. If anything can give a pastor a sense of peace, a sense that God has it all under control, it is reading these testimonies. I understand so much better now what Martin Luther, the great Protestant Reformer, was saying when he said, “While I sit here sipping my little Wittenberg beer, the kingdom of God is marching on.” I understand better what Jesus was talking about in the parable of the seed that grows secretly when he said: This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. Night and day whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he doesn’t know how. All by itself, the soil produces grain – first the stalk, then the head, and then the full kernel in the head.

Night and day whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts but he doesn't know how. This campaign has taught me to trust in God's work in your lives. To see the Lord working ahead of me and ahead of the church, ahead of what we are doing. That his grace has been working in you ahead of time, setting you up, making you open, making you soft, making you responsive. I will tell you, when I am able to trust in the Lord's work in your life, that causes me to relax, to be at peace, to not feel responsible for what I am not responsible for, to expect God to work miracles.

The last lesson I want to share with you today that I learned from the campaign is I learned the importance of recognizing God's protection as a result of prayer. We read in vv. 19-22:

"When they were but few in number,
few indeed, and strangers in it,
they wandered from nation to nation,
from one kingdom to another.

He allowed no man to oppress them;
for their sake he rebuked kings:

'Do not touch my anointed ones;
do my prophets no harm.'"

And then lets skip to v. 34:

"Give thanks to the Lord, for he is good'
his love endures forever.

Cry out, 'Save us, O God our Savior;
gather us and deliver us from the nations,

that we may give thanks to your holy name,

that we may glory in your praise.'

Praise be to the Lord, the God of Israel,

from everlasting to everlasting.

Then all the people said, 'Amen' and 'Praise the Lord.'"

Vv. 19-22 underline the weakness of the people before God. They were few in number. Few, indeed. Let me underline few. And strangers. Dependent having no roots. Wandering from nation to nation and yet the Lord protected them. And he answers prayers of protection.

I was recently reading a story by a missionary named Brent Haggarty. He was talking about the amazing impact of one committed intercessor. He writes:

"Florence Delano was a member of the church in which I grew up in Holten, Maine. While I was at Nyac College in the mid-1970's letters from my mother would often contain the comment, 'Florence Delano was asking about you in church today, Brent. She wants you to know that she is praying for you.' During the time I attended seminary and did my missionary home service requirements, my mother's letters often bore the same message from Florence, 'Brent, I want you to know I am praying for you.' Florence also prayed for my relatives who were engaged in Christian service. After my family and I went to France for language study we received letters personally from Florence with words of encouragement: 'Brent, keep your eyes fixed on Jesus. He is the one who called you to Africa. He has given you a task to do there. Regardless of how discouraged you may be, forge ahead.' At

the end of each letter she said, 'Brent and Susan, I just want you to know that I am upholding you before the Lord in prayer.'

During the first three years of our work in Burkina Faso, we seemed to live in a bubble of isolation, no major health problems. Then suddenly the bubble burst. We started to have one problem after another. One of the children would get sick with sores, fever, scrapes, bruises, and diarrhea – things that would cause a parent to become anxious. One would get better and the second child would get sick. The second would get better and a third would get sick. This went on for nearly six months. Then my wife, Susan, developed an infection. Then I fell ill and we got discouraged. I will never forget what my wife said one day, 'Brent, I am tired of being sick. I am tired of seeing my children sick. I am tired of you being sick. I wish I could get on a plane and go home.'

At that time my sister and her husband were in language study. She was pregnant and developed thyroid problems. The baby came a month early and developed a bronchial problem and nearly died. In the middle of all of this, my sister and her family arrived in Africa and we talked about the nitty gritty of life on the mission field. My sister brought something to my attention. 'Brent, you have been struggling with health problems in Burkina and you are at your wits end. We nearly lost our son in France. Do you realize all of this happened only weeks after Florence Delano passed away?'"

I am convinced that we have been carried on the prayers of our intercessors and on the prayers of many of you. We have been protected as a church in terms of our unity, in terms of our health, in terms of our leadership, our marriages. We have

been protected because many of you have been on your knees saying: Lord, protect us, save us O God. We are just few in number. We are weak.

This campaign went so well because it was drenched in prayer. That's the final lesson I learned. And when God's people gather and they cry out to God, He is so kind and willing to give us what we seek. I am so grateful to the Lord that not only has He provided for us financially, but as I hoped and I prayed at the beginning of this campaign, we are not only a wealthier church, we are a better church. We are a more mature church because of what He has done over the last couple of months.

I will finish with a story.

I still live in my hometown of Ashland, Ohio. The church I grew up in was more like a country club, judging you on the basis of what you wore, how much money you gave, how affluent your family and friends were and how much valuable gossip you knew. Needless to say, I'm still recovering. Most of what I learned about being a worthy servant of Christ was instilled in me at camp. I'm the last of eight kids in an extremely dysfunctional family—camp was a big part of our lives. It was a place of solace where there was no trouble, just love. I'm almost 30 years old and I've finally discovered that what I learned and experienced at camp is not enough to carry me through life. I need to constantly be replenished in the Spirit. Vineyard has brought me back to the way I used to feel when I was totally washed over with the Spirit as a teenager.

When I explain Vineyard services to others, I say, "It's so basic and simple without the traditional bells and whistles. You can wear what you're comfortable in, bring your own bible, and stand and sing with a rocking' Christian band by reading

the lyrics from a huge teleprompter. They have 12 pastors that are regularly seen in jeans or dockers, a café where you can order a cup of java and get closer to the friends you've met through Christ, and even an expansive education program for all ages, even more so for those who wish to lead in ministry some day. The highlight of the experience is, of course, the teaching. Simply put, the pastor says, 'This is the verse, this is what it means, and this is how you apply it.' It's nothing like the church you grew up in." I love coming to Vineyard because I feel very at home here. My sister is on staff and I am often there with her as she catches up on her work.

Recently I had a devastating tragedy occur to me. My best friend of three and a half years who also became my husband wants to leave me. He had given me much attention, love and support. Not a day went by that I didn't thank God for this precious gift in my life. Last winter we moved into a four-bedroom home in the country to start our new life together and to raise a family. In August, he said to me, "I can't love you the way you want me to. I don't want to be married and I want my life back." I was shattered. My entire future and all that I had thought was real was suddenly ripped away from me by the person that I trusted the most. He didn't want to seek counseling—he didn't want to discuss it at all. I didn't even know we had a problem!

For the first week I couldn't eat, sleep, work or do anything but cry and wonder what I had done wrong. Didn't I keep the house clean enough? Didn't I always do his laundry and serve his dinner to him every night? Didn't I help him mow the lawn and clear the woods? Didn't I graciously welcome and hostess his friends in our home? Didn't I make enough money? What was it?

I lost twelve pounds immediately. I came to Columbus Labor Day weekend to stay with my sister and hang out with her at Vineyard. My sister and I attended a healing service, Saturday evening service and Joshua House. I received lots of prayer from lots of people. I even wrote my husband a five-page letter to try to fix our relationship. But when I went home, nothing changed. He read the letter but wouldn't discuss it. He has already moved all my belongings into our guestroom. NOW WHAT? Why hadn't all the prayers been heard? I was crushed even more now because I was beginning to believe that God didn't care about me anymore either.

A week prior to Labor Day, because I had been talking about hurting myself, a friend checked me into a clinic. While I was there, they prescribed 30mg of Zoloft and 60mg of Vistaril (nerve pills) for me. Kinda silly to give drugs to someone contemplating suicide, huh?

On September 8, after my husband left for work, I sharpened one of my cutlery knives and wandered around the house with it pressed against my neck. I was worried though about the mess and if I would make the cut deep enough. Then I remembered the pills from the clinic. Great! I'll just go to sleep one last time. Foolproof.

The Vistaril came with a warning, and the nurses had told that one was good but that two was bad. So I thought, "Surely a dozen will kill me!" I took a dozen of the Vistaril and about 25 ibuprofen. (I avoided the Zoloft because they did not come with a warning label.)

I took the pills at 9:00 a.m. but woke up at noon! Boy was I mad! I looked around and thought that unless heaven looked like my bedroom, I had missed my

flight. I stumbled down the stairs feeling very drunk but not feeling any pain. I took the remaining 40+ Vistaril plus the last of the ibuprofen (about 20). I believed there was no way I could pull out of this dose. I had ingested between 90 –100 pills. I woke up again, this time at 3:30 in the afternoon. I was more ticked off than before. I knew I had to call someone because it was looking like I'd have to deal with all the bad stuff inside me. I ended up at the hospital and by 9:00 I was hooked up to an IV in the emergency room. It was too late for them to pump my stomach. They performed tests on my kidneys, heart, liver, bladder, pancreas and all were clean, as if I had never taken anything. I was so angry. I yelled at the doctor, "Why aren't I at least in a coma?! What went wrong?" He replied that he couldn't give me an explanation because I should be in the morgue.

Before I could go home, I was sent to the psychiatric ward for an "involuntary vacation." I was miserable. I didn't want to be anywhere—I was supposed to be dead. I was nasty to everyone and my fellow "inmates" were afraid of me. By the end of my stay, however, I didn't want to leave. Everyone had taken good care of me and I felt like I was at camp all over again. Two days later, I came to Joshua House to thank all who had helped me through my crisis and to pay respect to my Father.

My body didn't survive the overdose because of some medical miracle. During the morning of what I thought would be my last day, I prayed until I had fallen asleep. I had cried out and said, "Please Father, let me come home now. I'm ready. I need to stop the pain. I want to come home and be with You. I have nothing left to do here." Evidently, by allowing me to wake up not once but twice, He was saying to me, "This one is not your call, Sarah. Deciding who comes and goes around

here has always been my job. I'm flattered that you want to spend time with me, but you still have a lot of goodwill to do before your permanent vacation kicks off. Besides, I have big plans for you—you'll just love it!"

So, here I am, the ever-faithful servant. Christ is in my heart, He's in my thought, and He's in all that I do. I had just forgotten to ask for His help. I was hoping that He would welcome me home with open arms, but instead He threw me back in the pool and shouted, "Swim!" Symbolically, my life is the pool; when it gets tough I climb out and walk over to the diving board, pray all the way up the ladder, and do a swan dive back into my life. WooHoo!! It's great to be alive because I have work to do. I want to thank the Vineyard for being my diving board. Rich, Danny, Steve and Eric, you can all retain your positions as lifeguards because I know He's going to be tossing me back in that cold water on more than a few occasions."

Let's pray.