

THE HOUSE OF EVERLASTING

**ONE QUESTION, TWO HOUSES, AND THREE
ANSWERS**

ONE QUESTION

What will happen when you no longer meet with your church community?

This is not a question of *if*, but *when*. Perhaps the Lord eventually beckons you to another Christian community, a situation requires you to move elsewhere, or your time comes to leave this body and meet Christ face to glorious face. Whatever the circumstance, *someday* you will no longer be present.

In the case of the apostle Paul, the fact that he would eventually depart from the church community he temporarily called “home” was constantly on his mind. He wrote often in his epistles about his desire to be with the churches of other cities¹. We find a touching example of this as the brother left from Ephesus to Jerusalem:

¹ 1 Thessalonians 2:17-18; Romans 1:8-15

When he had said these things, he knelt down and prayed with them all. And they began to weep aloud and embraced Paul, and repeatedly kissed him, grieving especially over the word which he had spoken, that they would not see his face again.

ACTS 20:36-38

The point of asking what will happen when you no longer meet with your church community is not simply to remind you in a gruff, pessimistic old-timer's voice, "Yup, you'll be gone *someday*, and you better think about what'll happen afterwards." Nor is it intended to focus you simply on one aspect or particular meeting of your church. The inquiry is intended to provoke thought and allow for spiritual revelation about what is being built within your church community *today*.

As such, this question can—and should—be considered within all your Christian communities, whether that is among friends who meet together regularly for encouragement, men and women's bible studies, small groups, Sunday morning classes, youth groups, or whole local churches.

In your answer, you shall discover a vital sign in the health of your community. Of course, you ask the question not so that you might become the answer-bearer within your community, but so

that you might humbly seek how the Giver of answers will lead you and your community to press on and press in with Jesus.

Just as importantly as church health, your answer will help you uncover your unique contribution to that health. Again, you ask not so that you might become the “leader” who orders other believers to contribute according to your own demands. No, you ask so that God will graciously increase your own opportunity—and vision—for building His house together with all the saints.

But before you continue, do this: pray. Earnestly ask that the Holy Spirit lead you to an honest and wise response. To answer this seemingly simple, yet eternally important question, each one of us needs humility, spiritual discernment, and a desire to seek (not just speak) the truth for the right reason—love. Christ’s love for His bride is so very vast, and there are a great many of His riches to be discovered in the saints². Yes, astounding riches await finding in the very Christian community you call your own. By His grace, this question might very well begin you on the journey to finding more of them.

May He have His way in us all.

² Ephesians 1:18; Colossians 1:12

TWO HOUSES

Many analogies are used for the church throughout scripture. All of them serve to reveal the unsearchable riches God has hidden for us to discover in Christ and in His saints. Body. Bride. Building. City. Family. Field. Flock. House. Nation. Priesthood. Temple.

Together, these simple words paint beautiful, yet complex pictures of God's eternal purpose³ for us, both individually and corporately. Each one rich and layered and worth investigating individually, these portraits illustrate for us eternal realities in earthly language. God has given us "a copy and shadow of the heavenly things⁴" to reveal the higher realities we have been invited to find in—and only in—Christ Jesus.

But there is one picture we might examine more closely when considering the inevitability of our departure from a church community. The house.

³ Ephesians 3:8-12 speaks of God's "eternal purpose," which "might now be made known through the church...." For further reading on the eternal purpose of God, read Frank Viola's book, *From Eternity to Here*.

⁴ Hebrews 8:5

When we hear the word “house,” any number of thoughts or images might come to mind. So let’s narrow in: what *kind* of house does scripture refer to being built, exactly? Are we talking about a humble family home, a house of pancakes, one of those luxury mansions people covet on *MTV Cribs*, or something more akin to the Palace of Versailles? At first blush, it sounds like a house of mystery.

Before exploring the house God is building, let us first acknowledge what kind of house He is *not* building.

A HOUSE OF CARDS

From the time children are young, one of the first things they tend to draw are likenesses of themselves and their homes. With glee, children are heard regularly exclaiming with their siblings and friends, “Let’s play house!” Sometimes they use Lincoln Logs, building blocks, Popsicle sticks, and construction paper to artistically render their childish versions of houses, complete with rainbow-filled skies and the fluffiest of clouds. Just for fun, some people will even take decks of 52 cards to carefully stack, lean, and build their spade, heart, club, and diamond houses.

The Dictionary describes a house of cards as “a structure or plan that is insubstantial and subject to imminent collapse.” Yet

another definition offers that this type of house is “an insubstantial or insecure situation or scheme.” However one describes it, there is no denying that this type of house is a precarious balancing act, whether children, adults, or even expert architects construct it. The slightest disruption to a card or a single wrong move could bring down the entire house. In this regard, a Lego house built by toddlers is more stable and lasting than a house of cards.

In the same way that every believer will imminently depart their church community, a house of cards will imminently collapse. Jesus used the parable of two houses in His own teaching, saying:

*“Why do you call Me, ‘Lord, Lord,’ and do not do what I say?
... The one who has heard and has not acted accordingly, is like
a man who built a house on the ground without any foundation;
and the torrent burst against it and immediately it collapsed,
and the ruin of that house was great.”*

LUKE 6:46, 49

A house of cards is very much like a house built upon sand—weak, in danger, and temporary. It is a house built with no firm foundation to gird it. However, even when built upon a strong and lasting foundation, its materials are too weak to stand the test of

time. Paul wrote the Corinthians about this very kind of house, wherein the foundation is Christ⁵, but the work is temporary:

Now if any man builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, each man's work will become evident; for the day will show it because it is to be revealed with fire, and the fire itself will test the quality of each man's work. If any man's work which he has built on it remains, he will receive a reward. If any man's work is burned up, he will suffer loss; but he himself will be saved, yet so as through fire.

1 CORINTHIANS 3:12-15

See, a house of cards is nothing more than a house of wood, hay, and straw. In fact, these flimsy, forgettable, flammable houses are rising up everywhere. But God is not the builder of such houses. As Hebrews reads, “Every house is built by someone⁶,” and it is easy to acknowledge—the builder of every house of cards is man. As the Psalmist writes:

Unless the Lord builds the house, they labor in vain who build it.

PSALM 127:1

⁵ 1 Corinthians 3:11

⁶ Hebrews 3:4

Vanity, indeed.

But take hope! A house of cards is not the only house in development. A new house is being built and it is a glorious sight, revealed by the Spirit of God unto those who call upon the name of Jesus and love His bride. Praise our Father in heaven, for:

The Most High does not dwell in houses made by human hands.

ACTS 7:48

THE HOUSE OF EVERLASTING

In as few words as possible: the house of God is precious. Of course, words are inadequate to describe the full blessing, honor, glory, and power of His house. While every house of cards will one day fall, God's house is on the constant rise, built to last forever. While some cities and castles and palaces have stood for centuries, God's workmanship is and will be the one, only, and true house of everlasting.

Behold, the holy house of everlasting, established upon the Foundation of everlasting, being built by the God of everlasting, revealed by the Spirit of everlasting! Hallelujah!

Can you see it?

In His wisdom, His is not a house one can see with natural eyes or desire alone. We require the revelation of His Spirit to learn its makings and an experience of the church to understand it more fully. But for such revelation to come as more than just a shadow, we must first review His blueprints.

But, where are these blueprints? What was, is, and forevermore will be God's vision for His house?

Let us look to someone who already received such revelation⁷. Peter, "the rock upon which" Christ Jesus Himself prophesied He "would build His church," offers us a heavenly glimpse at God's plans:

You also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.

1 PETER 2:5

THE HOUSE IS US

First, the obvious: Peter begins with "You..." Or, in other words, God is not building a religious system or a comfy place to kick up His feet and watch the 24/7 entertainment of His creation.

⁷ Matthew 16:17

Such buildings are paper thin. He is building *us*. *We* are His house, His building project, His workmanship⁸.

This is not just a theological idea or a metaphor to be repeated glibly. It is a spiritual reality to be experienced and expressed. As Paul reminded the saints in Corinth:

*Do you not know that you are a temple of God and that the Spirit of God dwells in you?*⁹

1 CORINTHIANS 3:16

May we enter into expressing the reality that *we* are His house. It is not a natural building. It is not a natural organization. It is a people, and we are that people. We are the house where “there is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither slave nor free man, there is neither male nor female; for [we] are all one in Christ Jesus⁹.” Praise God!

IT IS BEING BUILT NOW

Peter also writes that we “*are* being built up...” Put in terms of grammatical tense, His house is being built up *presently*. We are not a future project God hopes to start someday down the line. Nor are we a past building project that has been completed, sitting

⁸ Ephesians 2:10

⁹ Galatians 3:28

around collecting dust. His house is under construction today. As you read these very words, work is being done to build His church in all her glory.

While this may seem like a very simple principle, we often fail to recognize the work that is happening before, around, through, and inside of us by His great might. Let us not fail to behold—and participate in—the work being done today.

JESUS IS THE FOUNDATION

Critical to the strength of any house, but especially the house of everlasting, is its foundation. In the architecture of God’s house, His Son is ground zero:

According to the grace of God which was given to me, like a wise [first] builder¹⁰ I laid a foundation, and another is building on it. But each man must be careful how he builds on it. For no man can lay a foundation other than the one which is laid, which is Jesus Christ.

1 CORINTHIANS 3:10-11

¹⁰ The word normally translated here as “master builder” is derived from the Greek word, *architektōn*. The etymology of this word is in fact “first” (*archē*) and “builder” (*tektōn*). Therefore, it is more accurate here to say “first builder” than “master builder,” as it is a matter of order, not prominence. Paul himself writes just prior to this in 1 Corinthians 3:5-9, “What is Paul?” The answer: A “fellow worker” who “planted ... as the Lord gave opportunity.”

When viewing the blueprints for God's house, Christ's fingerprints are all over them, from beginning to end, from floor to heavenly ceiling. In this wise architecture, we find an *unshakable* house.

Everyone who comes to Me and hears My words and acts on them, I will show you whom he is like: he is like a man building a house, who dug deep and laid a foundation on the rock; and when a flood occurred, the torrent burst against that house and could not shake it, because it had been well built.

LUKE 6:46-47

Let us find and build upon the everlasting and unshakable Foundation, Christ Jesus our Lord.

IT IS MADE OF LIVING STONES

While the Rolling Stones may have over 40 years of rockin' under their belts, they don't carry a candle to us living stones and our Rock of Ages.

Peter's very name in Greek, *Petra*, means "rock," and it was this name that Jesus declared over the disciple formerly known as Simon Barjona after sharing his revelation from the Father: "You

are the Christ, the Son of the living God¹¹.” One might say that, after Christ becoming our very “precious corner stone¹²”, Peter was the very first stone.

Stones are unique. Every rock carries its own shape, color, and size in the same way that God has allotted grace to every believer in their own unique personality, gifting, and experience. He does not strip away our uniqueness and build us like a tract home, every brick similar to the next and bland to the sight. Instead, He cherishes the uniqueness of each stone, perfecting us and fitting us together. He chooses to use gold and silver and stones He declares precious. His house is precious because His stones are precious.

Stones also have weight. They are not flimsy like cards, nor flammable like wood, hay, or straw. With such sturdiness and the rough edges common to stones, they can withstand storms and difficulty. These are no pebbles.

Unlike the result of removing an ace from its house of cards, with each stone’s uniqueness and weight, a single stone removed from a well-built house established upon a sound foundation will never fall or falter. True, a hole may then await filling, but the wall will not begin falling. And so it is with the house of God.

¹¹ Matthew 16:16

¹² 1 Peter 2:4-8

IT IS HELD TOGETHER BY LOVE

The living stones of the Lord are not just thrown carelessly upon the house and made to sit there, unbound to the other stones. As Paul admonished the Corinthians, “each man must be careful how he builds....¹³” Throwing stones together in a haphazard pile is not the house made everlasting.

Instead, the house of God is being joined together. In the reality of God’s body, scripture says that we are “fitted and held together by what every joint supplies¹⁴” when “holding fast to the head¹⁵” of Christ Jesus. Not by what one person supplies, not by what tradition supplies, nor even by what Christ alone supplies (though please hear: He *is* our supply)—the house of God is held together by what *every* unique and precious member supplies, and that includes you.

Paul prayed that the Colossians would be “knit together in love¹⁶.” This “knit together” phrase is the same Greek word (*symbibazō*) that Paul uses when discussing the body of Christ

¹³ 1 Corinthians 3:10

¹⁴ Ephesians 4:16

¹⁵ Colossians 2:19

¹⁶ Colossians 2:2

being “held together.” Later in this epistle, Paul exhorts the church to “love, which is the perfect bond of unity¹⁷.”

God’s house is not a piecemealed house of materials that remain loose and unbound, but a house of one, held together by the very compound of love. As it reads in Ephesians, “There is one body and one Spirit, just as also you were called in one hope of your calling; one Lord, one faith, one baptism, one God and Father of all who is over all and through all and in all¹⁸.”

Without love, we will not look like one. There is to be but one irrefutable marker of God’s children:

“By this all men will know that you are My disciples, if you have love for one another.”

JOHN 13:35

This was our Lord’s very own intercessory prayer for His family:

The glory which You have given Me I have given to them, that they may be one, just as We are one; I in them and You in Me, that they may be perfected in unity, so that the world may

¹⁷ Colossians 3:14

¹⁸ Ephesians 4:4-6

know that You sent Me, and loved them, even as You have loved Me.

JOHN 17:22-23

It is important to note, though, that, for us to look like one house and be found by the world “held together” by love, we must first be “joined together.” The idea of “joining” or “fitting together” in Greek finds its etymology in three words:

- *Syn*, which means “with.”
- *Harmos*, which means “joint.”
- *Legō*, which means “say” or “speak.”

Very simply, the house cannot be built together unless we are *with* one another. This means time face-to-face and heart-to-heart. Togetherness is required for the house to be built.

In regards to the latter aspect of this word’s etymology, we find another interesting and critical aspect of God’s house.

IT IS BUILT BY SPEAKING

“I will destroy this temple made with hands, and in three days I will build another made without hands.”

MARK 14:58

There has never been a natural house that has been built entirely without hands. Yet Christ declared that the house God was to construct would not be built with hands.

There are two Greek words used often in the New Testament to relay the concept of “building up”: *oikodomē* and *oikodomēo*. These words are often translated as “Edify” or “Edification.” Unsurprisingly, scripture has much to say about building up one another:

And now I commend you to God and to the word of His grace, which is able to build you up and to give you the inheritance among all those who are sanctified.

ACTS 20:32

Let us pursue what makes for peace and the building up of one another.

ROMANS 14:19

Let each of us please his neighbor for his good, to build him up.

ROMANS 15:2

The one who prophesies speaks to people for building up and exhortation and consolation.

1 CORINTHIANS 14:3

Let all things be done [in the church] for building up.

1 CORINTHIANS 14:26

He gave some as apostles, and some as prophets, and some as evangelists, and some as [shepherds] and teachers, for the equipping of the saints for the work of service, to the building up of the body of Christ.

EPHESIANS 4:11-12

Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for building up, according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear.

EPHESIANS 4:29

Knowledge puffs up, but love builds up.

1 CORINTHIANS 8:1

All things are lawful, but not all things are profitable. All things are lawful, but not all things build up.

1 CORINTHIANS 10:23

Seek to abound for the building up of the church.

1 CORINTHIANS 14:12

Therefore encourage one another and build up one another....

1 THESSALONIANS 5:13

As clearly illustrated by these passages, our words are inextricably tied to the building of God’s house because, as we have already established, we are building up *one another*, not a physical house. As mentioned earlier, the word “speak” in the Greek is a word we might find familiar from our earlier years: *legō*. Let us always remember that our words are critical building blocks to God’s house, eternal phrases and sentences and conversations that strengthen us and bind us together as living stones.

When we speak words of the Lord to one another and what it is He is revealing to us through His Spirit, we are building. When we share the portions of Christ we see in others, we are building. When we seek to encourage others during despairing times, we are building. When we speak of our love with one another, we are building. Enough cannot be said about the power of our words to build up the house of God.

James writes passionately about the power of our words:

The tongue is a small part of the body, and yet it boasts of great things. See how great a forest is set aflame by such a small fire! ... With [the tongue] we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse men, who have been made in the likeness of God; from the same mouth come both blessing and cursing.

JAMES 3;5-6, 9-10

For the sake of illustration, let us invert this verse in the positive:

The tongue is a small part of the body, and yet it boasts of great things. See how great a house is built by such a small member! ... With [the tongue] we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we build up men, who have been made in the likeness of God; from the same mouth come both blessing and building.

O Lord, may our words build up and not tear down! May from our tongues flow rivers of life¹⁹ and not fires of destruction. May we speak boldly the words You speak to us and through us. May we “seek to abound for the building up of the church²⁰.” Amen.

IT IS A SPIRITUAL HOUSE OF SPIRITUAL SACRIFICES

While we have already learned that God’s house is not natural, we must also see that it is more than just spiritual—it is holy. In His holy house, He has made us all priests. With fervor, let us rejoice: *We are His holy priests!*

¹⁹ John 7:38

²⁰ 1 Corinthians 14:12

Like the early Jewish priests, we too have a job, and that job is to offer up sacrifices pleasing to God. To repeat what Peter writes: “You also, as living stones, are being built up as a spiritual house for a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual *sacrifices* acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.”

But what do these sacrifices look like? These are not natural sacrifices modeled after the old covenant law. No, Christ has been sacrificed once and for all²¹! God no longer requires blood and flesh; He now desires we “offer up *spiritual* sacrifices....”

The scribe said to Him, “Right, Teacher; You have truly stated that He is One, and there is no one else besides Him; and to love Him with all the heart and with all the understanding and with all the strength, and to love one’s neighbor as himself, is much more than all burnt offerings and sacrifices.”

MARK 12:32-34

Through Him then, let us continually offer up a sacrifice of praise to God, that is, the fruit of lips that give thanks to His name. And do not neglect doing good and sharing, for with such sacrifices God is pleased.

HEBREWS 13:15-16

²¹ Hebrews 10:12

In plain terms, the spiritual sacrifices of God’s house are:

- Loving God with our all, demonstrated in our praise; and
- Loving others more than ourselves, demonstrated in our compassion and sharing with one another.

We find here the great commandments. It is in this love, flowing from the Love that indwells us, that we offer up sacrifices good and acceptable in the sight of God. And it is in this same love that the Lord’s house continues to be built, for as Paul writes: “Knowledge puffs up, but love *builds up*²².”

WE ARE INVITED TO BUILD

Most exciting of all, much like any general contractor overseeing the construction of a house, God has enlisted us as workers in His great and eternal purpose²³. Paul Himself writes, “Now if any man builds on the foundation ... each man’s work will become evident....” In response, we can choose to:

- Look on as others do the building;
- Build according to our own earthly plans; or, best of all...

²² 1 Corinthians 8:1

²³ Please read citation number three (3) on page five (5) for more information on God’s “eternal purpose.”

- Participate in realizing His heavenly blueprints.

In looking on as others build, we reject the invitation which God has extended to all His children, wasting the very gifts which He has apportioned to us according to His wisdom and grace.

In building according to our own earthly plans, we could be likened to a child with a plastic hammer, having accepted His calling and been zealous to do the work, but lacking the wisdom—or sometimes even the knowledge—to realize that plastic hammers are not equipped to do His work. God is patient, yes, but He has not called children or fools onto the construction site. God desires wise builders! Christ calls and invites us to become quality craftsman in “the good works He has prepared for us beforehand²⁴.”

Finally, we can choose to participate in realizing His heavenly blueprints, helping build the house of everlasting. In humility and obedience, out of love for Him and others, we can play our small part in the construction of His glorious abode.

HE LIVES HERE

When considering home construction projects, we might gravitate toward thinking about its residents living elsewhere

²⁴ Ephesians 2:10

while the project is underway. But it is not so with God's house. His house is His earthly address, under construction until the Day in which He will disclose the work that has been done upon it. Some of that work will last, other work will not.

For we are the temple of the living God; just as God said, "I will dwell in them and walk among them; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people."

2 CORINTHIANS 6:16

Like Solomon's temple, we now behold the Lord with unveiled faces²⁵, experiencing Him in His holy of holies. Christ tore down the veil and we may now find God Himself sitting and enjoying His house, even as it is being built up around Him (and through Him, and in Him, and for Him²⁶).

IT IS MADE FOR HIS FAMILY

God's house is not made to just become a magnificent structure to marvel at from the outside or fear entering. It is not made for a dictator. His house is being made for one purpose: to hold His

²⁵ 2 Corinthians 3:18

²⁶ John 1:1-3; Romans 11:36; Ephesians 1:8-10; Colossians 1:15-20, 2:9, 3:11

family. This is not a house of One resident, but being built for all the citizens of heaven, His holy nation²⁷, His very children.

Homes are built for families to enjoy and make their own. New homes are built so that families may build relationship with one another, eat together, grow, and rest. Families cry together, laugh together, and experience intimacy with one another all in the comfort and privacy of their homes.

The saying goes: “Home is where the heart is.” And so it is with God’s home and heart. As it is written:

“Zeal for Your house will consume me.”

JOHN 2:17

CAN YOU BEGIN TO SEE IT NOW?

While, again, no words alone can describe the full blessing, honor, glory, and power of God’s everlasting house, prayerfully this offers you a brief glimpse behind the veil of this world into the heavenlies. Alas, “For now we see in mirror dimly” and only “know in part²⁸.”

To summarize these heavenly blueprints—or at least the contribution this author has to offer—so that you might build more

²⁷ 1 Peter 2:9

²⁸ 1 Corinthians 13:12

wisely dear fellow worker, let us behold and celebrate the makings of God's everlasting house:

- The house is us.
- It is being built now.
- Jesus is the foundation.
- It is made of living stones.
- It is bound together by love.
- It is built by speaking.
- It is a spiritual house of spiritual sacrifices.
- We are invited to build it.
- He lives here.
- It is made for His family.

Finally, now that we have acknowledged the two houses under construction, let us return to the question at hand.

THREE ANSWERS

Thanks to the outpouring of God’s creativity when He made you, indeed, there exist an infinite number of ways you could respond to the question under scrutiny. However, with only a finite number of pages, let us agree that your answer might fall into one of three categories.

What will happen you no longer meet with your church community?

- 1 “Not much, if anything, would happen differently with or without me present.”
- 2 “The whole community would dwindle in size or eventually stop meeting.”
- 3 “My participation would be deeply missed, but the community would continue meeting and growing.”

Before you so quickly predetermine your answer, let us investigate what all three answers might lead us to discovering

about your role—or any believer’s role, for that matter—in the Christian community that God is building around you.

“NOT MUCH, IF ANYTHING, WOULD HAPPEN DIFFERENTLY WITH OR WITHOUT ME PRESENT.”

A Christian might feel this way for lots of reasons, each person with their own list of why this is the case.

Perhaps a Christian responds this way because they have not felt “plugged in” and they are still becoming acquainted with their current community. It will take time, they believe, before their presence would be missed by the group, however large or small.

Another saint might give this response because they feel as though they have no real responsibility unto the other members. It is not theirs to steward, but another’s—they are just the poor little sheep who need stronger shepherds to feed them.

In more disappointing cases, even those who have believed in Jesus for decades might say that they have no real contribution (or in common Christian vocabulary, “no great gift,” “too little knowledge,” etc.) to offer their brothers and sisters in Christ. “I don’t speak well ... I don’t read my bible enough ... I like serving, but far be it from me to contribute in other ways.” We have all heard such lists carry on and on.

Still another person might have *very much* to offer, riches they have discovered in Christ that they desire to share generously with their community, yet they have not been given the opportunity. In such cases, it is often that the very structure of the group requires only a few people or just one “leader” to make their meetings happen. As such, discouragement likely exists within such responders, eager to share but without the outlet to do so.

To summarize these common reasons in concise terms, a Christian may believe *not much, if anything, would happen differently with or without them present* because:

- They are not yet fully known.
- They are not responsible for the community.
- They have no real contribution to offer.
- The community’s structure does not allow or encourage it.

Any which way someone slices and dices the reasons for *why* they would acknowledge their lack of importance to the Christian community, we discover an answer that rejects their priestly calling and spiritual gifting.

That bears repeating.

Believers who *falsely* believe they are of little importance within the Christian community thereby reject their calling as

priest and waste the unique portion of Jesus Christ that has been given to them for the whole church to enjoy.

Please hear, this is not to condemn you or any saint that answers in such a way. Instead, let us all find grace and hope, joy and glory in the fact that we have not been called to the pews, corners, or shadows of a room where only the people we deem “more important” speak and share and lead. This is not to say there isn’t a time for one, or some, to speak. But this must not be the only experience of the community. If this is a community’s only or primary expression, it is being built like a house of cards.

We have not been called to a family that does not know our name. The household of God is not like a family reunion among strangers. We have been called to find great intimacy and relationship with one another.

We have not been called to shun our own responsibility and part in the body of Christ to put it upon others who are “more qualified.” Yes, we all have a part to play and let us learn from those who have gone before us. But let us also find our unique contribution and portion of Christ to share. As He deals with each of us differently, like a father does with their children, all children have unique stories and wisdom from their father to share. Praise our Everlasting Father for adopting us into His own household!

**“THE WHOLE COMMUNITY WOULD DWINDLE IN SIZE OR
EVENTUALLY STOP MEETING.”**

On the flip side of not much changing with or without a believer’s presence, we find this answer. Any believer who honestly (and humbly, mind you) answers in this fashion acknowledges their role as the glue of the community. Instead of being “fitted and held together by what every joint supplies,” such communities have been fashioned together by what one person—or a few people—supply. Not only is such a community’s everlasting, wise bond replaced by what is naturally, foolishly taught as “good leadership,” but in such communities, Christ’s own Headship is often replaced by a single leader.

Many believers do not understand the corporate Headship of Christ—truthfully, it deserves its own writing—but let us consider briefly. Among Christ’s many rightful titles and positions, no matter what people do or claim, is His Lordship. Jesus *is* Lord. However, just as Christ remains Lord whether or not a person submits themselves to His Lordship, Christ remains Head whether or not a community submits to His Headship. Jesus *is* Head. However, while Lordship requires individual submission, Headship requires corporate, community submission. As such, we have been called to submit *in partnership with one another* to His Headship,

just as we have been called to submit as individuals to His Lordship. This takes practice and learning together²⁹.

The hands building a community that would dwindle in size or eventually stop meeting on the basis of one person, couple, or small team of leaders are stacking a house of cards, building a house that will inevitably fall. It is difficult and humbling to admit such a case, but it is the case nonetheless.

As a final note to this response, please realize that saying the community would continue on because you have trained up another individual or group of “leaders” in your place is still not what the Lord is after—you are simply replacing one head with another. Such a change would still rely upon one or a few to keep the community ticking, rather than the whole of the community.

In summary, while this responder may very well demonstrate a zeal for God’s house much greater than the first responder, it is perhaps a zeal that relies more upon individual strength rather than the Lord’s strength. Very often, Christians mistake the fact that God *can* (and, yes, *does*) use something for thinking it is His very best. Let us acknowledge here and now that, just because God uses a particular expression of His church or the people within it,

²⁹ 1 Corinthians 14:26-33 offers an excellent model and blueprint for the meetings of a church. In this model, we find the saints gathering to together “so that all may learn and all may be exhorted.”

this does not mean that it represents His ideal. God can use anything and everything, but let us not be satisfied until pressing into the fullness of His will...and never stop pressing.

“MY PARTICIPATION WOULD BE DEEPLY MISSED, BUT THE COMMUNITY WOULD CONTINUE MEETING AND GROWING.”

Quite simply, saints that feel this way are participating in a church community on its way to realizing God’s vision. They are fellow builders of the everlasting house.

We see multiple examples of such people throughout scripture, where key members of local churches move from community to community, yet the church continues on, meeting and growing. This is not to say each church then continued on without its problems. We would not have most pages of the New Testament without church problems. So yes, problems arose then as they arise now—yet the church strengthened.

Of course, there is nothing more bittersweet than sending an active part of the body off to another city. It is bitter because there is great love and affection for that person and the understanding that their part of the body will be missed—very deeply. Such events represent saying goodbye to a dearly loved family member.

But at the same time, what could be more joyous than thanking the Lord for the time that has been shared, having been built up by

their portion of Christ, and sending them off to the next adventure God has in store for them? This is the shared life we have been invited to find in Christ Jesus. This is (part of) the inheritance we have to find in the saints³⁰.

As an encouragement, should anyone leave a community of which you are a part, make it your personal objective in prompting the entire community to send them off with a blessing. Have a time to pray over whoever is leaving, communicate your love for them, thank them for what of Christ they have shared with you all, and send them blessed by all the saints who remain.

While both leaving and sending may be bittersweet in such a house of love, like all families, new families are begun. While there is only One family of God, God is working—and building—all around the world, at all times. When the few that have truly witnessed God's house of everlasting are called elsewhere, what a great joy it is to send them as witnesses of this testimony, sharing generously what God is building to others still hoping and aching to behold such glory.

³⁰ Ephesians 1:18; Colossians 1:12

WHAT IS YOUR ANSWER?

Now that we have honestly assessed why believers might lean towards answering this question, the time has come for you to answer the question yourself, led by the Holy Spirit:

What will happen when you no longer meet with your church community?

Are you like the first responder, part of a community where *not much, if anything, would happen differently with or without your presence?* Is it time to rise up and claim your identity and unique part in the everlasting house of God and body of Christ?

Or are you building a house of cards on the other end of that spectrum, where *the whole community would dwindle in size or eventually stop meeting after your own departure?* Is it time for you to get out of the way, strengthen every member of the church, and begin building wisely?

Or have you entered into the building of God's everlasting house, where *your participation would be deeply missed, but the community would continue meeting and growing?* Have you taken up your royal priestly calling and participated in building a spiritual house of spiritual sacrifices?

The Lord asks:

“What kind of house will you build for Me?”

ACTS 7:49

This is not a question to be taken lightly. Christ has invited us to build with Him what it is He desires. We can build work that will last—work of gold, silver, and precious stones, “tested by fire;” or we can build with wood, hay, and straw; or finally, we can be like the “wicked, lazy” servant who buries their talents³¹, just sitting on the sidelines and watching as others do the building. To reiterate Paul once more, “each man must be careful how he builds...” Let us build according to the plans of the Great Builder³², building wisely.

On the note of building wisely, there remains one last thing we must realize when seeking to build with eternity in mind:

BUILDING WISELY LOOKS FOOLISH

In humility, Paul says that he built wisely³³. At the end of that same chapter in 1 Corinthians, after Paul exhorts “each man” to build carefully, He reminds the church of Corinth in no uncertain terms:

³¹ Matthew 25:14-30

³² Hebrews 3:4

³³ 1 Corinthians 3:10

Let no man deceive himself. If any man among you thinks that he is wise in this age, he must become foolish, so that he may become wise. For the wisdom of this world is foolishness before God. For it is written, “He is the one who catches the wise in their craftiness”; and again, “The Lord knows the reasonings of the wise, that they are useless.”

1 CORINTHIANS 3:18-20

In other words, building God’s house wisely will look absolutely *foolish* to the world and its traditions. Building the house of everlasting will not look like “good leadership” as it is typically taught. It will not be built around a person or personality. Brothers and sisters who tremble timidly on the fringes of a community, always silent, may outright reject what is being encouraged here within the body. The most actively involved within a group may even seek to overtake what is being built by virtue of their strong personalities. What the Lord and scripture invites us into is neither easy nor expected by the world’s standards—but it is true and it is divine.

Such a heavenly community will not look like the small groups, bible studies, Sunday classes, or church meetings as you have been taught or known them. In fact, it may require you exit the religious system entirely to enter into the community you feel your heart

wildly thumping for even now. Many have made such a journey, a deeper journey that most are unwilling to take, and the bounty is an unspeakable inheritance to be found in Christ and in His saints.

Where should we begin? As the very brother of Jesus wrote:

If any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all men generously, and without [shame], and it will be given to him.

JAMES 1:5

So let us pray!

Generous Lord, grant us Your wisdom. May we see Your house of everlasting. May we build wisely. May we honor You and Your calling to us as saints. May our priestly sacrifices be found pleasing in Your sight. Fill us with increasing love and zeal for Your house. Amen.

EPILOGUE

Now that you have answered the one question presented, an even bigger question awaits you: *What next?*

Let this mark the beginning of your own journey into the deeper journey of the Lord and His church. Much of the American church system today has individualized the believer's faith and marginalized the community experience. While our salvation remains between us and the Lord, the gospel of the kingdom³⁴ is not meant to be received and walked out alone. Our lives have been made to be shared, for as God Himself spoke over His own creation:

"It is not good for man to be alone."

GENESIS 2:18

If you have a community of people around you, consider humbly presenting to them what the Lord has revealed to you in

³⁴ For further insight on the kingdom of God, read George Eldon Ladd's book, *The Gospel of the Kingdom*.

these few pages and your own spirit. If the group is currently headed by another person, discuss your findings with them first. Seek to persuade them in all humility, speaking the truth in love. In the case that may be the current “leader” of a community, open up this topic for conversation among everyone. Begin to take a backseat to what it is the Lord is speaking through every member, not just you. Seek to abound for the building up of the church!

Likewise, even if you are searching right now for a community and have nowhere (or no people, rather) to call “home,” realize that how you have answered this question will guide not just your current interactions with other local believers, but all future interactions, as well. Yes, always and forever, seek to abound for the building up of the church! That could be tomorrow, or ten years from now.

For those interested in the deeper journey and sharing all aspects of life with other believers, find encouragement in the fact that there are many other esteemed saints who have gone before you. This author, too, is but one of many who are on such a deeper journey, seeking to uncover as many of the unsearchable riches hidden in Christ as He may reveal to me. One of the ways He has done that for me personally is through the Phoenix, Arizona organic church community I currently call my home, where I have been forever changed and built up by the living stones being fitted

together with me. If you ever wish to speak with me directly, of course, *we're family!* I truly and enthusiastically invite you to personally email or call me at any time:

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Blessings to you, my fellow worker, as your journey continues. Have faith, for God is endlessly and wonderfully good. His house of everlasting is just more evidence of Him and His great love for us.