

November 28, 2010 by Steve Brandon



Growing Up - In A Facility

Ephesians 3:14-21

- 1. Let's Be Spiritually-Minded (verses 14-19).**
- 2. Let's Ask God to Do Great Things (verse 20).**
- 3. Let's Give All Glory to God (verse 21).**

I want to begin my message this morning with a number. Then, I want for you to guess what the significance of the number is. The number is 456. Any guesses? 456 is the number of Sundays that we, as Rock Valley Bible Church, have gathered in this building to worship Jesus Christ and hear from His word. I am thankful to God for this place that we have been privileged to use since March 3rd, 2002. Every Sunday morning for almost 9 years, these doors have been open for us to use. What a gracious provision from the Lord! Never in that time have we lacked a place to worship.

Well, Lord willing, we will meet in this place only one more time--next Sunday morning. If all goes as planned, we will begin meeting in a new place on December 12th, 2010. We plan to begin using the building at 7721 North Alpine Road, in Loves Park. Not only will we change locations. But, for the first time in our short history, we will meet in a facility that we own. The days of renting are over. We will have a building free and clear; we will have no debt on the building. It will be the culmination of 10 years of saving and sacrificial giving.

By God's grace, this building we become a special place for many of you. The hours that you will spend there will be many. It will be a place where you will meet with God. You will worship Him there. You will hear from His word there. We will have fellowship in that building. We will have marriages in that building. We will have funerals in that building. We will have special gatherings in that building. It will become a special place for us. It will be a place filled with memories.

In many ways, the purchase of this building is an act of growing up as a church. Growing up is a process that we all are familiar with. Children, you know what it's like to grow up. Your body is getting bigger. You are getting stronger. You have more and more responsibilities. Parents, you know what it's like to grow up. Not only have you gone through the process yourself, but you have also seen your children grow up as well.

Inherent in the process of growing up are those times when we are stretched to do new things. We are stretched beyond what is comfortable for us. When you leave your child at school for the first time, there is some anxiety and discomfort. When your child learns to drive, there is some anxiety in the heart when she drives off by her own for the first time. When your child gets married, there is anxiety in the heart, as they will leave your household, never to return again. These things are just a part of growing up. They are a part of parenting our children as they grow. But, nobody would say that a child ought never to go to school, because of the anxieties of the parent (or the child). Nor would anybody say that a child ought not to learn to drive, or take on other responsibilities. Nor would anybody say that a child should never get married.

For us as a church, moving into a building is much the same. It is a part of growing up as a church. I know that there are some anxieties and apprehensions. But, such is the way of most every church in the United States. Only a few churches ever make it their aim never to own a building. In the vast majority of cases, those who don't own buildings do so because of financial limitations. If they had the means, they would purchase a building. And by God's grace, we have the means. What a reason to rejoice!

Whenever a group of people makes a transition like we are making, there is always a bit of apprehension in the whole deal. I mean, we have been in this place for almost 9 years! Rockford Christian High School is all that many of you have ever known as far as Rock Valley Bible Church goes. And now, some things are going to change. I know that there is some apprehension in your hearts. I've heard the way that some of you have talked about these things.

Such was the case with Israel when they were about to embark upon a new venture. Do you remember how they responded when they were about to take the land? The twelve spies went in to search out the land. Ten of them feared the people in the land. They said, "The people who live in the land are strong, and the cities are fortified and very large; and moreover we saw the descendants of Anak there" (Numbers 13:28). Upon hearing this report, the people were filled with fear. "All the congregation lifted up their voices and cried, and the people wept that night" (Numbers 14:1). Then, they "grumbled against Moses and Aaron." (Numbers 14:2). Even the pleadings of Joshua and Caleb, who believed the promises of God, were not enough to calm their fears.

Now, our situation isn't exactly like this. We aren't going into a country and conquering it. Nor have we heard the direct voice of God in these matters, who instructed us to take this building. However, this event does show the tendency of the human heart to doubt and fear when change is taking place. There may be doubts. There may be fears in your hearts as our ministry changes. Because, it's going to change. Until this point, we have a Sunday morning meeting place. Everything else needs to be done in homes. In some ways, this is very healthy for us. It helps to make our faith real, as the life of the church goes beyond the four walls of a building.

However, with the purchase of a building, we will have some changes. Some of them are obvious and on the front table. For instance, think about the days when the temple was built in Israel. For 500 years, they worshiped the Lord in the tabernacle in a tent. If you remember, the

Gershonites, the Kohathites and the Merarites were responsible for carrying the tabernacle as it moved from place to place. But, with a permanent temple, such duties were no longer needed. And the Scripture addresses this fact. In 1 Chronicles 23:26, we read, "The Levites will no longer need to carry the tabernacle and all its utensils for its service." So, their duties were reassigned. They were now to assist Aaron and the priests in their work.

There is almost a direct parallel for us this morning. The days of setup are almost gone. But, as they pass away, in comes the days of maintaining a building. We'll simply reallocate some of our resources.

Now, the changes that come with moving into a building aren't all as simple as that. There are some difficulties that come with it as well, which are hard to define fully. For instance, think of the second temple. When the Babylonians came and conquered Judah, they destroyed the first temple. Seventy years later, it was rebuilt. And with the rebuilding of the temple came difficulties.

We read in Ezra 3:12, "The old men who had seen the first temple, wept with a loud voice when the foundation of this house was laid before their eyes." The reason is explained in the prophet Haggai, who said, ...

Haggai 2:3-4

"Who is left among you who saw this temple in its former glory?

And how do you see it now?

Does it not seem to you like nothing in comparison?

... But now take courage, Zerubbabel, ...

... Take courage also, Joshua son of Jehozadak, the high priest,

... and all you people of the land, take courage and work; for I am with you," declares the LORD of hosts.

The temptation that they dealt with was that the second temple would be so small in comparison with the first temple. They had images in their mind of the past glory. They saw that the glory of the second temple wasn't even going to be close. It led some to weep in disappointment. Now, I know that some of you believe that the building we are purchasing is too small for us. You may be like the old men who are weeping. If this is you, I say, "take courage, for the Lord of hosts is with us."

I listened to a message this week of a pastor who was leading his congregation into a new facility. Of the building, he said, "It is a place that will have a much greater visibility than we have ever had before. It is a place that is going to speak of greater permanence and greater stability and greater maturity as a church. It is a place that is going to increase our effectiveness in our mission as a church." [\[1\]](#) And I couldn't agree more. Our own facility is going to give us a greater visibility in the community. For once, we will have a permanent sign, which says, "Rock Valley Bible Church meets here." We have never had anything like this before. It will give our church a visibility throughout the week.

I can't tell you how many times that I have had this conversation. "So, you are a pastor of a church, huh? Where's your building." I reply, "We don't own a building. Rather, we meet at Rockford Christian High School." And then often proceeds with a discussion about the nature of our church. I have an office in my home. We gather midweek in homes. It all speaks of immaturity. I anticipate things being different when I can say, "Our building is on Alpine, north of Riverside, a few blocks south of Harlem. Do you know where it is? It rests on several acres of land and is a great building. Come and join us." Such a statement communicates permanence and stability and maturity, which may lead others to join us.

Furthermore, a building will give us a greater sense of identity. It will place us in the city with a scope of ministry surrounding us. It will give us a presence in the city. It will give us something to use in the service of our city. I want for you to think of the building as a tool to accomplish our mission as a church, "to enjoy His grace and to extend His glory."

Now, as we transition to a new place, there are some particular temptations for us that I want to address this morning in my message, as we are growing up as a church. And I want to address them from a text of Scripture. So, open your Bibles to Ephesians, chapter 3. We will use Paul's prayer in verses 14-21 to launch my thoughts this morning. Like last week, I'm not going to be doing a strict exposition of this text. Rather, I'm going to use it to guide and direct our thoughts this morning, especially as it relates to our purchase of a building. I do believe that there are good words for us in this passage of Scripture. The title of my message this morning is simply, "Growing up – In Our Facility"

Ephesians 3:14-21.

For this reason I bow my knees before the Father, from whom every family in heaven and on earth derives its name, that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man, so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith; and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God. Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.

By way of outline, I want to give three exhortations. My first is this, ...

1. Let's Be Spiritually-Minded (verses 14-19)

Our first temptation is to set our focus upon the building. Now we have a building! Look at this thing. Isn't it great? Oh, that needs to be fixed. Oh, I don't like that. This is our temptation.

I'm calling you this morning to think beyond the building. See the building as a means to an end, not the end itself. If we set our minds on the things above, I know that our transition into this building will be smooth. But, if our minds are upon earthly things, there will be conflicts and

disappointments all along the way. So, the way to protect against this is to be "spiritually-minded."

This is essentially Paul's point in verses 14-19. In these verses, Paul is praying for the believers in Ephesus. His prayer is an earnest prayer. You can see it there in verse 14 that he is on his knees praying. The core of his prayer comes in verse 16, ...

Ephesians 3:16

that He would grant you, according to the riches of His glory, to be strengthened with power through His Spirit in the inner man,

It's a prayer for power and strength. But, notice that it's not a prayer for external strength. Rather, it's a prayer for inner strength. It's a prayer for spiritual strength. That's my point this morning. As we move into this building, it's my heart that we would have spiritual strength. Or, to say it another way - that we would be "Spiritually-Minded."

I bring this up because this is our temptation as a church, right now. For years we have had the privilege of not owning a building. This has come with a blessing. The focus of our body hasn't been on the building in which we meet. Rather, the focus of our attention has been upon God and upon the people of the church. We have had no choice. Well, now, with a building, we have a choice. Will our thoughts gravitate to the church building and all of the ways that we want to see it used? Or, will our thoughts gravitate to the Lord and to the people of the church?

And in recent weeks, as we have thought about purchasing this building, I know that many of you have been thinking a lot about this building. I know this because recommendations have been made about what needs to be fixed. I have heard things like this: "The platform is too high; it needs to be fixed. The carpet needs replacing. The walls need help. The roof needs repair. There's no handicapped accessibility for the downstairs portion of the building. There's no sound-booth in the auditorium; we need to build something." Concerns have been raised about maintenance costs. Concerns have been raised about repair costs.

Now, I appreciate all of these concerns that have been raised. I really do. Is the building perfect? No. Are there things that we will plan to modify and update? Yes. Should these things distract us from Christ and the glories of the gospel? No. Can these things distract us from Christ? Yes, they can.

This is where Paul's prayer helps us so much. It is a prayer for spiritual strength. It is a prayer for spiritual power. And at this time in the life of our church, this is our greatest need. May this building not distract us from seeking spiritual strength. May we enter the building as people focused upon the Lord, and not on all of the issues surrounding the building. May Jesus Christ be our focus.

May the building be a tool to accomplish our mission as a church: to enjoy His grace, and to extend His glory.

In verse 17, we see the purpose of Paul's prayer. He prays for spiritual strength, "so that Christ may dwell in your hearts through faith;". At first glance, this prayer sounds a bit strange. Doesn't Christ through the Holy Spirit dwell in us the moment we believe in Him? Yes, He does. Jesus said, "The Spirit of truth, ... abides with you and will be in you" (John 14:17).

So, what is Paul praying for? He's praying for Christ to fully dwell in us. D. A. Carson says this, ...

"It helps to recognize that the verb here rendered 'to dwell' is a strong one.

Paul's hope is that Christ will truly take up his residence in the hearts of believers, as they trust him, ... so as to make their hearts his home."

He then gives this analogy, ...

"Picture a couple carefully marshalling enough resources to put together a down-payment. They buy their house, recognizing full well that it needs a fair bit of work. They can't stand the black and silver wallpaper in the master bedroom. There are mounds of trash in the basement. The kitchen was designed for the convenience of the plumber, not the cook. The roof leaks in a couple of places, and the insulation barely meets minimum standards. The electrical box is too small, the lighting in the bathroom is poor, and the heat exchanger in the furnace is corroded. But still, it is this young couple's first home, and they are grateful.

The months slip past, then the years. The black and silver wallpaper has been replaced with tasteful pastel patterns. The couple has remodeled their kitchen, doing much of the work themselves. The roof no longer leaks, and the furnace has been replaced with a mower powerful unit that also includes a central air conditioner. Better yet, as the family grows, this couple completes a couple of extra rooms in the basement and adds a small wing to serve as a study and sewing room. The grounds are neatly trimmed and boast a dazzling rock garden. Twenty-five years after the purchase, the husband one day remarks to his wife, 'You know, I really like it here. This place suits us. Everywhere we look we see the results of our own labor. This house has been shaped to our needs and taste, and I really feel comfortable.'"

And then, D. A. Carson comments, ...

"When Christ by his Spirit takes up residence within us, he finds the moral equivalent of mounds of trash, black and silver wallpaper, and a leaking roof. He sets about turning this residence into a place appropriate for him, a home in which he is comfortable. There will be a lot of cleaning to do, quite a few repairs, and some much-needed expansion. But his aim is

clear: he wants to take up residence in our hearts, as we exercise faith in him" [\[2\]](#)

In other words, Paul prays for us to walking in the Spirit, not carrying out the desires of the flesh (Gal. 5:16). And this is my exhortation to you - to be spiritually-minded. Through this transition in our ministry, this is so important. Paul's prayer continues in verses 17, 18 and 19.

Ephesians 3:17-19

... and that you, being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth and length and height and depth, and to know the love of Christ which surpasses knowledge, that you may be filled up to all the fullness of God.

Paul's desire is for our lives to be rooted in the love of Christ; grounded in His love (verse 17); pursuing a knowledge of His love (verse 19). This is a call to reflect upon the love of Christ as shown in the gospel - that He loved us while we were yet sinners (Rom. 5:8), that He loved us enough to die for us (1 Peter 3:18). His love is from everlasting to everlasting (Jeremiah 31:3). Nothing can separate us from the love of Christ: not death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing (Romans 8:28-29). He who did not spare His own Son, but delivered Him over for us all, how will He not also with Him freely give us all things?" (Rom. 8:32). Such is only the surface of the love of Christ.

But, my point this morning isn't so much to dig deep into these words. I'll leave that for another day. My point this morning is that Paul is calling us to a spiritual-mindedness, one that is aware of the incredible love of Christ, one that is secure in the love of Christ, one that is pursuing the love of Christ. Because, I believe that if such is our mindset, then there will be little trouble in our building.

I know that one of the things that has concerned me regarding this building is the many opinions about what should be done to the building, and when these things should be done. I have heard so many opinions as to what's broken and what needs to be fixed that there is no way to satisfy everybody in these things. Everybody has a different idea in their mind of how it will play out. If our minds are upon the earthly things, then we may well have some difficult days ahead of us. When your preference won't be satisfied, you may well be disappointed. Satan can use such a disappointment to divide us. And this building, which has a great opportunity to unite us, may actually become a reason for division.

To this end, Darryn, Phil, and I have delegated the responsibility of the building to three men who are qualified to make the decisions regarding any changes that we make to the building and to the property. Lance, Ray, and Dirk will be the ones to decide what is to be done, when it is done, and how it is to be done. They will take your feedback. They will take your advice. They will take your input. But, beyond that, they will take the urgency into account. Furthermore, they will take our financial status into account. And, they will decide what to do and when to do it.

They will decide what grade of carpet to purchase. They will decide when to repair the roof. They will decide when and how to make the basement handicapped accessible. And when applicable, they will seek your help on matters. There will be opportunities to serve alongside these men. And I ask you to support them in their decisions. I'm going to support them. I can't think of any better team. They are spiritually-minded men who are capable of making wise decisions.

I have intentionally not placed myself in control of the matters of the building. It has to do with my role as pastor. My role is to devote myself to prayer and the ministry of the word (Acts 6:4). I can't tell you how encouraged I am that when the final contract on the building was accepted and signed, I was half-way around the world and without email communication didn't find out until a week later what happened.

For instance, we had a meeting this past Tuesday evening with Darryn, Phil, and Ray. We were talking about when we should have our first service in the building. My preference was to wait until some basic cosmetic repairs were done on the building, so that it would feel nice from the first meeting. The preference of the other men was to get into the building as soon as we can. If that's what other leaders of this church prefer, it's fine with me. So, I bent. We'll plan to have our first service on December 12th.

So, Let's Be Spiritually-Minded (verses 14-19). My second point comes from verse 20, ...

2. Let's Ask God to Do Great Things (verse 20)

Look at verse 20, ...

Ephesians 3:20

Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us."

This is an amazing verse. It describes the amazing power of God. Not only can God do what we ask for. Not only can God do what we dream for. Not only can God do more than we ask for. Not only can God do more than what we dream for. But, God can do "far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think."

On the one hand, this verse is an expression of the omnipotence of God. God can do anything. He spoke the world into existence (Genesis 1). Psalm 115:3 says, "Our God is in the heavens; He does whatever He pleases." Jeremiah 32:17 proclaims, "Nothing is too difficult for You." But, this verse isn't merely a statement of God's omnipotence. It's in the context of prayer. It's in the context of us seeking His blessing upon our lives. It's in the context of God extending His favor to His people who ask. And this verse says that God is able to give generously to those who ask Him.

And so, Let's Ask God to Do Great Things (verse 20) with this building. This building is a tool that we have never had before as a church to use. I'm praying that God will use this building to accomplish great things for Himself.

I'm praying that God will use the place for us to enjoy His grace.

I'm praying that God will use the place for us to extend His glory.

I'm praying that this building would draw us closer to God.

I'm praying that this building will give us a greater unity than we have ever enjoyed before.

I'm praying that we would enjoy some further services in the building: Christmas Eve, Good Friday.

I'm praying for a Bible conference each year that is well attended.

I'm praying that the building would be used much throughout the week.

I'm praying that this building would be used to bring people to Christ.

I'm praying that this building would give us all a fresh desire to invite others to come to our new church building for a service with a new beginning.

I'm praying for more people to come to church.

I'm praying for those who visit the church to experience the facilities and to stay at the church.

I'm praying for the neighborhood surrounding the building, as we will have opportunity to distribute information about the church.

I'm praying for a Vacation Bible School in the summer.

I'm praying for an Easter outreach to the community.

I'm praying for God to bring some unique opportunities our way that we haven't even thought of.

I'm praying that we will look back five years from now and reflect upon what a great blessing the church has been to us and what a good move it was for us to purchase this building.

These are things that I'm asking for, as I believe that they are in accordance with God's will.

I can see God doing every single one of these things. And there are many other things regarding this building that I can think of.

I can think of revival breaking out.

I can think of a packed auditorium, so that we are forced to go to three services.

I can think of planting another church with all the people coming.

I can think of building an addition onto the building, a gymnasium which is used to reach out to the community.

I can think of several more pastors being added to the staff of Rock Valley Bible Church.

I can think of several full-time missionaries being sent out by Rock Valley Bible Church, fully supported.

I can think of a Biblical training center with classes at night to equip the saints.

I can think of a Seminary that meets at the building.

I can think of an afterschool tutoring program for children in the neighborhood.

I can think of sports camps for kids happening on the lawn during the summer.

I can think of a coffee house environment on Friday nights.

I can think of concerts in the auditorium.

I can think of a Christian book store in our facilities.

I can think of a Christian radio station in our facilities.

I can think of a Day Care center for single moms in the neighborhood.

I can think of free dinners being served on Thanksgiving and Easter.

And you know what? God can do all of these things, and more. God can do "far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think" (verse 20).

Are you asking God to do great things through this building? May the accusation never come against us, "You do not have because you do not ask" (James 4:3).

Let's now get to my last point this morning, ...

3. Let's Give All Glory to God (verse 21)

This point comes from verse 21, ...

Ephesians 3:21

to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen

I love how Paul writes of God's glory being "in the church." This is not "in the church building." This is in the church. This is in the people of the church.

May we be those who give all glory and thanks to God for what He has done in our midst. With a new building will come a tendency to pride. Oh, look at what we have done! Oh, look at what we have accomplished! Oh, look at our building that we have purchased by our own means. Such an attitude will actually take away glory from God.

And for those of you who think that the building is too small: what a wonderful thing it will be when God fills the place. And for those of you who think that the building isn't in the best location: what a wonderful thing it will be when God still brings people to the church. And for those of you who think that the building isn't nice enough: what a wonderful thing it will be when God brings people to the church despite the building. In these ways, God will be greatly glorified, because it wasn't our nice building in a nice neighborhood that drew people. It was God, who accomplished His work among us. He will get the glory, because we know that it wasn't from us.

I'll give you a first hand testimony. When we planted Kishwaukee Bible Church in DeKalb, Illinois, we carried on for only two years, until we purchased a building. The building we purchased was small. We purchased it for the price of an averaged size house. The building we

purchased was old. Like 80 years old. It didn't smell really nice. It had a leak that flooded the basement on several occasions. And you know what? God used that building to bring many people. And he brought them, not because of the building. At one point, the church was packed out at 200. We had people standing in the back. We had people seated in every nook and cranny of the room, which was smaller than what we are looking to purchase. And those were great days, because God was glorified. There were so many people, that we took some of them and started Rock Valley Bible Church.

May the Lord do the same with us at Rock Valley Bible Church.

This sermon was delivered to Rock Valley Bible Church on November 28, 2010 by Steve Brandon.
For more information see www.rvbc.cc.

[1] Mike Bullmore, in a message preached June 4, 2006

[2] A Call To Spiritual Reformation, pp. 186-187.