

Reflections on Building a Church and a Building

By Chuck Malm

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Bible Text: Romans 1:16-17

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Chuck Malm:

Good afternoon. I'd like to welcome you also. My name is Chuck Malm and I have been here pretty much from the start of the church. This is Scott Negley. He also has been here pretty much from the start.

Those people who know me know that I am the storyteller and I don't let the facts get in the way of a good story. That won't happen today...

Scott Negley:

That's why I'm up here today.

Chuck Malm:

Actually, Scott is in here because he has got great insight. In fact, I was talking to his boys about what it is like to watch a movie with Scott. And...

Scott Negley:

You don't want to do it.

Chuck Malm:

First...First he goes, "That can't happen. That's not true." And he's got this running commentary through all the special effects and the idea. And about half way through he starts trying to figure out what the end is going to be. And he starts announcing what the end is going to be. So you can't...valuable insight is why Scott is here, so...

I get to tell the story. Scott gets to tell the lessons and the idea behind the stories so...

But thank you for coming.

If one thing comes out about what we are going to be saying it is the faithfulness of God in how God has been involved in our work.

We have a lot of people that we should thank: the volunteers. How do you begin to thank them? We have had large donor gifts and they have wished to remain anonymous so we can't publicly thank them. We have had electricians like Acro Electric or Cisco or McCann Remodeling or the plumbing, Eberly Plumbing and some groups that we do need to thank. But in the end it has been our walk with God and the lessons that he has taught us, how he has answered our needs that has been what we appreciate most about standing here today and telling a story.

So that is...to him go all the glory and honor and prayer.

Psalm 115 kind of speaks it for me.

Not to us, O LORD, not to us but to your name be the glory, because of your love and faithfulness. Why do the nations say, "Where is their God?" Our God is in heaven; and he does whatever pleases him.¹

And that really has been our experience. Will God treat us? Will God do for us what he did in the Old Testament, all those great Bible stories that we know? And that has been our experience.

Our church started May 10th, 1987 up on the chapel at JFK. But prior to that people had been praying for a work like this to get going seven years in advance. Christ Community, the mother church that planted us had a Sunday school, had a group of men that were praying specifically for Wahoo. Indian Hills and Lincoln was doing the same thing. And finally we got started. Their volunteer work, they supplied the pies. The Christian Missionary Alliance our denomination gave us the pastor and we got going so...

We have Steve Albright. We have got five families. We have got 16 kids. And with that we got started. We were a mission church and it didn't take long for us to outgrow that facility up there. In two years we were now at around 16 families. Like I said, don't let the facts get in the way of a good story.

Forty-five kids, eight mothers were expecting at that time. And we started hearing a rumor of the campus being sold and our growth was the motivation for us to start looking for another facility.

One of the things that you don't know is how God works in the background, how he works tragedies for good. Romans 8:28 is there.

Scott, you can jump in here any time you want to and talk about that.

But on April 8th, 1988 this bowling alley caught on fire and was basically a total loss. The fire had started in the far corner where you come in. The pressure and the heat had moved to the middle of the building, about right there and had formed like a tornado that

¹ Psalm 115:1-3

had gone through the floor and had set off the sprinkler system wrecking the downstairs. And then, for some reason or another, all the pressure goes out the side and pushes this north wall out about two foot.

So when they came in to evaluate it, it couldn't be saved as a bowling alley. Estimates just to clean it up was \$75,000 and it was over a million to restore it. It looked like a tragedy and how no idea that we would be one of the ones to answer and turn that tragedy into what we are sitting in now.

God answered our prayers by bringing people into our congregation. Among those families we had a structural engineer, a civil engineer. We have got a draftsman by the name of Wally Schwartz. And we have the people in our congregation now to come into a problem like this and start looking at it and going, "Here is the damager. What can we do with it?"

So we started looking at it. We started seeing it was possible. The fire had done a funny thing. It hadn't really burned the roof up. You would think heat goes up and there would be a problem, but as our engineers looked around they found that the penetration into the wood was only maybe a 16th of an inch. Expressly it was still fine.

We still had a huge problem here on the north wall, but there was an old man in Fremont that had retired from building elevators and he took a look at that. He was a part of the Christian Missionary Alliance. He said, "I can pull that wall in.

So, you know, we proceeded. We still had two problems, though. Number one, we didn't have any money and number two we didn't have any authority to buy ground. So we started praying about it. We started talking to our district office and an individual from Omaha comes forward. We have no idea who this is. And he says, "I will give you guys \$10,000 free interest free loan and a matching grant. When you can raise the money I will match it for \$15,000."

So all of the sudden we have that problem to solve. We started the process of incorporating and becoming an incorporated body in the Christian Missionary Alliance so we could buy the ground. That step got started.

We offered what we considered a low figure and the owners countered within 4000 of our offer. So all of the sudden we had the ability to purchase the property, to get started on the cleanup and the renovation and in 1990 that all happened.

Steve Albright, our pastor, had come on a short term basis. His goal was to get back to the mission field and he was only planning on being here five years. And so he comes in 87 and 1990 just as we get started Steve thought we would be done cleaning this thing up in a year.

Scott Negley:

Yeah, we might point out that...when did we finalize the sale, Chuck?

Chuck Malm:

Yeah.

Scott Negley:

Well, it was in the early Spring of that year and Steve Albright, the optimist that was, ordered Bibles that he was going to hand out on Easter Sunday as we moved into the building. And needless to say we used those Bibles for something else because it has been quit a long trek before we moved in.

That was the thing about Steve. He was extremely optimistic. And when it became apparent that is building was going to become available he was like, “Yeah, we are going to do this.”

And we are all like, “What are you talking about?”

Because I think the asking price of the building at the time was, I don’t know, 75 or \$100,000, something to that effect and we know there was no way that we were going to be able to afford that. But, you know, for Steve this was no big deal. And maybe it’s because he grew up in the mission field in Africa. You know, I don’t know.

You know, so...I guess the thing that we all learned from that and its been a pervasive lesson throughout the church’s experience is that God puts people with unique characteristics together to accomplish his purpose. And you’ve got a pastor like Steve who is extremely optimistic. We have got an engineer like Chuck Bloom who is extremely pessimistic—and for good reason, because...what did I say?

Chuck Malm:

Chuck.

Scott Negley:

Chuck Bloom?

Chuck Malm:

Chuck Malm.

Scott Negley:

Chuck Malm. Kurt Bloom. Sorry. Kurt Bloom. Stand up, Kurt, so everybody knows you. Kurt used to go to church here. They have moved to Lincoln, but he was...this place

wouldn't be here without him. So...but you want a pessimist when you go to designing a building because he is going to look at every possible place in which it is going to fail and he is going to make sure it doesn't.

And so those are two of the extremes. You have got people like Chuck and I. You know, Chuck is...he flies by the seat of his pants. I do, too, sometimes. But not nearly as well as Chuck does. And he makes it work and, you know, Chuck can look at this building and he can see potential. I looked at the building and I said, "This is...this is never going to happen."

And so there was a balance there that God put, you know, and so that those that were in favor of doing it didn't go head long and make the kind of mistakes that might have been made because there were those that were holding them back and saying, "Ok, we need to think about this. We need to consider."

And I think that was the lesson that we learned early on and we have seen that throughout our entire church history is the fact that God has put the right people in the right place at the right time to accomplish his plan and his purpose.

Chuck Malm:

I think another thing we learned at that time was the importance of unity. I think we made a decision as a board that we wouldn't make a major decision unless everybody agreed with it. You know, if somebody was objecting we figured there was a reason why they were objecting and we would wait for that to solve itself or wait until everybody came on board. And that's been a blessing.

Scott Negley:

It has been a blessing. And you might think that that would be an undoing, but it is amazing how over the years we have learned to trust God that if there is somebody that is dissenting in the leadership that obviously there is a reason for that and we are able to take a look at that and as Chuck goes through the story there is a specific example of that that maybe we will come back to.

Chuck Malm:

Ok. So we are able to purchase the building. We sit down with our plans. The clean up was obvious, but then this was a bowling alley and apparently people weigh a lot more than bowling alleys and so we had to change the way the structure was made. We got the bottom, the basement cleaned out. And then we had to add six inches to all the two by twelves. And this, in particular for me was a very interesting time because Kurt, our engineer, said, "We need to add six inches to the bottom of our two by twelves." And he wanted the nails an inch apart. So we are on scaffolding. We have got an air gun and somebody is pushing the scaffolding while the other guy is going like that and it was...

There's lots of stories and fond memories like that of the work itself.

Well, we came up with a plan and we said we wanted to do this in three phases. We would do the basement first. Then we would do the front. And then finally this area we are in here.

And it was at that time that we, as a board, decided that we weren't going to borrow money and that makes it very interesting.

Scott Negley:

Yeah, that was probably the first decision that we really struggled with as leaders of the church and because a lot of us are businessmen and how do you do business? You borrow money and you invest it and you do the work and that returns. You get a return on your work and then you are able to pay your loan off.

And so, as is the case in a lot of...for a lot of churches, that just seemed like the natural thing to do is, you know, we will just...we'll go borrow the money and we will finish the building and then we will just trust God to supply to pay in the interest and the principle off on the note.

And I guess we looked at the Scriptures and we decided that that's not what God's plan ought to be, that if God wanted something done then God would supply for those needs. And so we decided, as a board—and it was a difficult decision. We discussed it at length and there were people on both sides of it, but we decided that if this was really what God wanted to accomplish then we were going to let God accomplish it his way. And he did it his way and we have been debt free and in this entire building project except for at the very beginning when we had that loan and we paid that off rather quickly.

Chuck Malm:

And then the lesson became: trust and obey and wait.

George Mueller a saint from England back at the turn of the century I think it was said, "God's work done God's way will never lack God's resources." That's a nice saying, but wait patiently like a farmer, that's a little bit tough.

The other thing we learned is that God is never late. But he is seldom early. He answers in his own time.

So we got started with phase one. That was 1990 when we bought it. And in November 1990 Steve and Laurie move on to the mission field. And Don and [?] come down in December of 1990, look at it and decide to lead our flock. And, you know, maybe Don remembers the advice... After he had taken the job and started pastoring our flock then he found out about the advice of: Never taken on a building project in the middle of it. And here he is a rookie pastor and we say, "Jump," Don says, "Jump yourself."

Scott Negley:

It's not quite that way, but...

Chuck Malm:

But Don was man to lead us and, you know, in spite of his youth he has done a very good job and stuck it out.

Phase one, downstairs was finished March 14th 1993. And we were so happy. We were rejoicing. We had done it. We were now able to use the building. And I don't remember if you remember the summer of 1993. Perhaps you remember the pictures on TV of the Mississippi River flooding and houses being swept away as the dikes broke and I think it was called a hundred year rain. Well, Wahoo also got to share in that. Wahoo's storm system breeched the sewer system and we came to church in June one day after a storm to find about a thousand gallons of sewage floating around on our nice new carpet and our new remodel.

Best way to describe it is: What a mess!

We started checking into how we were going to pay for it because all of a sudden we have got a huge bill. What are we going to do?

We had insurance. We filed with the insurance, but there was no evidence of a flood. The water had come down through the sewer valves or the floor drains. And at first the insurance company said, "Fine, ok, we'll cover it," until we got the estimates. And then that lady got fired and the supervisor took over and he basically said, "There is now way we are paying for that. Sue us."

Now as a church we have a little bit of a problem there.

Scott Negley:

We do have a problem. And some of us...and basically the agent told us the only way you are going to get any money is if you sue because the agent basically told us that we were covered when, in fact, we weren't covered. And so the only avenue was to sue.

Well, the company that we were insured with was a company that was based on biblical principles and some of us on the board said, "Ok, let's get a lawyer. Let's sue them."

But there was one person on the board that said, "No, we are not going to do that because that is wrong. It is unbiblical."

And we're going, "But how else are we going to pay for this? You know, we have a legal right here to sue them. It's not like..."

He said, “No. It’s not the thing that a church ought to do.”

So we said, “Ok. This must be God’s plan. This must be God’s purpose. I don’t like it necessarily, but, you know, we have agreed that if there is a person that is dissenting, then we step back and we look at it.”

And so, you know, we began to pray. We began, you know, began to reevaluate and say, “Ok. It’s...the insurance is not going to pay for this. And so how are we going to get it paid for?”

And, you know, once again it’s about God and it’s about what God is going to do and how God is going to meet our needs about insurance companies.

Chuck Malm:

We went from the insurance company, went to the City Wahoo and said, “You know, that was your sewer and your water that got in our building.”

But it’s got an ordinance that said it’s not responsible if you don’t have a one way valve in the sewer line. And we didn’t have a one way valve in our sewer line.

Scott Negley:

Yeah, they took it out some years earlier because the bowling alley got tired of calling the plumber to come and clean it out so he removed it.

Chuck Malm:

So, you know, once again here we are stuck with, you know, not a big problem and, you know, we really no way to pay for it other than legal action.

So what do you do? We went and... God had brought in our congregation a drywall specialist. He also owned a drywall company and what looked like a mess to him I think was normal work. Or what looked like a mess to us was normal work for him and he directed us right through the cleanup. He directed us through the changes of he walls and all that.

We got it cleaned up and then the same thing happened. So about a month later the same sewage is all of the sudden floating all over the basement, you know.

Basically...

Scott Negley:

I think it was different sewage, Chuck.

Chuck Malm:

Yeah, well, it looked the same.

Like I said, it's a good story.

You know, how do we proceed now?

It's obvious we cannot fix the building up until the one way valve is in. And so City of Wahoo does come in. They assist us. They help us spot it. They were right by our sides. I'm sure they felt just as bad as we did about what was happening. We got that part of the building secure.

During the summer, though, the Christian Missionary Alliance looked at the flooding and said, "There will be churches that will need funds." And so nationwide a fund was taken up for churches that were flooded.

There weren't any except for one. And so here we are sitting with \$26,000 in bills and they come alongside and say, "Well, here's the money."

Once again we prayed and we waited.

After we got that money we did talk to a lawyer. He did talk to the insurance company. We didn't press our legal right. But the insurance company, then, when it was all said and done, came back with an original offer and all of the sudden in the mail shows up another \$70,000, wasn't it?

So we didn't feel right keeping that money so we sent that to a struggling work in Colorado and shared our blessing there.

But, you know, through that all the lesson of waiting , of looking to the Lord...

Scott Negley:

Doing it God's way.

Chuck Malm:

Doing it God's way.

It was very frustrating, very easy to give up, very easy to throw your hands. And it was a tough time, but... praise the Lord.

Scott Negley:

And, once again, it was a time in which God had the right people at the right place at the right time. You know, and you can say, "Well, you know, why?" You know, it would have been just as...I mean everything would have been fine if we had just not had the flood, if God had just prevented the flood, right? But you have to look...You have got to look inside and you have got to realize that going through every one of those experiences changes who you are. It changes how you look at God. It changes how you look at one another. And, you know, when you are wading through sewage, you know, up to your ankles in the basement of your church it does something to you. Not only makes you smell, but it changes who you are and it changes your perspective on the people that are working side by side with you.

And so I think that every experience that we have gone through with this building was intended by God to unify us and to make us stronger and to keep us in a mentality or an attitude of perseverance.

Chuck Malm:

Phase one, then was completed, was fixed. Phase two, next, was the front office. That was completed in 1998. We didn't have the challenges of construction type failures. The money was there. We were able to hire outside work, but we lost some people through death. And that was...

Scott Negley:

That's one of those things that you just look back and... There are things that you just don't expect to happen. You are working side by side with individuals that you expect will always be there, will always share in what you are doing. And it's...it's difficult when you realize that those people had the same dream that you had and now their dream is fulfilled and we still have to sit here and deal with every day life. And we have to do it without them. And, you know, it leaves a hole. But we also have seen that where there is a hole, where God allows a hole to develop that God will fill the gap with someone else or he will retrain someone.

And so even though along the way we have seen people pass on, we have also learned that God is the strength through which we can continue even without them.

Chuck Malm:

Phase three is what we are presently sitting in and phase two was completed in 1998. We are now sitting in the completion of phase three.

It is amazing. We have never treated this building for smoke. So I look at that as being like the nation of Israel shoes not wearing out for their 40 year walk across the desert. God has provided. He has answered.

Our work is bigger than us. We will pass that on and there will be those who take our place, but as I conclude, you know, it is going to be our privilege to join that throng in Revelation six that is gathered around the throne and they get to testify and sing out to God the Lamb who is sitting on the throne. And I said Revelation six when I want Revelation four.

We get to join the living creatures giving glory and honor and thanks to him who sits on the throne, the 24 elders who bow down before him who sits on the throne, the groups of angels, the myriads upon myriads upon angels in the throngs that are there and declare, “You are worthy, oh Lord our God, to receive glory and honor and power for you have created all things and by your will they were created and have their being.”²

So that’s our testimony. This is the story that we pass on and the lessons that we have learned.

Scott Negley:

And, you know, we have talked a lot about the building. And one of the things that I have tried to stress with my children and tried to stress as I teach young people, you know: What is a church? This is not...this building is not a church. This building is a blessing that God has given us. It is a wonderful facility in which a church can meet. And it is the people that make up a church. It is a body of believers that God has called together for a purpose and he provides all of the necessary parts of the body. And that is the thing that God has proven to us through this project that he has called us to, which is the building or the remodeling of this building.

And I’d like to close with one verse from Philippians chapter one. And Paul is stating this about individuals, but I think it can apply to the church as well. He says, “For I am confident of this very thing, that He who began a good work in you will perfect it until the day of Christ.”³

So this isn’t the end. This is just the beginning of the work that I think you will see that this church is going to seek to accomplish. This is simply a phase and we thank God for his blessing and the lessons that he has taught us and we wouldn’t be the same church had he not taken us through those lessons.

² See Revelation 4:11

³ Philippians 1:6