

Years ago, I remember watching *Field of Dreams*. In the movie, Ray hears a voice whispering while he's walking through his cornfield one evening, "If you build it, he will come." He then had a vision of a baseball field in his cornfield, with the great baseball player "Shoeless Joe" Jackson appearing in the rows of corn.

Throughout the movie, Ray and his wife Annie face all sorts of obstacles as they try to make this dream a reality. Most people think he's crazy putting his farm at risk as he plows up a portion of his crops to build a baseball diamond, but Ray continues to believe that if he builds it, something amazing will happen.

King David had a similar vision, but rather than building a baseball field, he envisioned building a house of worship for God. David had built a magnificent home for himself, but he was concerned that God had only a tent, which they had been using for many years as they roamed around the countryside as nomads. Now that they were settled, David wanted a more permanent structure in which to worship God.

He consulted the prophet Nathan, who at first agreed it was a good idea, but in the middle of the night, Nathan received a second opinion. God asked, "In all the years I have helped the people, have I ever asked for a house made from wood?"

"Well, no, I guess not."

"Why would I need one now? Tell David that I have been with him through everything—from the time he was just a kid watching the sheep until now while he serves as king. Tell him it's not a good idea to build me a structure, but I will build my people into an everlasting house."

Just imagine the disappointment when David heard this message from God. His great idea had been vetoed. No building project would occur, but it came with a promise—that God will remain with the people forever. That's a rather good trade-off, wouldn't you say? In place of a structure that eventually will need lots of upkeep and will someday fall apart, we get the eternal presence of God. What a deal!

Sometimes when we have what we think is great idea, we may find ourselves out of step with what God

has in mind. Creating a structure in which to gather for worship could deceive us into thinking that once we leave that place, that we can leave God behind in the sanctuary and hide from God throughout the rest of the week. We may mistakenly believe that if we behave ourselves in church, we can ignore God the rest of the week.

God's Spirit moves beyond our walls, for God cannot be captured within a box. Even our ideas about God are limited, for God goes beyond all our rational explanations. I'm sad every time I hear some good church folks arguing that their understanding of God is right, while looking down upon another person's theological views. Throughout the centuries of the church, some have defended their views of God, sometimes even by using violence. Those ideas may be partially correct, and wrong at the same time, for God cannot be captured in one set of views, just as God cannot be captured in one building.

Even building the most magnificent structure will not capture the full essence of God, which reminded

me of a game that's commonly used in team building experiences.

The participants are teamed into two or three teams of at least three people on each team. The teams are then given building materials... Each of the teams is then told to build the largest building possible in a given amount of time.

What happens in the next few minutes is fascinating. Some teams just go to work. Others appoint a leader—or the leader is self-appointed—and take orders in the construction process. Sometimes a team will spend most of its time planning. The team may not even have enough time left for the actual building stage of the game.

All the teams stay busy, all build a building. There is always a comparative winner among the teams, but not one team succeeds. No team has ever built the largest building possible. The rules of the game never told the teams they cannot work together on one building. But they never come together and work as one team. The teams just never think to cooperate.¹

To build what God has in mind means we need to think beyond the boxes of our buildings, beyond the traditional ways of doing things, and lately, we've had to do a lot of that. When the pandemic forced us to

gather in safer ways, in Elkhart we discovered how to stream our worship on Facebook to watch at home, and in Mishawaka, we learned how to broadcast on AM radio and listen in the parking lot. I've heard folks say how much they have enjoyed these experiences, how God has still moved within their lives to give them hope.

We miss being gathered in one place, of course, but I think we have discovered some important things through this experience:

First, that God can creatively inspire us to try something new to celebrate that God is with us everywhere, something we especially have needed to remember during these difficult times.

And second, even though we might have already known that we could worship anywhere, we have experienced God's presence in a new way, which I hope, will strengthen our faith for many years to come.

And third, I imagine each of us has our own field of dreams, a vision of what we might build in our lives. My field of dreams for us includes the following:

- when we can all safely gather again without the concern of a virus, we will appreciate our experience of being together even more, which will encourage us to invite more people to celebrate God's presence among us.
- My dream envisions that we will continue being creative and willing to try new things rather than doing things the way we always have.
- The third part of my dream is that we will become even more empowered to reach out to our neighbors through our livestream in Elkhart or our AM broadcast in Mishawaka to bring hope to people we may not even know.

In the coming months, as we find ourselves walking through our field of dreams, I pray that we walk in step with God, remembering that God walks with us always step by step.

¹ Hodgins, Michael. *1001 More Humorous Illustrations for Public Speaking: Fresh, Timely, and Compelling Illustrations for Preachers, Teachers, and Speakers*. Zondervan. Kindle Edition, #907.