

17 Signs You're an 'Empire Builder,' Not a 'Kingdom Builder'

Ever since the Western and Eastern branches of Christianity divided in the 11th century, some of the greatest fears of the once united Christendom has been realized—fragmentation and division.

Even in the 16th century when Martin Luther led the Protestant Reformation, there was the hope that there would only be a few major expressions of the body of Christ—never in their wildest dreams did the reformers envision all the denominations and now various branches and networks of Christianity that have evolved—which has given opportunity for a spirit of lawlessness, independence and empire building among some insecure but gifted leaders. Whether all these expressions are of God or not is not the purpose of this article.

However, the following will show us some signs revealing when the motivation to build a church, ministry or network is akin to when the human race attempted to build their own empire—epitomized by the “Tower of Babel” which God judged and scattered across the whole earth. (Gen. 11:1-18)

In 1 Kings 11:11 and 12:16 God divided the kingdom of Israel because of religious apostasy, which is the same reason the Catholic Church was judged and fragmented—too much concentration of power in the hands of humans who deviated from the true way of Jesus and the apostles. God will judge His church and hold back revival from certain churches, ministries and regions when their key spiritual leaders are attempting to build themselves an empire rather than build the kingdom.

Leaders talk the talk but their actions speak louder than

their so called “kingdom first words.” The following are 17 signs you are an “empire builder” instead of a “kingdom builder”:

1. You rejoice when other key leaders in your region are struggling

Although all leaders with their mouth say they are sad when another church, pastor or leader in their area is struggling, I have observed that some leaders seem to privately gloat or compare themselves with other failing leaders in their area. Whether the failing church or leader is right or wrong, it never pleases God when we internally rejoice or gloat when the body of Christ is not advanced in our region.

2. You are territorial and only work with those under your “covering”

Some leaders and denominations I know will only do outreaches with churches and leaders who have a ministerial and financial allegiance with them. If we are going to reach our communities, we have to be willing to cross denominations and networks and work with the leaders who are sincerely committed to advancing the kingdom.

3. You only support events that which can give you a platform

I have seen leaders actually pull out of a city-wide or community event because their name was not advertised on the program or because they are rivals with a leader who is part of said program. This shows that their concern was not advancing the kingdom but on advancing their own name and empire-building goals.

4. You tend to exaggerate your own importance and influence to outsiders

Empire builders treat their ministry like a sporting event—they are constantly throwing around numbers and stats

and comparing their numbers to the numbers of other ministers. They say things like, "We are growing in record numbers" or "This was the most significant event in our city" or "We have the largest network in our city." Or worse yet, they claim something like "our ministry is the reason why the crime rate went down in our community or region," and they tend to exaggerate their influence, importance and results in their region or community.

Kingdom builders brag about what God is doing through His church in His city, and they also attempt to applaud the success of others whose feet they wash instead of propping themselves up for photo shoots and publicity. I have observed that several so-called revivals in our country the past 10 years have been more or less nothing more than good advertising and marketing rather than a real move of God.

5. You are jealous of successful key leaders in your region

I know I am with an "empire builder" when I am with a person who is always attempting to dig up dirt on other leaders, criticizing key leaders in their community, or giving "faint praise" when asked about other key leaders in their region.

6. You speak about kingdom unity as a smokescreen to hide your own selfish agenda

Some of the most self-centered empire builders I have known in the past 30 years have spoken the most in public about the need for unity in the body of Christ. They use this kind of talk to get "sheep pastors and ministers" to forsake their own agenda and follow them to aid them in building their empire! They know the entire lingo and have the biblical passages down, but unfortunately their actions do not correspond with their words and preaching.

7. Your name and picture has to be highlighted in every event you participate in

There are leaders I have heard speak about God raising up a movement of “nameless” and “faceless” people and yet in all their conferences, literature and advertising their picture and name are highlighted more than anybody or anything else in the program! I even attended one conference in which there was a life-size picture of the leader in the lobby with the event and program advertised in small print under his picture!

8. You try to steal the loyalties of people connected to other ministries

I have observed that one of the key signs that someone is an empire builder is when they go after key leaders in other leaders’ churches or networks. I myself have had leaders representing our Christ Covenant coalition approached by another leader in my city, asking them to join his network as a representative, even though these leaders have been part of my leadership for over 10 years!

When leaders do this, they make themselves look bad, both to the loyal leaders they approach and to the other key leaders in the city who eventually find out about the M.O. of said empire builder.

9. You love those who follow you and disregard all others

Empire builders have an “either your with me or against me” mentality and approach to life.

Empire builders will not be friends with a person if they are also connected to the ministry of a rival. One of my regional leaders was actually told several years ago that he was no longer welcome to preach in a particular church because he was keeping the company of certain other leaders (me).

The reason for this is that since empire builders are untrustworthy and use their pseudo-friendships as a platform to perpetuate their own empire, they project that same spirit and mentality on other leaders in their region and thus they

cut off people loyal to other networks and ministries because they suspect others are all untrustworthy like they themselves are!

10. You have a “top-down” leadership approach and thus struggle to attract strong, successful leaders

Empire builders surround themselves with “yes men” and actually discourage strong, resourceful leaders from working or partnering with them because it does not fit their “top-down” leadership style. Unlike mature leaders who take a “bottom-up” approach—in which they try to lead through consensus with multiple participation of various levels of people taking responsibility in ministry (so that all have ownership in the process)—empire builders surround themselves with leaders of ministries they deem less significant and who want to follow their dictates without meaningful, strategic dialogue.

11. You are driven by self and not led by the Spirit

Your intense need for affirmation because of your insecurity drives your need for success—not the glory of God and work of advancing the kingdom. Thus there is rarely inner peace or rest because you are striving—constantly trying to create a platform and expand your ministry on your own efforts instead of being led by the Lord and letting Him bring the opportunities and open doors.

12. You are an opportunist when other ministries are struggling

Empire builders make believe they are concerned when other churches or ministries are struggling, but they attempt to maneuver themselves so that they can capitalize on the struggles of other ministries and seize either their property or, more likely, their choicest leaders and key people.

13. Your main goal in life is to build some kind of monument to your success

Empire builders are obsessed with building bigger and better buildings, and acquiring more and more property—even if they have to go into huge debt. The lower their self-esteem, the bigger they have to build to compensate for their internal lack. Unfortunately, they are often risking the future of their ministry with all this spending and they rarely if ever think about how their successor is going to fill all these buildings and pay off the mortgage! Remember, there is never any real success without a successor!

14. When possible, you will sabotage the influence and ministry of other leaders you deem a threat to your influence

Recently I reunited with a key leader in another country after almost 12 years of disconnect. I tried numerous times to stay connected but I could never understand why there was some kind of obstruction in the relationship. After speaking for three hours it finally dawned on us that another leader who was jealous of my influence in this country sabotaged our relationship because he wanted to supplant me as the covering of this key leader.

I have also witnessed firsthand when one leader will insinuate lies about another key leader behind their back to try to stop their influence from spreading to other regions. In instances like this we need to speak up and defend the honor of those not present in the room.

15. You tend to copy those you are jealous of in your region

It is said that when someone copies your ideas it is the highest form of flattery. Empire builders will attempt to replicate and outdo many of the things other key leaders in their region are doing. They may call it something different, but in the end it is essentially the same model but with the attitude to make it bigger and better than anything else

in their region.

It is like Dunkin' Donuts and McDonald's trying to reinvent themselves to keep up with Starbucks. It is borne out of personal competition and not a pure love for Christ and His kingdom.

16. You are a narcissist in relating to your desires in life

Ultimately, empire builders are lovers of themselves. Thus they will sacrifice the dreams and lives of others so their own dreams can be fulfilled. They will throw everybody and anybody under the bus to advance their goals or save their own skin!

Their incredible commitment to the ministry is really only a commitment to advance their own ideals and dreams—which is narcissistic in nature, this is unlike the model of Christ who laid down His own life for the sheep. Ezekiel 34 speaks about the judgment God will bring on shepherds who use and abuse the sheep for their own pleasure.

17. You tell people that your church or network is the main key in your city for true revival and transformation

When giving reports about your ministry, you exaggerate the results of your work and utilize self serving testimonies that back up your claim for spiritual dominance in your region. Many pastors I know have told me of prophecies that have come forth alluding to the fact that it is their church that is going to start a revival for the nation or their community—or that revival is going to start in their region and go to the world because their region is the gate to the rest of the country. I am so tired of hearing these prophecies and so-called words from the Lord.

Unfortunately, some prophets are motivated to give these flattering words so they can be invited back to preach because they know that most inexperienced leaders fall prey to

prophetic flattery. That being said, empire builders use these words, visions and experiences to back up their claim that their particular church or ministry is “the church” in their region God is going to use so they can garner the loyalties of unsuspecting and naïve sheep and even pastors.

In my experience, most churches with that attitude are judged by God and actually begin to decline until the leaders repent of pride. Although it is possible that revival can come through one church to the whole world (Azusa Street revival in 1906) it is the exception to the rule because community, city and national transformation usually take place when God visits a region or nation and multitudes of churches receive “times of refreshing” all at the same time, resulting in the formation of informal apostolic networks who partner together to continue to perpetuate the advance of the kingdom of God

Joseph Mattera *is overseeing bishop of Resurrection Church and Christ Covenant Coalition, in Brooklyn, New York, and author of numerous books, including Ruling in the Gates: Preparing the Church to Transform Cities. Follow him on Facebook or visit him online at .*

Unless otherwise specified, the opinions expressed are solely the author's and do not necessarily reflect the views of Charisma Media.