

Renovation

In June of 2004 I was in Spencer Tennessee, on a mission trip with our youth group. We were one of about twenty different churches participating in the camp. Spencer is located about sixty miles north of Chattanooga Tennessee, in the Cumberland Mountains. We got there on Sunday afternoon and after dinner all of the camp participants were divided into work groups. A work group is made up of five youth and one adult, all from different churches. For two days my group worked in the small town of Dunlap Tennessee, just south of Spencer.

In Dunlap we had to build a porch and a wheel chair ramp for the elderly resident of the house. He had surgery the month before, for lung problems, and would be confined to the chair for the rest of his life. When we arrived at the house we saw a wood porch that was in really bad shape. The porch was sitting on cinder blocks, some of the wood was rotting and there were a huge number of nails that held the rotting wood and the porch together. As I walked up onto the porch it would move from side to side. The porch was about four feet by eight feet with three steps and a railing around the sides.

Now we could have painted that porch a nice color and put some more nails in to hold the loose boards down. We could have even put supports on the 4x4 uprights to help stop the movement of the porch. But after we had finished the painting, nailing, and putting in extra supports the porch would still have been unsafe and probably collapsed the week after we left.

What we needed to do was tear out the old porch and build a new one with a wheel chair ramp. We were only going to be there two days and I wasn't sure we would get everything done.

We tore the old porch out and began digging holes for the 4x4 upright support posts. What I didn't know was that the town was built between two mountain ridges, down in a valley. In that valley there was an old stream bed that had been dry for a long time. When the founding fathers of Dunlap Tennessee decided to build the town the stream may have had water, but we never saw a stream running through Dunlap while we were there. The old man who lived in the house told us that Dunlap was about 150 years old. It was built as the county seat of Sequatchie County. He also said that "anywhere you dig in Dunlap you find rocks".

The porch we were going to build would be a little bigger, to help accommodate the man's wheel chair and a couple of other chairs for family and friends. We had to dig new holes for the upright supports. We found out real quick that digging in an old stream bed was

not going to be easy. We couldn't use the posthole digger because there were stones just inches below the surface; stones that we had to dig out by hand. Most of them were well over 12" in diameter. We dug six holes that day, by hand, and produced a big pile of stones that the old man was grateful to have. He said that his daughter would use them in a vegetable garden she was going to build for him.

By that afternoon we had dug six holes and set the 4x4 uprights in concrete. All six of us were tired, sore, dirty, and hungry. It had been a long day. We came back the next day and built the porch and the wheel chair ramp. By the end of that day we were again tired, sore, dirty, and hungry. But the thing about the porch was that it didn't move. When we were digging the post holes, we had to dig out big rocks that were in the way. Even though we dug out some rocks, other rocks surrounded the hole and became embedded in the concrete when the posts were set. Those posts were solid.

Ezekiel was a priest who became God's spokesperson during Israel's exile in Babylon. The book of Ezekiel tackles the questions that Israel asked while they were in exile.

"Why are we in exile?"

"Is God unjust?"

"Will God do anything to help?"

He talks about the defeat of Israel, the destruction of Jerusalem, and the deportation of the people.

Ezekiel 27:1-9 is the beginning of a funeral song to the city of Tyre. The city is portrayed as a ship made out of materials from many different lands, with a crew of men from many Phoenician cities. Listen to the funeral song for Tyre:

The word of the Lord came to me: "Son of man, take up a lament concerning Tyre. Say to Tyre, situated at the gateway to the sea, merchant of peoples on many coasts, 'this is what the Sovereign Lord says:

"You say, O Tyre, I am perfect in beauty. Your domain was on the high seas; your builders brought your beauty to perfection. They made all your timbers of pine trees from Se-nir; they took a cedar from Lebanon to make a mast for you. Of oaks from Bashan they made you oars; of cypress wood from the coasts of Cyprus they made your deck, inlaid with ivory. Fine embroidered linen from Egypt was your sail and served as your banner; your awnings were of blue and purple from the coasts of

Eli-sha. Men of Si-don and

Ar-vad were your oarsmen; your skilled men, O Tyre, were aboard as your seamen.

Veteran craftsmen of Ge-bal were on board as shipwrights to caulk you seams. All the ships of the sea and their sailors came alongside to trade for your wares.

The city Tyre of was an exotic cosmopolitan showplace; it was a jewel of the sea. But the people were puffed up with pride thinking they were invincible.

Ezekiel predicts that Tyre, the ship, will sink because it is built on a shaky foundation. They gained great possessions but lost their soul. They practiced their religion, but were so puffed up with their wealth and success they forgot that God was the foundation of their lives and their religion. The funeral song continues in chapter 27 with a list of the trading partners, the ship's inventory, and recounts the sinking of the great ship.

Now that old porch in Dunlap Tennessee could have had a make over with a coat of paint, some more nails, and added supports but it would have still been built on shaky ground. The porch needed to be re-built on a firm foundation.

When a contractor comes in to bid on remodeling a house, what do you think is one of the important things he looks for? Randy Metzler, if I called you and said, "I would like a quote from you on building a room addition to my house." What would you look for before giving me a price? Charlie, if I asked you to quote me on remodeling my living room what would be one of the most important things you would look for before quoting me? One of the most important things to look for is structural damage or foundation damage. If there is rotten wood, then that needs to be taken into consideration when quoting. Any structural damage that needs to be repaired has to be part of what the contractor is bidding on.

Matthew 5:1 through 7:28 comprises the Sermon on the Mount.

Not to be confused with "The Sermon on the Mound," which happens Sunday September 2nd. Check out your bulletin.

Jesus instructs his disciples about how to shape their identity and lifestyle around God's will for them. He begins in Matthew 5:1 with the Beatitudes and ends in Matthew 7:24-27 revealing two possible consequences for doing or not doing God's will. Listen to what Jesus tells his disciples:

"Everyone then who hears these words of mine and acts on them will be like a wise man who built his house on rock. The rain fell, the floods came, and the winds blew and

beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not act on them will be like a foolish man who built his house on sand. The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell—and great was its fall!”

If you build in the dry gulch, like our Southwestern arroyos that seem smooth and inviting, remember that when it rains that place will become a raging river and destroy your house.

Crossroads has been built on a strong foundation. Over the years we have listened to the voice of the Spirit, we have listened to each other, and we have made decisions based on what we have heard. We dug down deep and found solid rock.

Do you know that you have 27 bones in your hand? In both hands you have over 25% of the bones in your body. You have an opposable thumb on each hand; you can touch the front of each of your fingers with the front of your thumb. Your hands are the hands that have worked on getting this church built. Your hands are the hands that have held paint brushes, hammers, brooms, folded bulletins, picked up trash, cleaned dirty dishes, pulled weeds out of the rain garden, made cookies for the mission trips, signed a tithing check, held the hand of a little kid, and prayed for someone. That’s how this church got built, with your fingers and hands.

It’s the same with Children’s Sunday school. In the 8 years we have been together we have carefully built the Children’s Ministry on that strong foundation so that our children will have a strong foundation. The first six years we were like the Jews wandering the desert looking for the Promised Land. Every time we stopped we had to pitch tents and make decisions about how we would do Sunday school for the children, where could we set up, decide on curriculum, find teachers, and make sure there was a place the kids could call their own. During those years we continued to tweak the machinery to the best of our ability. After 18 months in this building, a building we now call home, we are taking the next step. Now is the time for renovation.

Three months ago Jack and I were talking. He told me that he believed 2007 was going to be a year of change for Crossroads Church, a year of growth. Later while I was planning for this year’s mission trip we talked again and he said, “We need to plan Children’s Sunday school like you plan mission trips, plan out a year in advance.” My first thought was, “Well, duh, isn’t that what I’ve been doing all along?” As I listened I remembered my struggles getting

people to commit on a monthly basis. What Jack was saying was we should be bold enough to say to people, “We would like a commitment from you to work with our children for eleven months.” Out of our talks Jack and I decided we would get together some interested people and throw out this idea. After a couple of meetings we decided to have “The Gathering.” We put together a list of 45 people we thought might be interested in this new possibility for Children’s Sunday school, set a date, time and a place, sent out the invitations, made calls, called again, and then on the fourth of this month we met at Cynthia and Paul Steinberg’s house. There were fifteen people who came. We laid out some of our goals and desires for Children’s Sunday school for the next year. Here they are:

- Children, parents, and adult leaders are to have positive experiences through Sunday School
- Safe Church Policy needs to be adopted by the congregation
- Training for the Sunday school teachers, shepherds, and substitutes
- Leadership Teams consisting of 4 teachers and 2 shepherds in each classroom
- 2 volunteer Sunday School coordinators
- The commitment is for eleven months. September through July. August will be additional programming with other volunteers.
- A good supply of Sunday school snack providers.
- Substitute Teacher list
- An assembly on September 9 – “Promotion Sunday” to be sure children and parents are clear about where they are to go and who the adult leaders are. Parents will receive clear directions about times to pick up their children,
- Announcements during the worship service to remind the congregation and visitors about what’s happening in the SS program.
- Sharing by adult SS leaders during the worship service
- Have more opportunities for the children to share in the worship service
- Adult leaders will help children experience Bible stories in a positive and helpful way -- without rigid interpretations or frightening implications
- We will encourage teachers to say “I don’t know” when they really don’t know
- Teachers need to encourage children to talk about what they heard or experienced in SS
- Children need to experience learning interactively and creatively

- Children benefit by acting out the stories they hear or by finding themselves in those stories
- We need to have a Sunday School class for preschool-age children during the Sunday school hour
- This will enable some parents to teach the older children
- This will provide a safe and stimulating environment for preschoolers and get them into the habit of Sunday School
- This will allow parents to attend Sunday school or participate in the Sunday morning worship rehearsal or adult Sunday school classes

Out of this meeting came the plans for the next meeting, “The Gathering, part II.” This will be a time when people can come together to develop teams to teach, serve as shepherds, or work as Sunday school coordinators. We are encouraging everyone to bring their calendars to work out a schedule for the next eleven months. If there are four people who want to work together on a teaching team this will be the meeting where they can start looking at the next eleven months and make decisions about when each of them will be teaching. Shepherds can also do the same, deciding how they want to spend time with the kids. Snack team volunteers can put together a schedule for when each person will provide the Sunday morning snacks. There is no set way these decisions have to be made; the various teams will work that out. Our goal is to have committed people who will take eleven months out of their lives, find others they want to work with and serve in our Children’s Ministry.

Some exciting things have already been happening from our August 4th meeting. Marty Horn has become the first person to volunteer to work in the new pre-school class room on Sundays and Marty is recruiting others to work with him. Annie Magill has told me she has a puppet stage that she would be willing to *renovate* it for Sunday morning classes. Lise Copeland has already found a new curriculum for the coming year; that is already being used on Sunday mornings. Kathy Ralston sent me an e-mail the week after “The Gathering” on August 4th. I asked Kathy if I could read part of that e-mail, and she said yes. Here’s what she wrote:

“I had a conversation this morning with Paul Steinberg about the Sunday school recruitment. We've both decided that we will commit to being "shepherds" for the

coming term of 11 months. We're not exactly sure how it all works, but we would like to be on the same team. Is that possible?

My reasons for pushing past fear and reluctance to commit include wanting to get to know the kids and the parents through their kids, and a deep sense of wanting to help Crossroads Church provide the services/experiences that current and prospective members need--Sunday school for their kids being understandably high on that list.

Paul expressed similar reasons for wanting to get involved."

Kathy's e-mail reminded me of something from Elizabeth O'Connor's book

Eighth Day of Creation:

"A primary purpose of the Church is to help us discover our gifts and, in the face of our fears, to hold us accountable for them so that we can enter into the joy of creating.

The major obligation of the Church to children is to enjoy them and to listen to them so that they can grow according to the design which is written into their being and emerge only under the care and warmth of another life."

I invite you to consider whether you, like Kathy, Paul and Marty, would like to be blessed by serving the children and this body through the Children's Ministry. Come and join us in this time of renovation.

Benediction - Matthew 16:24-26

Then Jesus went to work on his disciples. "Anyone who intends to come with me has to let me lead. You're not in the driver's seat; I am. Don't run from suffering; embrace it. Follow me and I'll show you how. [25] Self-help is no help at all. Self-sacrifice is the way, my way, to finding yourself, your true self. [26] What kind of deal is it to get everything you want but lose yourself? What could you ever trade your soul for?"