

# SUCCESSFUL BUILDERS OF THE CHURCH

Before we jump on to the successful church builders of this century let us pick a lesson from the church builders of the first century.

They knew themselves as Apostles. The word “apostle” means “one who is sent out.” They knew they were sent and they knew the one who sent them. They were the 12 closest friends of Jesus. Apostle means that the person is a representative, ambassador or delegate of some mission. They clearly understood their mission.

The twelve apostles were ordinary men whom God used in an extraordinary manner. Among the twelve were fishermen, a tax collector, and a revolutionary. The Gospels record the constant failings, struggles, and doubts of these twelve men who followed Jesus Christ. After witnessing Jesus' resurrection and ascension into heaven, they allowed the Holy Spirit to transform them into powerful men of God who turned the world upside down (**Acts 17:6**).

These men became the pioneering leaders of the New Testament church, but they were not without faults and shortcomings. Interestingly, not one of the chosen 12 disciples was a scholar or highly educated. They had no extraordinary skills. Neither religious, nor refined, they were ordinary people, just like you and me.

But God chose them for a purpose—to fan the flames of the gospel that would spread across the face of the earth and continue to burn down through the centuries. He selected and used each of these regular guys to carry out his exceptional plan. We take a few moments now to learn a lesson or two from the 12 apostles—men who helped ignite the light of truth that still dwells within our hearts today and calls us to come and follow Jesus Christ. Christian leaders who follow this example can powerfully impact today's entire church.

## What did they do?

The Bible says in; *Acts 2:42-47* **42:** *And they continued steadfastly in the apostles' doctrine and fellowship, and in breaking of bread, and in prayers. 43 And fear came upon every soul: and many wonders and signs were done by the apostles. 44 And all that believed were together, and had all things in common; 45. And sold their possessions and goods, and parted them to all men, as every man had need. 46 And they, continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart. 47 Praising God and having favor with all the people; And the Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.*

The final verse of Acts, chapter two, ends with two phrases that really catch my attention:

- Having favor with all the people
- The Lord added to the church daily such as should be saved.

The last phrase, “added daily to the church”, is our goal, yet it cannot be accomplished without first having, “favor with people.” You will never grow your church unless you have favor with people. You will never win people to Christ unless you first win peoples favor.

In this text there are five things that these very first Christians did that give us a clear and concise blueprint for consistent growth in our churches. In each of these efforts, I believe that the church gained favor with the people.

1. They Continued in the Apostles Doctrine.
2. They fellowshiped and broke bread together.
3. They prayed together.

4. They sold their possessions and goods for those in need.
5. They continued with one accord at the Temple every day.

Today's successful church builders have some things in common. They started when they had no money, they had no people but it is not that they had nothing- they had one thing and that is they had A DREAM. They had a dream that was not theirs but God's dream. Amidst their continued challenges, failings, denials, tough times, they knew who the owner of their dreams was. This kept them awake, it kept them moving because they could not drop a dream that was entrusted to them by God. They became possibility thinkers and great dreamers.

Successful church building is not an evolution, not an overnight achievement; a journey, not a destination; an unending project, never a simple, single accomplishment that stands alone unrelated to the past and disconnected from the future. Successful church building is a never ending process of going through good times and bad, pleasure and pain, ups and downs, ins and outs.

Like Dr. Robert Schuller observed, successful church building is a dream that from conception to accomplishment evolves from ten stages.

**Stage one: The dream begins in the mind of God.** That's the ultimate source of inspiring ideas that somehow come into our minds to command our destinies. Dreams that capture our imaginations and inspire our wills begin in the mind of God.

**Stage two: God matches His dream to the great dreamer.** God searches for the right person to whom He can entrust the greatest gift he can give a human being. "I have a dream," He asks "whom can I give it to? Who will receive it with respect, embrace it with passion, and claim it as his own? Live for it and die for it? God must find the right mind to which He can send this great dream.

**Stage three: The dream takes on a life of its own.** The dream now enters into gestation period. The dreamer becomes pregnant with what will become a new life. A beautiful new creation! A glorious achievement! A wonderful accomplishment! An awesome success! God has given the dream a life of its own. Success begins once the dream starts to believe in the beautiful dream that God sends him.

**Stage four: God times the evolutionary Process.** The fourth dimension of a dream in process is timing. The gestation period is enough to teach the dreamer patience. Patience is the quality more than any other identifies those who succeed. Impatient dreamers will look for painless shortcuts and cheap discounts on the price of true success. With patience, a church that begins with three people, with no money in a tapeline shelter will be celebrated 20 years later as a multicultural mega church.

**Stage five: Surprising support comes from unexpected sources.** The dream which began in the mind of God and was deposited in the mind of a possibility thinker suddenly begins to attract support from sources, centers, and souls the dreamer never knew before. The dream like a magnet starts to attract help from persons who are motivated to help inspiring dreamers achieve success. The persons with the right strength, skills, and spheres of influence come to move the dream forward, onward and upward. God starts to build a team around the dream.

**Stage six: Temporary setbacks and difficulties create frustration.** By this point you were probably expecting final victory! Crowning achievement! Solid success! Hold on – you are not yet there. Believe me, there must be a last-minute test and trial before the great moment of stunning success. The dream and the dream experience setbacks, delays, and frustrations. This stage assures God that the dreamer will be truly humble when the crown is placed upon his head.

**Stage seven: The dream comes true.** Stunning success is bestowed upon your praying, your possibility thinking, your patience and your pain! You have reached, the mega church is established. Now be prepared for surprises and disappointments! Honors as well as hurts will come unsought and uninvited. Enthusiastic applause will come from your supporters. However, when you have reached the top of the mountain, you will also be noticed by your competitors. Jealousy will swing against you. Opponents and envious peers will lash out at you. You will be prepared because you have already been scarred in the limb upward. You are a veteran. You are a seasoned mountain climber.

**Stage eight: You have been shaped by the dream.** The dreamer has now reached the upper stratum. He looks in the mirror and he is shocked. He discovers that he has been changed, shaped, carved, and molded by the dream. He has become as great as, and no greater than, the dream that has driven him. Now he understands that there are no great people- only ordinary people. Some simply have bigger dreams than others. Now we see how dreamers are really rewarded. The pain they encountered along the way has given them more compassion for the hurts of others. Living the dream has changed them! They are richer, fuller, broader people because they dreamed the dream and stayed with it. So when you chose a dream, the dream will decide your destiny. The size of the dream will determine how big a person you will become.

**Stage nine: The dream keeps growing.** In this stage the door opens to give a vision for tomorrow. The dreamer learns that great dreams of great dreamers are never fulfilled, they are transcended. Hence they tend to propagate themselves. Success multiplies. Having made the dream come true, you discover you discover that success is not an end in itself but a positioning in power for greater accomplishments and grater achievements.

**Stage ten: The dreamer enters into a danger zone.** This is a parlous time. The dreamer is now in danger of not keeping up with the fast growing, forward looking dream. The dream, like a growing child is in danger of running ahead of him as the scholar outruns the teacher, as the athlete outruns the trainer. The dream now is taking command. And meanwhile the dreamer wants to rest or retire, yet there are more heights to climb and more victories to be won. The dreamer hesitates. He wants to rest, but he must not. At this point he needs a new dream. Once again, he must go through the ten stages. He knows that if he doesn't continue to dream and grow, then he will begin to die. When the alternative to dreaming is dying, then the decision should be easy.

**Successful church builders know the best secrets of making dreams come true.** These secrets are summarized in 4Cs. They are Curiosity, Confidence, Courage and Constancy. The great people are no different from you and me. They simply grabbed a great idea before it disappeared from their minds. They took an option out on it. They wrote it down so they wouldn't forget it. It became a dream. Then intuitively or through training they learned how to make their dreams come true. They had the 4 Cs.

Successful leaders are able to dream because;

1. **They have curiosity.** Creative curiosity; Curiosity is the dynamic potion of the mind that provokes the questions that release creativity. The right questions release possibilities. The right questions release confidence. The right questions release creative solutions. The right questions release great motivation.
2. **They have confidence.** Great dreamers have confidence. They tap into the power of the five magic words "I can do it too!" these are enthusiasm producing words. We can have confidence if we believe that our wonderful positive ideas are created in the mind of God. Be confident in this very thing that "He who has begun a good work in you will complete it." (Phil 1: 6)
3. **They have courage.** They make commitments to God. "If you will entrust the dream to me, Lord, you can count on me! I won't let it fly away. I will do something with it. I will give it the best that I can." Courage is something you will never lose because courage is something you can always chose. The truth is that courage

is not a gift, it is a decision. Courage is not the absence of fear; it is the presence of a calling- a dream that pulls you beyond yourself.

4. **They maintain constancy.** Follow it through, wrap it up, complete the work, and never pack up. Stick with your dream even if you get knocked down. Tap into incredible power generated by an uncompromising commitment to constancy. You can do it, you can make your dreams come true, you can build a new life, and you can start over, even if you are down and out.

**Successful church builders believe that everything is possible.** Because they are possibility thinkers; when others are seeing impossible situations, for them they insist on the possibility. The fact that we don't know how something can be done does not mean that it is true for us to say that it is impossible. The fact that experts in the field have never done it doesn't mean that we agree that it is impossible.

- **It is not impossible!** I just have to revise my plan. Rearrange my priorities. Remodel my blueprint. Redesign my strategy. Relocate my power center. Recheck my traditional answers. Get out of my rut.
- **It is not impossible!** I just don't know how to do it, and I don't know anyone who does. I simply need to connect with smarter people. I just have to solve some problems; I have to make some tough decisions; I need to set new goals. I might need to ask some hostile people for help. Am I prepared to turn my competitors into partners and enemies into friends?
- **It is not impossible!** I just need more time; it will take longer than I planned. I may need to cancel some appointments to give it more time. I will have to streamline, remodel, and revise my calendar or have other people help out when I can't have time.
- **It is not impossible!** I just need to raise more money, cut costs, eliminate waste, and set aside pet projects to release fresh financial resources. All I need are creative ideas, and money will flow to imaginative and resourceful efforts.
- **It is not impossible!** I just have to think bigger. This will release a new burst of enthusiasm and energy. I must release my imaginations from self-imposed, limited, too-small thinking.
- **It is not impossible!** I just have to work harder. I must be willing to pay a higher price. I must increase my bid. I can't take it easy or be careful and succeed.
- **It is not impossible!** I just need more faith in my faith, more self confidence. I have to learn how to manage my thinking, stop putting myself down, I have to get into the habit of thinking in terms of "Yes I can."
- **It is not impossible!** I just have to take charge and dare to begin. Decide to get started. Wrestle leadership from forces and faces that don't have my interests as their first concern.
- **It is not impossible!** I just need a positive mental attitude. I have been reacting negatively. I will chose to believe that somehow, someway, sometime it might be possible.
- **It is not impossible!** I just need more faith. I must learn to believe in tomorrow. I will shift my thinking from the repressive influence of past memories of failure and rejection.
- **It is not impossible!** I just must never quit. All I need is patience that will never run dry. I will hold on. Tomorrow is replacing yesterday.

- **It is not impossible!** I just need to tap into a higher power. There are sources of creative ideas I am yet to connect with. There are undiscovered forces I am about to discover and harness. I just can't do it alone, I need God's power. Great things when man and God confront a mountain.
- **It is not impossible!** I just have to stop being so stubborn. I have to compromise on my silent stipulations, my unspoken demands, and my unyielding set of givers. I simply need to practice humility, and doors will swing open. God will move In. Mountains will move. I will be blessed.