

Life Lessons From A Building Project

By: Dan Nelson

2006

Life definitely has its lessons, doesn't it? If we pay attention, there are opportunities to learn all around us. I want to share one of those moments that I had recently with you. It is a metaphor of life and it involves change.

It has been said that the only kind of change most people like is the kind that jingles in your pocket. But I don't want to talk to you about that sort of change. It's the other descriptor of change that I want to discuss with you. We know that the only way we can change the world is to first make the necessary alterations in ourselves. It starts with us. Jesus said this in his teaching about removing the log in our own eye so that we might see clearly to help someone else with the speck in theirs. But therein lies the problem. Most people don't like to change. You may have heard someone say, "Everybody likes progress, and it's the change they don't like". Is it true? Is correcting things in your life as painful to your mind as a new pair of shoes to your feet?

Experts relate three steps to the process of change in one's life; awareness, insight, and transformation. I want to talk about part one. One must first become "aware" of the need to change before any true adjustments will take place in one's life. Sometimes we find that we are upset with ourselves, or others, as though we are holding individuals accountable for behaviors that they are not even aware that need to be altered. Is this fair? Should I become frustrated with my 8 year old, for example, because he can't do Algebra? Is it right to hold someone accountable for something they are not yet aware of? Notice with me that Jesus taught "repentance"; this is calling for change in people's lives. He called for people to change their attitudes, behaviors, lifestyles, and spirituality to reflect a purpose of being "a child of God". It all started with preaching the need to change; making listeners aware of the importance of living differently. For others, it was a reminder of the vitality of what they once knew. Either way, the status quo would not be an option. For those who didn't see themselves as needing any change, they had a choice to make.

But what needs to change and how do you do it? Where do you start? This is where my life lesson metaphor comes in.

We are currently in the process of purchasing and remodeling the Chapel on Mahoney Avenue in Oak View. The building was originally built in the 1930's and has been modified several times since, probably by volunteers. As we engage in the steps of the project, we uncover things that make us stop and assess. Sometimes we find things that reflect the richness of generations past, reminders of the life and community impact of people that once called this place home. We also find things that are not "keepers". Things that need to be thrown out, gotten rid of, or although useful to someone, can't be part of the future of this house of worship. I see this as a lesson for life.

You see, for most of us, our lives are a whole lot like this building; it is valuable in it's purpose so that it is worth remodeling but in order to be what it can be, a lot has to change. Of course some of those changes are easy and can be easily recognized, thus new paint and minor repairs will make quite a noticeable difference. But before that can happen, deeper issues need to be resolved. Just like with this building, we are usually focused on the

things we want to add to our lives, and what we want it to look like. These design ideas are great but before we go putting on the finishing touches, we need to do some reconstructive surgery on the bowels of the building. The same is true for our lives. Herein lies the lesson: it is the structural integrity of the whole thing that is the most important of all. What is the structural support system that holds up your life? You know, you can't always tell the difference between a well-made building and a cheap imitation at first. There are two ways to tell: 1) remove some panels or wall covering to see what's inside, or 2) wait until heavy storms come and let it get tested by the weight of adversity. The first is proactive, preventive, and although sometimes uncomfortable, has the greatest opportunity for success. The second is risky, unwise, expensive, and outright dangerous.

As we go through the building we are making decisions. Some things are definitely keepers; I am told that the wood that was used in some of the original construction is better than what is on the market today. Other things are brought immediately to the dump; we don't want it around a moment longer than we have to. The most important part of the lesson is that the new stuff has to wait to be installed until what needs to go is gone. There are things in our lives that need to go and we need to get rid of it. We need to be less focused on what we need to bring into our lives until we dump what should not be there. Little things are easy and most people can do them themselves as a do-it-yourself project. But when you get deeper, you learn that we all have parts of our "life projects" that only God has the capacity to deal with. Then we realize our ultimate need for Him to supply and be the foundation for the whole thing.

Dan Nelson is a frequent contributor to the Ojai Valley News and currently serves the Ojai Valley Ministerial Association and community as editor of the Religion Column. This article was published in 2006. Permission is freely granted to reprint the article in its entirety. Dan Nelson is pastor of Calvary Chapel Christian Church of the Ojai Valley.



P.O. Box 1443
Ojai, CA 93024
(805) 640-9498
www.calvaryojai.org

Sunday Worship:

9:00 & 10:30am
Calvary Chapel Ojai Valley
195 Mahoney Ave, Oak View

Mid-Week Study:

7:00pm Thursday
Calvary Chapel Ojai Valley
195 Mahoney Ave., Oak View