

Good morning everyone! My name is Mark Peters, I'm one of the pastors on staff at North Shore Alliance, and this morning I have the privilege of opening the Bible and teaching.

But first, I'd like to weigh in on our 40 days of prayer. Likely, you haven't been counting, but as of today, we are 22 days in and I want to encourage you to continue to be in prayer for your neighbours, friends, and family who don't know Jesus. I also want to encourage you to continue to pray for our North Shore Alliance missionaries, both local and global.

If you've been making use of the prayer guide, then you've been praying some rather big prayers the last 3 weeks. You've been praying things like:

- *God, create a hunger among us for deeper relationship with Jesus.*
- *God, give me Holy-Spirit-eyes to see what you are doing in the world around me.*
- *God, show me, my small group, my church how to provide for the financial needs of our missionaries.*
- *God, raise up people, young and old, who will passionately go to the ends of the earth, in order to bring honour to Jesus and extend His kingdom.*

This last prayer is an especially "big" prayer, because when we pray it we include ourselves. The prayer is not, "*God, raise up others to be your witnesses...*", but, "*God, raise me up to be your witness, whether here on the North Shore, or on the other side of the world.*"

illus: Last Friday, Naomi was working and I took the day off...I had the whole day planned. I would get the kids up, dressed, fed, and off to school and then I'd have the rest of the day to myself. I woke up

on Friday and got the kids ready with a smile on my face because as soon as they were in school, I was planning to drive to Stanley Park and run a couple laps around the Seawall...I'd been looking forward to it all week.

The walk to my kids' school takes all of 2 minutes...I walk down my street about 50 meters, and take a right hand turn onto a pathway that leads to their school. On the way back, I was enjoying the sun, thinking about my run, planning what I was going to listen to on my iPod, but when I stepped onto my street I noticed my neighbour.

You know what it's like on the North Shore during the Winter months...you don't spend a lot of time on the street talking with your neighbours, because it's usually pitch-black, pouring rain, and cold...when you see your neighbours, you give them wave, shout out a "hello" and then make a bee-line for your home.

As soon as I saw my neighbour, I felt the Lord prompt me to go talk to him. But I didn't want to...I had the morning all mapped out...my running shoes were calling my name...and in that split-second, I decided to ignore God's prompting and walk up the street towards my house. Do you realize how much of life is determined by the split-second decisions we make?

I got about 10 meters up the road before the Lord prompted me again, "*Mark, go talk to him*". It's hard to pray daily for neighbours and nations, and then ignore your neighbour when it suits your fancy. Sometimes, God wants to use us as His answer to the prayers we are praying.

So I turned around, called out to my neighbour, and we stood in the middle of the street and talked for about 10 minutes. I didn't share the gospel with him, and I didn't invite him to church...but I found out he had broken some ribs playing hockey, I asked about his two girls...how they were doing, and we talked about life...

In my neighbourhood, in most cases, it's relationship that will open the door for conversations about Jesus. Prayer is important, so too is putting feet to those prayers, and building relationships with my neighbours...sometimes I'm a little slow, or maybe, just a little too focussed on my own plans to see when God is opening a door.

Dave Sattler and I were talking the other day, and he said something that resonated with me. He said, *I want it to become normal for all of us to pray big prayers, put feet to those prayers, and then tell the story of what God is doing.* Me too...I want that to become normal for us.

Can you do something for me? If you've been praying and asking God to move in your life, in your neighbourhood, in your school, or in your workplace, I have no doubt that He has been showing up. It doesn't have to be earth shattering, it can be something small, like the conversation God opened up with my neighbour...if God is showing up, I'd like to hear about it...send me an email and tell me the story.

This morning we are jumping back into our teaching series on 1 Corinthians, entitled, *"Rethinking Church"*. Last week Pastor Linda was teaching from the book of Nehemiah; she walked us through the story of God using His people to rebuild the wall around Jerusalem.

This morning, in 1 Corinthians 3, we're going to touch down on the same theme...*building*. God is the Master Builder, and we are His apprentices in training. If you have your Bibles with you, I want to invite you to turn with me to 1 Corinthians 3:9-17, that's page 1774 in the blue Bibles.

"9 For we are co-workers in God's service; you are God's field, God's building.

10 By the grace God has given me, I laid a foundation as a wise builder, and someone else is building on it. But each one should build with care. 11 For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ. 12 If anyone builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, 13 their work will be shown for what it is, because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire, and the fire will test the quality of each person's work. 14 If what has been built survives, the builder will receive a reward. 15 If it is burned up, the builder will suffer loss but yet will be saved—even though only as one escaping through the flames."

16 Don't you know that you yourselves are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in your midst? 17 If anyone destroys God's temple, God will destroy that person; for God's temple is sacred, and you together are that temple."

Illus: By a show of hands, how many of you have ever worked in the construction industry? I know Adam and Brad are electricians, Travis and Marcus are carpenters, Gord/Gerry/Graham/Jayson/Stephan are general contractors, Andrew works with cabinets, Daniel is a stone mason, Kevin is a finisher, and I've only named a few of you...there

are some who work with cement, others are plumbers, painters, and on the list goes. If you've ever built a house, or had one renovated, you know that a lot of people are involved in making your house functional and beautiful.

Does anyone know what the first rule in construction is? I'll give you a hint, it's not: *don't shoot yourself with a nail gun*. That was my first thought too...it's a very important rule, but I'm pretty sure it's not the first rule.

I have to be honest here...I'm hardly qualified to speak about the "rules" of construction. But since I have the mic this morning...if I were the one making the rules, *don't shoot yourself with a nail gun* would be definitely be on the list, but at the top of the list would be the following rule: *know what you're building*.

That makes sense doesn't it? *Know what you're building*. If you don't know what you're building, you won't know where to start, what materials to use, or what the finished product should look like.

A few months back, Jayson Eisenhower invited me onto one of his job sites; I'm always fascinated when I get to watch people who know how to build. Jay showed me around, introduced me to his crew, explained the different building challenges of his current project and how he was addressing each one; it was a lot of fun to see what he and his crew were building.

As he was showing me around, I had the chance to see the most important room in the house...and no, it wasn't the man-cave. In fact, if Jay hadn't pointed the room out, I would have walked right by and dismissed it entirely. It was a temporary room, way in the back, and

is probably destined to become some kind of closet when the building is complete. But there on a makeshift table was a set of blueprints for the building.

These blueprints told Jayson what he was building (a house), these plans told him what the house was supposed to look like, and based on these plans Jayson knew what kind of materials he needed to build with. If I were crowned "*King of the Construction World*" it would be a total disaster, trust me, but if I were King my first rule would be: *know what you're building*.

In verse 9, Paul spoke to the Corinthians saying "*you are God's building*;" the question is: *what kind of building were they?* Paul answered his own question in verse 16: *the kind of building God is building is a temple*. God is building Himself a home, a dwelling place, and the Corinthian believers were that dwelling place.

I want to point out something interesting in the original language that makes a difference how we interpret and apply vs. 16. When Paul uses the word "*you*" in verse 16, the "*you*" is plural. Our English translation does a pretty decent job: "**16** *Don't you know that you yourselves, or, you collectively, "are God's temple and that God's Spirit dwells in your midst?*"

Later on in chapter 6, Paul will make the point that every individual follower of Jesus is a temple of the Holy Spirit, but that's not the point he's making here. Paul wants to make it known that whenever the people of God gather, God the Holy Spirit is present, dwelling among them.

Paul begins by saying "*you are God's building* (vs. 9)," he concludes by saying "*you are God's temple* (vs. 16)," and in between he makes

two important points: (1) Without Jesus as a foundation, there's no temple...there's no dwelling in our midst; and (2) This temple really matters to God, so we'd better be careful how we build.

(1) Let's begin with Jesus, and verse 11: "*no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ.*" I'm not going to go into great detail here, because we've already spent weeks talking the centrality of Jesus: His life, His death, and His resurrection.

Psalm 118:22-23 contains a prophecy foretelling how people would react to Jesus's life and ministry. It reads, "**22** *The stone the builders rejected has become the cornerstone; 23 the LORD has done this, and it is marvelous in our eyes.*"

In ancient architecture, a cornerstone was the most important stone in a building's foundation; a builder would choose a cornerstone, set it in place, and everything would be built around this stone. The religious rulers of Jesus day rejected Jesus outright...He didn't fit their mould; just like a builder might reject a stone that didn't meet the established criteria.

Jesus was rejected by rulers of His day, but God the Father appointed Him to be our cornerstone. In essence, what the Father said was: "*I have chosen Jesus, and everything must be built and revolve around Him.*"

1 Peter 1:20 says that before the creation of the world, the death and resurrection of Jesus was God's chosen plan. Before the world was created, before man and woman rebelled against God, God saw our

sin, and God chose to take on our humanity, carry the weight of our sin, and put it to death on the cross.

There is none like Jesus! He is God's chosen cornerstone! Jesus is the only One who can reconcile us to God. Without Jesus, there's no foundation, and there's no temple. The only reason a holy God can make His home among us is because Jesus has so marvelously dealt with our sin.

Perhaps you've heard people talk about the rapid decline in the Western church...it's true you know. Most churches are shrinking, and many are shutting their doors. And while there are many reasons for the decline, chief among them is this: *when Jesus Christ is removed from the centre, there's no longer any reason to show up...when you cut yourself off from the Source of Life, death is the natural result.*

Our church belongs to a family of churches known as the Christian and Missionary Alliance, and one of our old hymns has a line in it that reads, "*Jesus only, Jesus ever, Jesus all in all we sing.*" There is no life apart from Jesus. There is no forgiveness apart from the death and resurrection of Jesus. There is no peace apart from the reign of Jesus. There is no hope apart from Jesus.

If you haven't already done so, entrust your brokenness and sin to Jesus; ask Him to forgive you for all that you've done wrong...make Him the cornerstone and foundation of your life. And when you do, you become a part of something massive, a building, a temple, the people of God...Jesus is our common foundation, we call one another brothers and sisters in Christ, because Jesus is our common entry point into the family of God.

So there you have it...we are God's building, His temple, He wants to make His home among us, and, Jesus is our foundation. Verses 12-15 go on to talk about our participation in God's building project; let's turn attention there right now.

(2) The second point Paul makes is that God's building project, the people who bear His Name, and house His Presence, is of the highest importance to Him...so...we need to be careful how we build.

Take a look at verse 12...Paul assumes that others will take an active role in God's "building" project; building up the people of God is too much for any one person. In 1 Corinthians 12-14, Paul explains how the Holy Spirit empowers people within the church with spiritual gifts and abilities, for the purpose of discipleship and transformation. Since every follower of Jesus houses the Holy Spirit, every person has a role to play in building up the church.¹

I want to take a moment and return to our construction analogy...I have a question for you: *when you're on a construction site, who's in charge? Who calls the shots? Who makes the decisions?*

Is it the foreman? The general contractor? The architect? Who makes the decisions? It's a bit of a trick question isn't it? Each one has a measure of authority, but none of them has the final say; the last word typically belongs to the owner.

When it comes to to the church, and to the shaping of the people of God, who has the final word? Is it the pastor? The elders board? The longest standing members? Those who have faithfully supported the church with their finances? The lines get very blurry if we start talking about the "stakeholders" in the church, and how to keep them all happy...but when we talk about who the "owner" is, things get really clear, really quickly.

Gordon Fee writes, "The church belongs to Christ, and all other things—structures, attitudes, decisions, nature of ministry, everything—should flow out of that singular realization. Moreover, those 'in charge' must be ever mindful of who is really in charge."²

In vs. 12, Paul lists six different construction materials, apparently, in descending order of cost: gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay, and straw. But Paul makes no mention of the cost of these materials; there is only one quality highlighted: the ability of these materials to withstand the test of fire. How many of you know that not all building materials are created equal?

If you're building a garden shed to house your lawnmower and few assorted tools, leftover plywood will do just fine. But if you're building something that is fireproof, something that will withstand the scrutiny of our Owner and Master...that changes things. Remember what is being built...we are the temple of God: He dwells in our midst every time we gather, He wants to make His home

¹ Roy E. Ciampa, *The Pillar New Testament Commentary: The First Letter to the Corinthians*, 152.

² Gordon D. Fee, *The New International Commentary of the New Testament: The First Epistle to the Corinthians*, 135.

among us. And so Paul says, *“In light of what is being built (a dwelling place for the Living God), be careful how you build.”*

And now for verses 13-15...I want you to pay close attention. If you've got a Bible, open it, because these verses have been horribly misunderstood by many people.

It's hard to miss the language of judgement in these verses; Paul talks about the Day of the Lord, fire, reward, and loss. But I want you to notice that it is the builder's work, not their life, that is being tested. These verses are not talking about individual salvation. Remember, Paul is writing to followers of Jesus, their eternal destiny has already been established. He's not talking about heaven or hell, he's talking about *reward*, or *no reward*.

Don't misunderstand the image of "fire;" this is a "fire" that tests the quality of the building being done. Note in verse 15 that it is the building material that is burnt up, not the builder. There are places in the Bible where God does talk about life and death, heaven and hell, but not here.

So the question is: *when it comes to building up the people of God (the place where He dwells), what kind of building materials will be rewarded, and which will go up in flames?*

You'll notice that Paul doesn't offer an immediate list of appropriate building materials, but I think that's because he's been doing so all the way along. In fact, the entire letter was written as a reminder of what it meant to do life together as God's holy people in Corinth. As

we read this letter, we find that it instructs us on how to do life together as God's holy people on Vancouver's North Shore.

Here's a few questions we might want to ask as we consider the kind of building that pleases God, and opens the doors for His work of transformation. Again, we need to remember what we're building...our aim is to be God's dwelling place...our goal is to be a people among whom God feels *“at home.”* Here's the first question:

- *Is our building Jesus-centered?* (1 Cor. 3:11)

There is only one foundation and cornerstone for our life together: the Lord Jesus Christ. If we do a good job of pointing people to Him, then most of building "issues" will be taken care of. It's His life, His forgiveness, His peace, His healing that we seek. And the Holy Spirit always feels "at home" among those who worship, honour, follow, and obey Jesus Christ. Here's the second question:

- *Who are we building for? For God, or for self?* (1 Cor. 4:5)

1 Corinthians 4:5 says, *“He will bring to light what is hidden in darkness and will expose the motives of the heart. At that time each will receive their praise from God.”*

One author writes, "Disturbingly...God will consider not only **what** Christian workers said and did in their attempts to build up God's people, but **why** they behaved in this way."³ Do you realize that some of the building we have done will go up in flames because we built with the wrong motives?

³ Ciampa, 156.

I've known firsthand what it is to lead out of woundedness. At the time, it seems like the the most natural thing in the world to do. Have you ever wrestled with feelings of insecurity? Or become aware of your need to be recognized and celebrated? Have you ever felt the weight of an unfulfilled longing for greatness? Of course you have. And quite often, our woundedness pushes us into a kind of "building" mode that looks good on the outside, but is rotten on the inside. *Just who are we building for anyway?* Here's a third question:

- *Are we building in our strength, or according to God's power?*
1 Cor. 2:4-5; 12; 14

Remember who we are...we are the dwelling place of God the Holy Spirit...the Holy Spirit is God's empowering presence. If we are trying to get by on natural talent, skill, and expertise, our "building" efforts are not going to pass God's test.

Do you know that only God can do the work of God? And knowing this shouldn't push us to sidelines, but it should change our entire approach to building. *Jesus, I take you to be my life...fill me with the Holy Spirit's power and gifts, make me an instrument of your love, speak through me as I interact with people, help me to see what are seeing so that I can do what you are doing.*

Intimacy with God unlocks His power for ministry...it just does...when prayer becomes a major part of our building work, more often than not, we'll end up building with the right materials. One final question:

- *Are we building in love?* (1 Cor 13:1-3)

1 Corinthians 13:1-3 says, "*1 If I speak in the tongues of men or of angels, but do not have love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal. 2 If I have the gift of prophecy and can fathom all mysteries and all knowledge, and if I have a faith that can move mountains, but do not have love, I am nothing. 3 If I give all I possess to the poor and give over my body to hardship that I may boast, but do not have love, I gain nothing.*"

Love is the ultimate building material...it can withstand any assault, and come through every fire.

Conclusion: As I wrap up this morning, I want to conclude by bringing us back to Paul's final image in vs. 16: we are God's temple, His dwelling place. It's one of my favourite images in all of Scripture...God making His home among us.

illus: Six years ago I was working at a church in Calgary, but when I resigned, Naomi, Luke and I relocated to the North Shore and we moved in with Naomi's mom and dad. At the time, all the bedrooms were on the top floor of the house, and there was one kitchen for us all to share...we were one big happy family.

But shortly after I was hired at North Shore Alliance, Naomi and I received word that the little girl we were waiting to adopt, Anna, was ready for us. All of a sudden, the house we were living in was too small, there weren't enough bedrooms, and so we looked for, and found, a place to rent.

When we got home from Thailand, we moved into our new place, and lived there for a year. But in the year we lived there, I never felt

at home. I could have been the paint colours...a strange shade of blue, and an unhealthy dose dusty rose.

It could have been the backyard...it was a funny L-shape, and bears would frequently gorge on our crabapple tree and then pass out in the yard. Or it could have been the temperature...it always felt cold and drafty in that house. The bottom line was that I was living in a house that never felt like a home...I was inhabiting a house but always felt like a guest.

As I've been meditating on the Scripture this week, I've been thinking about our church, and asking God the question: *if we are your dwelling place, does You feel "at home" in our midst or do You feel like a guest?*

I was out on a prayer walk early this morning, again, asking God this question, and He brought something to mind I'd like to share with you. When you have good friend come in from out of town to stay with you for a few days, often, we will say something like: *Welcome, we're so glad you can be with us, make yourselves at home.* By it we mean, if there's food in the fridge go ahead and eat it (please don't ask), the remote controls are yours' to use, borrow our car keys if you need to go somewhere. Our house is your house.

But we're still talking in terms of a house, not a home. If we really meant the phrase "*make yourself at home,*" we wouldn't be surprised if our friends started to re-arrange the furniture, or redesign the kitchen, or begin to clean out the mess in our closets that no longer seems to bother us.

I don't think "*make yourself at home*" goes far enough when it comes to God, do you? We've been intentional as a church to regularly declare that Jesus is our Lord and Master; He is our Leader, and we are His followers. But God has more in store for us...I have a sense there's some of our furniture that needs to be re-arranged (mine and yours), there's some parts of our life together that need to be redesigned, there's some junk in our closets (yours and mine) that God wants to clean out.

We are His dwelling place, **His** dwelling place...Holy Spirit, we are your people, your home.