

What Kind of Church Would the Holy Spirit Build?

Well, as you just heard from the announcements, we are canceling all of our services next weekend. I want to encourage you next weekend for our commitment service to invite friends and family. The message is not going to be on giving. It is going to be a Jesus-centered message. In fact, the Columbus Dispatch may be covering our service. But the service itself will be really appropriate and exciting for family members and friends. Make sure that you are down to the Convention Center by 9:30 because you really will want to be in your seat ready to worship at 10:00 a.m. It would be so unfortunate to walk into the middle of worship on the one occasion when our whole church is gathered together.

You have heard a great amount about our building plan and you should have received the campaign brochure last week with a blue print of the prospective facility that we are going to build, as well as other helpful information. As I was praying about this last message before our commitment Sunday where we will be inviting you as part of the Vineyard to make a 3-year pledge on the building campaign, as I was praying about today's message, this thought came to my mind: "I wonder what kind of church the Holy Spirit would build?" I know what our new facility is going to look like, but for a church that welcomes the presence of the Holy Spirit and says, "God, we want to make ourselves available to you. We don't want to

quench you by restricting what you are allowed to do in our midst. We don't want to grieve you by having lots of unconfessed sin in our lives." For a church that makes itself available to the Holy Spirit, the question that came to my mind was: What kind of church would the Holy Spirit build? What would that church be like?

And Luke, the writer of the gospel of Luke as well as the second half of the story, the book of Acts, in Acts 2:42-47 describes for us the kind of church that the Holy Spirit would build.

"They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer. Everyone was filled with awe, and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles. All the believers were together and had everything in common. Selling their possessions and goods, they gave to anyone as he had need. Every day they continued to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts, praising God and enjoying the favor of all the people. And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved."

What I see here is a blueprint for the kind of church that the Holy Spirit built back then and the kind of church the Holy Spirit wants to build today in Central Ohio. There are literally hundreds of books out, as well as seminars and teaching tapes, regarding what kind of church we ought to be producing in the 21st Century. As I have read some of these books and have gone to some of the seminars and conferences concerning 21st Century churches, it seems to me that the basic prescription for building a church for the 21st Century falls along one of two lines, either the managerial, technological innovative technique line; and you can tell the

book and the conference because it will be loaded with words like: innovative, cutting edge, the church that is loaded with gee-whiz technology, lots of multi-media that pops your eyeballs. So on the one hand you have this quest for being as innovative and cutting edge as possible, what I call the technique orientation. And on the other hand you have almost a mystical orientation, what one writer calls “the church of the lost detail.” Or what I would call “The church of the missing ingredient.” The idea is for centuries the church has missed this one detail of building and that if we just get this one detail down, then the Holy Spirit will have the opportunity to build a church correctly and in that case, revival will break out. So over the last 20 years the missing ingredient was speaking in tongues or the restoration of the five-fold ministry of apostle, prophet, evangelist, pastor and teacher or no church buildings, we’re just going to meet in homes, or no paid pastors, or a plurality of elders, or one church per city, or communal living.

And I do believe, by the way, that a church really needs to be adaptable and make use of all available technologies. And a church must constantly search out the scriptures to see if there are any details that we are neglecting and recover those. What I love about Acts 2:42-47 is that the Holy Spirit’s blueprint for the church is so accessible, it is so plain. It is not hidden in some secret wisdom or knowledge that is only available for a few highly innovative people, or spiritually initiated folks. You don’t have to be brilliantly creative to have a church that the Holy Spirit is building. But we need to be faithful to the pattern.

And in our church’s blueprint, the pattern of life that is described in Acts 2:42-47 ought to be replicated in the church that will be housed in our new facility. So I have

called today's talk very simply, "What Kind of Church Would the Holy Spirit Build."
Let's pray.

The first thing we read regarding the kind of church the Holy Spirit would build is that it would be a biblical church. It says in Acts 2:42, "They devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching." The word devoted means a single-minded resolve, a steadfastness, a commitment, and a fidelity to this one thing—the apostles' teaching.

Let's think about this for a moment. The people had just experienced a profound encounter with the Holy Spirit. The Spirit of God fell in power on the Day of Pentecost. And people upon whom the Spirit fell had this wonderful new gift of Pentecostal tongues. Peter's preaching was empowered by the Holy Spirit so much so that 3000 persons were converted to Jesus through one message.

What would we expect these folks to be talking about and focused upon in the midst of this great revival atmosphere when the Spirit of God is falling in power? What would we in our day expect people's attention to be focused upon?

Well, I can tell you from my experience what most people's attention is fixated upon when God's Spirit is coming in tangible ways, so physically that we can feel him. People will talk about manifestations. Books and teachings will occupy themselves with how we are to fall and how a person shakes and why a person shakes. What the meaning of this or that physical manifestation is. The interesting thing, and by the way, I do believe that when a person encounters the awesome presence of God they will respond very often physically. I have no problem with that whatsoever. We have seen that as a regular part of this church's life. Nevertheless, it is interesting to me that the focus of attention is what is in first place

in this Holy Spirit church is teaching, Bible teaching, by the apostles' teaching. Of course today we would just speak about New Testament Bible teaching.

I do believe very often that we expect whenever the Holy Spirit is mentioned to immediately discuss exotic experiences. But the Spirit of God immediately leads people toward faithfulness, fidelity, and commitment to the teaching of the apostles. And there isn't this war between experience and truth in the Holy Spirit built church. They grow up together. So often people expect this big tug of war. The Spirit of God touches us and gives us a wonderful experience of God. And the Spirit of God immediately draws our attention to the Bible.

What does a biblical church that the Holy Spirit is building look like? What does it look like? What are its characteristics? I think, first of all, it is going to be a balanced church. Its going to commit itself to do and to believe all that the Bible says that people should do and believe. I have often said that I want to be part of a church that runs on all 8-cylinders. That is my vision for the Columbus Vineyard. That we would run on all 8-cylinders. That we would be a church that does a great job in world missions, not just an adequate job, not just a passing reference, but that lots and lots of missionaries would go forth from here to plant churches around the world. And that we would do a great job in worship. And training parents. And that there would be great support for single mothers and fathers. And that there would be great help for kids. And great counseling. And great teaching. That we would do a wonderful job of reaching out to our community in mercy and in love. And that there would be fabulous evangelism – lots and lots of people coming to Christ. And

the power of God would be present here to heal. And that people in the church would be praying and calling out to God for more.

Some churches run on 1 or 2 cylinders. And they call themselves a biblical church because the church functions like a classroom. Everyone has thick notebooks and are taking lots and lots of notes and are going to this or that class. A church that reduces itself to a classroom is not a biblical church unless its committed to do all the things we see in the scripture – worship, prayer, healing, deliverance, care for children, loving each other.

Some churches are like the maternity ward of a hospital with lots of new babies constantly being born. But the church is not a balanced church in that they don't care for the sick babies in another part of the hospital. Sick babies are put on the side to die. And babies that may not be functioning all that well, may not have all the capacities or capabilities are also pushed aside. They are just birthing babies, birthing babies.

A biblical church is going to be a balanced church. A biblical church is going to be a consistent church. The church is not regularly going to be off on little side trips following some tiny little stream into some muddy little hole somewhere. The church is going to have a sense that it is regularly paddling in the main flow of the river of God. It is going to be doing the main and plain things all the time. Oh, the Lord will enrich and bring a new stream into the river, but when we lose the Bible as the centerpiece of church life, very often the church becomes the Baskin-Robbins church – which flavor is it this month? This month we are the prophetic people. Next month we are the revival people. We grow in new dimensions. We get mature,

but there is a consistency so that from month to month and year to year, you can say this is the church I was a part of a decade ago or twenty years ago and it is still full of vibrancy, life and passion. It is better than it was, but its essential character hasn't changed.

Let me read to you one of the testimonies we just got in the last couple of weeks. Regarding the Bible and its challenge to our lives, here is what this person writes:

"After the Spirit converted my sister through Vineyard's teen group, she began to drag me to church with her. I liked the music, but as soon as Rich got up on the stage narcolepsy hit me like Mark McGwire's bat. I could never stay awake for a full message [that's encouraging]. This was a habit, a defense mechanism I had learned while attending our old church with my family. Finally, one Sunday a more powerful force than sleep got a hold of me. As Rich began to preach about the sins brought about through pornography, the conviction of a Spirit crashed into my little world like a tidal wave. I couldn't understand why I felt nauseated. As Rich outlined the consequences of an action I didn't feel that was that bad, I squirmed in my seat as the Spirit brought out the disgustingness of my sin. It felt like somehow he knew what I had been doing and decided to tell everyone about it.

Needless to say, I didn't feel like going to church the next week. Since then, 8 years ago, God's Spirit brought about my conversion and I have pledged my life to Jesus. I thank God that he challenges me to follow him more closely through the ministry of the Word at the Vineyard."

Have you ever had that happen to you? Listening to a Bible teaching and just be squirming in your seat? Uncomfortable, knowing that what is being said is true but

having this division in your heart where on the one hand you just hate every minute of it, it is so excruciating. God is just putting a spear right through your chest. You hate every minute of it.

But on the other hand, it feels so good. Instead of a spear, it feels like a scalpel and God is cutting out a tumor. He is cutting some infection in your life and the pain feels so good. It feels like “Yeah, that’s what I needed to hear.” There is nothing more wonderfully challenging than the written word of God.

And a biblical church that the Holy Spirit is building is going to be an enduring church. At the beginning of this century there was a tremendous revival in Wales. And the stories that come out of that revival in 1904 and 1905 are really quite extraordinary. There were several hundred thousand conversions during about a year and a half period. Churches were just overflowing with people and worshipping God and praising and weeping for their sins. The prayer was so sweet. There were lots of testimonies and spontaneously, activities of God. It’s from the Welsh Revival that we get stories of how the pick ponies at these coal mines needed to be thoroughly retrained. The ponies that were used to do work at the coal mines were used to being cursed at and motivated by streams of profanity. But then these hardened coal miners who had worked in the mines since the age of 12 were all getting saved. And as a result of getting saved, their speech got cleaned up. The ponies didn’t know how to respond when they weren’t being cursed at and beaten.

So there was this great Revival that took place in Wales in 1904 and 1905. But you know the sad thing about it? Ten years later by the beginning of the First World War, there was almost no sign that any revival had ever taken place in Wales. The

churches were empty again. It was hard to find the converts that had been swept in in this mighty wave of the Spirit. By the end of WWI, visitors to Wales said they could find literally no sign at all of the mighty work of God at the turn of the Century.

What was the problem? The problem was that there was great worship and great prayer and wonderful testimonies, and lots of confession and brokenness, but there was no Bible teaching to undergird it all. And without the Bible at the foundation, it was really like water poured on the ground. It all got lost.

Listen to what the prophet Isaiah says in Isaiah 40:6, “A voice says cry out and I said, what shall I cry? All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field. The grass withers and the flowers fall because the breath of the Lord blows upon them. Surely, the people are like grass. The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the Word of our God stands forever.”

If we want to have an enduring church, a church builds and lasts for not just a year, not just a little movement, but lasts for decades and, indeed, for a century, then it must be a biblical church.

A church that the Holy Spirit is going to build will be a loving church. Look down at Acts 2:42. It says, “They devoted themselves to the apostles’ teaching and to the fellowship.” They were devoted to the fellowship. The Greek word here is *Koinonia*. It comes from an old word, *Koinos*, which means sharing, having in common. Fellowship is not just a piece of pie and a cup of coffee in Fellowship Hall. Fellowship has to do with sharing our lives together – deep involvement, getting into each other’s lives.

I love the fact that immediately after reporting that they were devoted to the apostles' teaching, Luke writes that they were devoted to the fellowship. In other words, I think to myself wouldn't it be great to have the most biblical church possible and also the most loving church possible? Wouldn't it be great if we did a fabulous job of building people up in the truth and we also did a fabulous job of building people up in love?

Many of the testimonies we have received have been testimonies of how the love of this church or the love of different individuals radically changed someone's life. I want to read to you a couple of stories. They are really powerful. Just testimonies to the power of love. Listen to this.

"If I were to try to tell what God has done in my life, or even the past 8 years, the resulting tome would resemble an encyclopedia in size, so I will stick to just a little of what God has done through the Columbus Vineyard. A little background is necessary to understand what mighty things God has done. I came from a "home" where there was abuse of every type and it was unrelenting. My sisters and I were told daily by my mother and father (who is a pastor) that we were hated by God, were useless, and unwanted in the world and should not exist. My days and nights were filled with X-rated abuse, hatred and constant shaming. The biggest miracle in all of this is from my earliest memory in the midst of horrific blackness I loved Jesus. I never dared to believe He did anything but hate me, but I loved Him and I always wanted Him even if He didn't want me. He put that love for Him in a little girl's heart. A few people who even know a little of my past say it's a miracle I'm alive and

don't despise God. But I know it is because He kept my heart soft towards Him, not from anything I did.

I came to the Vineyard because I saw a poster advertising a movie. My heart got that "I'm outside looking in" feeling of longing and I came to the movie "The Prodigal." One of the members introduced herself and kept calling me, inviting me to church, inviting me to spend the holidays with her, and writing notes to say she cared. I kept coming to the church, but as soon as the worship music started, my heart would be so overwhelmed I had to leave, and would go cry so hard in the car. I didn't understand why the songs made me cry, but I kept coming back. Incidentally, God has used Vineyard worship to heal so much pain. [By the way, many of the testimonies have said that – that God has brought incredible emotional healing through the worship here.] At first the songs made me sob uncontrollably and I howled like an animal sometimes at home when "Arms of Love" was on. I didn't know that those songs of God's love touched the place where I had never been loved. Now the songs still cause me to cry sometimes, but it's "Jesus, I hurt so badly, I wasn't loved, please YOU come love me."

I went to a kinship and the people were so kind. I would stay 5 minutes, sit in the corner, and duck out when it was too much. I was like a stray cat someone has beaten and abandoned; expecting a kick, and spooking at even a look from someone. I didn't feel like I had a right to exist, let alone be in a warm, loving place, and I kept expecting them to tell me to leave. They never have, and have not rejected me even though I had no clue how to act other than defensive, afraid, and invisible. They

have been consistent for all these years, hanging in with me while I struggle and hopefully learn how to accept love and love back.

At my very first kinship meeting, the host was sitting in a LazyBoy and his little daughter was draped across him, very casually, and he was just stroking her hair and cuddling her as he listened to the teaching. I was astonished—I had no idea that fathers could be like that with their daughters. I just stared at him and wished I could take a picture as he held his baby daughter in church every week. I prayed for God to let me know if that's how He was with me. Until I came to Vineyard, except for maybe when I was an infant, I had never been held. [She talks about how someone just hugged her here and how she asked Jesus to come hug her when she's crying, desolate, empty, alone. And here's how she ends...] Of the Columbus Vineyard, I can say that I am living proof—Come as you are – socially inappropriate behavior, rough edges, raw wounds and all – and you will be loved by people and by Jesus.”

Don't you just love what God did in this woman's life? Friends, I believe that as we move into the 21st Century that it's only going to be this kind of Holy Spirit given love that will cause people to last and will result in disciples being made. Because tragically, more and more people are coming from worse and worse backgrounds of abuse and brokenness, loneliness and divorce. There are more and more folks who have experimented with things that are just incredibly self-destructive. And they are going to need buckets of love if they are going to last in their walk with Jesus.

I have to read you another story of love. This woman, Margi Moriarty writes this:

"It was December of 1994. My husband called me from work (he's one of the pastors here at the Vineyard) one afternoon and surprised me by announcing that he had taken the next morning off of work to stay home with our then 4 year old and 1 1/2 year old to give me some time off from mothering. " Go do something you'd like to do." he said. The next morning I took a stack of photographs to label and headed to the McDonald's in Clintonville for pancakes and coffee. When I looked around for a place to sit, I found a window seat facing High Street. As I was pondering what to write on the backs of my photos, I looked out the window and realized that I had a view of the front doors of a local abortion clinic. When I saw a woman go in or come out, I would pray silently to God for that woman.

Then I began to daydream. I pictured one of these women coming out of the clinic, walking into the McDonald's to order, meeting up with them and helping them so that they wouldn't have to go through with an abortion. You see, I know firsthand the pain an abortion can cause in a young woman's life.

To my surprise, within seconds of this daydream, I saw a woman walk out of the clinic, cross the street, come in, order, and sit down at a table not far from me. Now I couldn't help but wonder if God had seen my heart's desire. Then I realized that this might be one of those opportunities that Christians call a "divine appointment." Of course I did what any mature Christian would do, I went to the women's restroom and paced.

By God's grace, I approached her, told her I had noticed her coming out of the clinic, that I cared about women in crisis pregnancies, and I wanted to help in any way I could. She was scheduled for an abortion the next morning, As we talked, she

began to cry and share her situation with me. It became apparent in our conversation that she didn't really want an abortion, but felt stuck. Her boyfriend was not supportive of a pregnancy, she had no health insurance, no car, and her family lived two states away. When I told her that I could help her and that God would bless her life if she chose to give her baby life, she believed me. The next morning instead of going to her abortion appointment, I picked her up and drove her to her first pre-natal appointment at New Life Nurse-Midwifery Care. The following week she came to my women's group, Women for Life, where she received money to buy maternity clothes and a tape of my personal testimony, which I had shared at the Fall Women's Breakfast. A couple of weeks later, she went to put on some music and put my tape on by mistake. She listened to the entire tape and by the end, surrendered her life to Jesus Christ.

In addition to her conversion and the life of her child who is now 3, a most awesome aspect of this story is how God used various members of this church to lavish His extravagant grace on her. When her roommate decided to abruptly move to Texas and she couldn't afford the rent alone, a member of the church invited her to live with her. Other church members moved her into her new place. When she needed an eye exam, she was given it. When she needed to take driver's ed, one kinship took up a collection to pay for it. Another person took her out on the freeway to practice driving. She was given a car. When that car broke down, then she was given another car. When the cars broke down, someone repaired them. When she needed groceries, Fruit of the Vine Food Pantry provided them. When she needed medical care, volunteer doctors at the FOTV medical clinic helped her.

The young woman now has a 3-year old son. She provides child care in her home for three Vineyard families now. She now stands in front of a local abortion clinic once a month to tell women who feel stuck in their situation, that there's help and support for them if they would change their minds and not go through with an abortion. She has a huge heart and reaches out to inner city teenage girls through our food pantry, FOTV. God used the love of different people in the church to change this woman's life and to preserve her baby's life."

A church that the Holy Spirit builds is going to be a loving church.

And it is interesting to me that the structure of the church looks very similar to the kind of structure we are trying to employ here at the Vineyard. It says in v. 46, "Every day they continue to meet together in the temple courts. They broke bread in their homes and ate together with glad and sincere hearts."

There is a big church meeting where they are all gathered together to worship in the temple courts, and then they meet in homes at small group meetings. As we are in the middle of this campaign, may I encourage you, those of you who are part of the church and not yet part of a small group, to go out to the lobby and pick up one of our small group cards. We have lots of different kinds of groups. Just go. Get involved. Get caught up in this thing called relationship and fellowship. Don't just stand on the outside looking in.

I would also say that if you have a desire to perhaps lead a small group, a co-ed kinship group, women's group, men's group or a Bible study, why don't you write your name down on the insert in your bulletin where you can give information to

the pastors. Say, "I would like to be contacted about potential leadership in a small group." You can deposit those in the boxes at the back at the end of the service.

A church that the Holy Spirit builds is also going to be a worshipping church. It says, "they devoted themselves to the apostles' teaching and to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread." There is lots of controversy regarding what is being referred to by the breaking of bread. It almost certainly includes the Lord's Supper, what we call Communion. Luke, in Luke 22, refers to the Lord's Supper as the "Breaking of Bread." It may, in addition to that, may refer to a longer meal that took place that was included after the breaking of bread. What is known in 1 Cor. 11 as a love feast. But it says that they were obviously taking communion together and in addition, they were gathering in the temple courts to worship.

I imagine that these early Jewish Christians had stopped offering sacrifices since they came to believe that they didn't need any animal sacrifices anymore – that the one true sacrifice that paid for all their sins, Jesus Christ, had been offered up to God on the cross. They placed their faith in the one true bloody sacrifice, Jesus. So they stopped offering animal sacrifices. But I appreciate that in the church that the Holy Spirit builds, they were not only concerned about relating to each other, that attention is drawn to worshipping God.

It is very possible, friend, to get so caught up with one another that we lose Jesus in the process. Listen, I have been there. At the early stages of this church, we were committed to loving relationships and building community with each other. So there would be these wonderful sharing of our possessions. Different people would lend tools out and help with painting and we moved different people. We helped

roof homes. Women would baby-sit each other's kids and cook meals when someone would have a baby. I remember women cleaning each other's homes when someone would be sick. It was a great practice of loving practical relationship with each other.

But in a very real sense, our relationships with each other began to take priority over our relationship with Jesus. And I recall very distinctly when we first began to get in touch with Vineyard worship and these very simple songs like "Isn't He...beautiful, isn't He? Wonderful, isn't He? Counselor, Almighty God, isn't He?" And as I allowed myself to enter worship, it was like I was coming up from under water. I had a spiritual experience that was almost like I had been holding my spiritual breath for ten years under water. As we learned how to worship as a church, I felt like I could breathe again.

A church that the Holy Spirit is building is a church that is going to learn to worship God. And as we worship God and give Him honor, God will come to us and heal us. Listen to this story.

"I want to testify that the Holy Spirit is alive and well and that body ministry is vibrant at Vineyard Columbus. I have been attending for ten years, nearly seven as a single mom. [She talks about the teaching for awhile but then listen to this...] The worship, however, is where I must give my biggest praise. At the time my marriage failed, I was going through incredible pain. I rushed to church faithfully to drop off my daughter and to get to worship to cry my eyes out. It was there week after week that God met me. Weekly I would receive refreshing and cleansing that only comes through worship. I usually sat alone, but occasionally someone would come and sit

down by me and reach out. I would cry even more. I remember one specific day when during the message I heard, “God may not change your circumstances, but he can heal your heart.” It happened for me during the worship service. I wept and I forgave my ex-husband. I went to him and tore up all the IOU’s. I repented for my wrong-doing and Jesus Christ healed my heart. I can say today that I no longer have any anger. I stand forgiven and free. I regularly pray for my ex-husband.”

Worship. The church that the Holy Spirit builds is always going to be a praying church. It says, “They devoted themselves to the teaching of the apostles’, to the fellowship, to the breaking of bread and to prayer.” Back then they had set times of prayer. Not just private prayer, but times that were set during the day for corporate prayer. Have you ever wondered why there was so much happening in the early church? Why so many people were converted? Why so many people were healed?

What we see in the book of Acts was that the church was constantly praying. They were praying for fresh power. They were praying for open doors for the gospel. They were praying for healing. They were praying for direction. The apostle Paul in his letters can hardly speak a sentence with out mentioning, “Oh, by the way, I have been praying for you...”

Why was there so much life in the early church? Because the early church was a church characterized by prayer. The same thing was true in Jesus’ life. I want to read to you something from E.M. Boud. Listen to this.

“The praying of Christ was real. Prayer pressed upon him as a solemn all-imperative, all-commanding duty, as well as a royal privilege. Prayer was the secret of his power, the law of his life, the inspiration of his toil, the source of his wealth,

his joy, and his communion in strength. To Christ Jesus prayer occupied no secondary place, but was exacting and paramount, a necessity, a light, the satisfying of a restless yearning and a preparation for heavy responsibility.”

Nothing is more conspicuous in the life of our Lord than prayer. There has been a great burst of prayer and fasting during this giving campaign. I would want to encourage you that if you haven’t taken a day to fast during the campaign, you might want to do that. You might say, “I don’t want to miss out on the blessing of some breakthrough. I will fast for a day or fast for a few meals, or fast for a few days this last week.” We have seen a great burst of activity and prayer these last several months. I sure don’t want to have it be a season, but rather to build upon what God has done here.

We set aside room 18 for prayer. There are a number of prayer meetings that you can come to. Every other month we have an all-church prayer meeting. Those of you who were touched during the prayer vigil or fasting and prayer, when you hear about our all-church prayer meeting, why not come? Kinship, women’s group, and men’s group leaders – I would encourage you in the next month or so to spend one of your meetings just praying.

There are monthly prayer cards that are in plastic boxes by the door or on the ministry wall out in the lobby. You can pick them up and pray. The fact is, friends, if we want to be a loving church, we are going to be a praying church.

Richard Foster, a writer on prayer, once said this: “If we truly love people, we will desire for them far more than it is within our power to give them and this will lead us to prayer. Intercession is a way for us to love others. In the on-going work

of the kingdom of God, nothing is more important than intercessory prayer. People today desperately need the help that we can't give them. Marriages are being shattered. Children are being destroyed. Individuals are living lives of quiet desperation, without purpose or future, and we can make a difference, if only we would learn how to pray on their behalf."

Prayer is the link up between the power of Jesus and what it is that we are trying to do at the church. Prayer is the means that the Holy Spirit uses to build the church.

And a church that the Holy Spirit builds is always going to be a wonder-working church. Biblical, loving, worshiping, praying, wonder-working...v. 43, "Everyone was filled with awe and many wonders and miraculous signs were done by the apostles."

It is absolutely false to say that miracles and signs and wonders were just the special province of the apostles. The truth is that the early church built by the Holy Spirit was a wonder-working church. And any church that doesn't quench the Spirit, but welcomes him to do what he wants to do is going to see signs and wonders. There were lots of non-apostles in the early church, like Stephen of whom it says "he was a man full of God's grace and power and he did great wonders and miraculous signs among the people." And Philip, of whom it says, "When the crowds heard Philip and saw the miraculous signs he did, they paid close attention. With shrieks, evil spirits came out of many and many paralytics and cripples were healed." And Ananias, of whom we read that "he healed the side of the apostle Paul instantly." And we read of signs and wonders in the early church among the Corinthians who

were given gifts of healings and miraculous powers and tongues and prophecies. And the Galatians among whom God worked miracles.

Signs and wonders are part and parcel of a Holy Spirit built church. When someone says, “that’s just what the apostles did,” you say to them, “But aren’t we to imitate the example of the apostles?” I mean there is a uniqueness, don’t get me wrong. The apostles uniquely laid the doctrinal foundation of the church and they uniquely are witnesses to the physical resurrection of Christ, nevertheless, the apostles frequently tell us to imitate them.

And why is it, other than some super anti-supernatural bias, or some theological framework that cuts out the miracles of God for today, that our imitation of the apostles would exclude signs and wonders? Listen to what the apostle Paul said in Phil. 4:9, “Whatever you have learned or received, or heard from me or seen in me, put it into practice.” Or in 1 Cor. 11, he said, “Follow my example as I followed the example of Christ.”

Or in 1 Thess. 1:5, the apostle Paul says, “Our gospel came to you not only with words, but also with power with the Holy Spirit and with deep conviction. You know how we lived among you. For our sakes you became imitators of us and the Lord.”

A Holy Spirit built church is going to be a wonder-working church. Listen to this testimony by a physician and his wife.

“My husband Dave and I were married in 1976, but we were never able to have children. Both he and I had medical problems that inhibited my ability to conceive and carry a baby to term. Because we wanted children, we decided to adopt. In

1984 we adopted a baby girl and four years later, a baby boy. Although we were content with our two children, we also desired to have more. During my quiet time one morning, I believe the Lord told me he would give us more children, but I wasn't sure how he would do it. We remained open to adoption, but also began infertility treatments. After one year, though, I was still not pregnant. We continued to just trust the Lord. In 1994 we built a new house. Because Dave and I were convinced the Lord would give us more children, we designed a nursery for our new home. In the Spring of 1994, Vineyard hosted a healing conference with John Wimber. At one of the sessions, John called forward for prayer couples who were having difficulty getting pregnant. Even though I wasn't there, Dave went forward. Within two months I discovered I was pregnant. I was 37 years old and Dave was 41. The chances of this just happening are impossible. We tried everything medically possible without any success and by then I had only one working fallopian tube. God himself intervened and performed a miracle. In April 1995 our son was born and then in January 1998 our little girl. I have two precious reminders that our God is still a God of miracles."

The sixth thing – a Holy Spirit built church is going to be a giving church. It says in v. 44, "all the believers were together and had everything in common, selling their possessions and goods they gave to anyone as he had need." If you are going to be a loving church, you better plan on being a giving church because love is always practically expressed in giving. What does John 3:16 say? It says, "For God so loved the world that He felt good about it..."

For God so loved the world that it just warmed his heart. That emotion was inside of God.

No, it says, "For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son."

When the Holy Spirit makes a loving church, that loving church is always characterized by giving. It says that the believers were together. That they had everything in common, selling their possessions, they gave to anyone as he had a need. Some people speak of this as early Communism. But I think there are three things here that distinguish what is going on in this Holy Spirit built church from Communism.

First of all, not all private property was done away with. It is very apparent as we read the rest of the account in the book of Acts that people still retained private property. People still had houses. They still owned land and had possessions. The private property was not turned over at the point of the barrel of a gun. Any selling of the property was voluntary. It was done with glad hearts at the urging of the Holy Spirit.

What I think we are reading here is that people held their property with a loose hand. Property was available to give to those who had a need.

As you know, if you have been coming over the last couple of months, this has been a time when we have emphasized giving. And I asked our staff to go first in giving toward this building project. The reason I asked the staff to go first is because biblically if you look at 1 Chronicles 29, leaders go first in giving. I want to share with you the total amounts that were given. The pastors here in the church, ten

pastors, pledge a total of \$232,750.00 for an average gift by our pastors of \$23,275.00.

You need to know, friends, I sign their checks, I know what the pastors' salaries are here. I was really blessed to see those results. And then the staff—administrative assistants, work room folks, receptionists, people, who many of whom are part-time, they gave for 22 number of people, they gave a total of \$184,269.00 for an average gift of \$9,000.00. The total for 32 staff members is \$417,000. At the leaders dessert, 232 pledge cards were turned in for a total of 3.345 million dollars.

You know, I looked at a few of the cards and in one particular case, I was moved to tears, (I asked her permission to share this) because one of the single moms on our staff, who I know her salary and I know that she is really having some difficulty in making ends meet, committed to give \$15.00 a week.

Two issues come up for us. One of the issues that come up in determining giving is "what if I don't have very much – what should I do?" I am pastorally concerned for people in this church who don't have very much. We are in the middle of a giving campaign. I know that some of you are really struggling financially. I know that. My concern is that some of you would say, "Because I don't have very much, I am not going to give anything." Friends, there is something in each one of us where we have a need to participate, to feel a part of the whole. And no matter where we are financially, you have a need to participate. God understands this. In the Old Testament God makes provision for the poor. In Lev. 5 God says that people are to offer him a sacrificial lamb, but if they can't afford a lamb, they should bring as an

offering two little turtle doves. And if they are too poor to even afford two doves, they should bring a handful of flour. I think about that principle for some of you and I think, "You can't afford a lamb, bring a handful of flour, bring two little doves." The Lord knows your situation and the Lord knows your heart. But pastorally, I am concerned about people who might think about not giving anything. Because here is what is going to happen, friends, and I speak with all the affection I can. We are going to have a big celebration and announce what God has done. And I want you to feel a part of that. I want you to feel like, "I gave something to this" instead of watching others celebrate. All of us together did it. And so even if you know the most you can afford is \$5.00 a week, and that for you would be your sacrifice, listen, \$5.00 a week is not nothing. It is \$250.00 a year and \$750.00 over three years. That is twenty chairs in the new auditorium. You can come into the new auditorium and say, "Hey, those 20 chairs, they are my chairs. Don't be spilling your coffee on my chairs."

That is 20 square feet of carpet. Watch where you put that coffee cup. Don't put your Chinese food down on my carpet.

I really want you to have that feeling of, "Lord, I also gave."

Some of you are struggling with hearing from God. I sure don't want to make this too mystical. If you are really not hearing, then just do what is right. Be biblical about your giving and make a sacrifice. If it doesn't involve change in your lifestyle, the amount is probably not enough. The fact that you have to make changes, that you have to limit yourself, you are on the right track.

Last thing about a church that the Holy Spirit builds, it is always going to be an evangelistic church. It says in Acts 2:47, “And the Lord added to their number daily those who were being saved.”

One of the things we see in the book of Acts is that the Holy Spirit is always driving people out. He is always in the process of growing the church. It is interesting that we have both sides of the balance here. God doesn’t add to the church without saving people. There are lots of churches that are filled with unsaved people, lots of nominal believers. The Holy Spirit doesn’t build a church by adding numbers, he saves those he is adding.

And the Holy Spirit doesn’t just save people, he adds them to the church. There’s no nominal Christianity; there’s no individualistic Christianity; there are saved people being plugged into the church.

I want to finish with a couple of testimonies regarding evangelism. This woman writes:

“In December 1993 I welcomed Jesus Christ as my personal Savior. Afterwards I noticed an inner change in me. I couldn’t understand what it was. By the grace of God, I was invited to the Vineyard on Easter Sunday 1994. Through the sermon and every worship song, Jesus, by the Holy Spirit, spoke deep in my heart. The songs enabled me to communicate with God. In addition, I was receiving lots of prayer because I came from a very performance-oriented background I felt as though my duty to Christ was to talk about him at all times and to defend him constantly. This caused my family to drift farther away from me. My husband, coming out of a very religious Islamic background turned completely against me. And when his family

found out, he even threatened a divorce. My oldest daughter, 11 at the time, was completely withdrawn and depressed because of the discord in the family. All of this I couldn't understand because God's promise of peace and joy. One Sunday on my way to church I was praying that someday my whole family would come together. That's when Jesus spoke to me saying not to defend Him, but instead to abide in Him. Little by little Jesus answered my prayer. In May 1995 my older daughter, who had been totally against my coming to Christ, accepted Jesus as her personal Savior. In August 1995 my husband came to the Vineyard Summer Harvest for the first time. In December I was baptized and my whole family came to the church service, together for the first time. During the service, the Lord touched my husband's heart and he said he wanted to come to Vineyard every Sunday thereafter. In October 1996 my husband welcomed Christ into his heart. On July 14, 1997 both my daughters and my husband were baptized at the Vineyard."

Last story...a church that the Holy Spirit builds is always going to be an evangelizing church. I just read of a family of Muslims that received Christ. Listen to this one...

"One Sunday morning in our TenderCare class, a class for children with disabilities, we were blessed to have a new student join us. His name was Joe and he is 13 years old. Joe was born with Downs Syndrome, a chromosomal abnormality which results in mental retardation and other characteristics such as heart problems that may need to be surgically corrected. During the class we enjoyed some games, shared some stories, and ate some snacks. I asked Joe if he had asked Jesus into his heart. He looked at me and with an energetic nod stood up from the

table. While he repeated that he had, indeed, asked Jesus into his heart, he began to unbutton the top three buttons of his shirt. I began to get a little nervous wondering what he was doing and got up to stop him. Within seconds, he separated his collar and showed me a very big vertical scar on his chest near his heart and he said, "See, right there I asked Jesus into my heart right there."

That is what the Holy Spirit is doing here. Let's pray.