

**Doing What Disciples Do:
“Work”
1 Corinthians 3:9-15**

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Once upon a time, there were three little pigs who left their mother to build homes of their own. The first little pig built his house of straw. The second little pig built his house of sticks. The third little pig built his house of brick. Soon the Big Bad Wolf came to visit the three little pigs. When the little pig in the straw house would not let him in, the Big Bad Wolf huffed and he puffed until he blew his house in. When the little pig in the house of sticks would not let the wolf in, the Big Bad Wolf huffed and he puffed until he blew his house in. When the Big Bad Wolf came to the pig in the house of brick, he huffed and he puffed, but he could not blow his house in. For his house was made of brick.

Do you ever wonder why old stories like that endure from generation to generation? Maybe it's because there is a kernel of truth in them that every generation needs to know. I Corinthians 3:9 says, *“We are God’s fellow workers, we are God’s building.”*

Everybody has a house to build. Our houses hold our lives. Every moral is a beam; every window is a dream; every door is an opportunity; every roof is protection from the storm. We all have a house to build, and there are a couple of things about building a life that we need to know.

THE FOUNDATION IS CRITICAL

According to the grace of God given to me, like a skilled master builder, I laid a foundation, and someone else is building on it. Each builder must choose with care how to build on it. For no one can lay any foundation other than the one that has been laid; “that foundation is Jesus Christ.”

We live in an age of vague spirituality, high tech religion, and entrepreneurial preachers. We affirm one another in our multiple quests for meaning, impress large crowds with razzle-dazzle worship services, and pledge great loyalty to charismatic leaders. Meanwhile, we are adrift in a sea of relativity, with no anchor to hold us and no foundation to sustain us.

We need an anchor that keeps the soul steadfast and sure while the billows roll. That anchor is Jesus. We need a foundation that will not shake in shaky times. We need a cornerstone from which all construction flows. Christ is that sure foundation. Christ is the head and cornerstone.

To some of you that sounds rigid and exclusive, but what if it happens to be right? What if the life of Jesus is the blueprint for life? What if the death of Jesus proved the redemptive possibilities of death? What if the resurrection of Jesus is the assurance that life wins? What if the life, death, and resurrection of Jesus is not an argument, but an alignment with reality? Are we so wrong to witness to that? Our testimonies need not be manipulative, and certainly not judgmental. Let them be authentic and true. As a reporter who interviewed Billy Graham for Newsweek Magazine said last month, “He is sure and certain of his faith in Jesus as the way of salvation, but he asserts ‘It would be foolish of me to speculate on who will be in heaven and who won’t. Those are decisions that only the Lord will make.’”

BUILDING MATERIALS MAKE A DIFFERENCE

Now if anyone builds on the foundation with gold, silver, precious stones, wood, hay, straw, the work of each builder will become visible, for the day will disclose it, because it will be revealed with fire.

The first little pig built his house of straw, people do that too. They build their lives out of the cheap stuff, easy stuff, whatever happens to please them at the moment. “*They sow the wind and reap the whirlwind*” (Hosea 8:7). Lust is a multi-billion dollar business in our world and our children, our marriages, persons addicted to it, are reaping the whirlwind of our momentary excitement.

Twenty years ago, Wayne Oates wrote a book on the proposition that Americans substitute luck for grace. Since we no longer believe in the grace of God, we gravitate to luck as a hope we might get something better than we deserve. That was before there were state lotteries, and casinos on every riverbank in America. Could this wise father of Pastoral Care be right? Has luck become the whirlwind of grace?

People are not always what they sometimes seem to be. Some not only live conflicted lives, they live double lives, they maintain more than one identity. They are mentally ill. They are morally bankrupt.

The second little pig built his house of sticks. Paul says some built on this foundation with wood. Wood is not bad building material. Wood houses offer good security even though they do burn easily. When I think of a stick filled life, I think of all the stuff we collect through the years. The first time Sandy and I moved, we put all our belongings in the trunk of a 1964 Ford. We didn’t even need a U-haul. When I said something about moving the other day, something about downsizing, Sandy gave me one long, dirty look and then said, “Exactly what do you plan to do with all the stuff in this house?”

Comedian George Carlin once said, “The essence of life is trying to find a place to put all your stuff,” the cars, the boats, the houses, the land, the stocks, and the bonds. Life is more than stuff, even good stuff.

The third little pig built his house of brick, the precious stones, the gold, the costly stuff. While wood is consumed by the fire, gold is refined by the fire. Remember Paul's advice in I Corinthians 13 "*There are three things that abide. They are faith, hope, and love.*" That's the right stuff.

Every time I get sick, I develop a little ritual that gets neglected in healthier, busy days. I come home from work early. I relax in my favorite chair, and prayerfully read each card, e-mail, letter, prayer, that we receive from so many of you and hundreds of our friends around the world. Some make you laugh, like some birthday cards I received Friday. "You don't need a silly calendar to make you feel older, that's what mirrors are for." "Do you know why old men wear their pants up so high? You will soon." Some contain Scriptures like Romans 12:12, "*Be joyful in hope, patient in affliction, faithful in prayer.*"

All are saturated in love. If I have any regrets about life, it's that it has taken me so long to accept love and that it's been so difficult for me to express love. You see, those words were never spoken in my family of origin. I was told when I did wrong, but I was never affirmed for doing right. I don't blame my parents for that. They did the best they could, but love experienced and love expressed is critical material for building a life that really matters.

Build your life out of the good stuff. You deserve it. Time will test it. After all, you are God's temple, and God's spirit dwells in you. Make your life an honorable dwelling place for God.