

## **A Building Project**

Sermon text: 1 Peter 2:4-10

Bruce Hedgepeth

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### **I. Help wanted**

My aversion to building projects goes way back to childhood. My dad wasn't skilled in those handyman tasks and couldn't teach me the tricks of the trade when it came to doing construction stuff. But that wasn't the part that bothered me. No, the hard part was that we still tried to do building projects, even though they led to frustration with the work and frustration between us.

One time in particular stands out in my memory. The first part of the project was really good: my dad hired a contractor to convert our two-car garage into a game room for me and my sister. It would be a great space to watch TV, play games, and hang out with friends during the long, cold winters in the northwest suburbs of Chicago. Unfortunately, it was after the contractor finished his work and winter set in that we realized that the old window in the newly converted room was not sufficiently winterized to keep out the cold and the wind. We needed to have a storm window on that window.

Even more unfortunately, my dad decided not to call the contractor back to install the storm window. He decided it was a "do-it-yourself" building project. That meant the two of us putting our limited construction skills to the test. For those of you who've lived in the north, where do you put storm windows? That's right – they go on the outside of the house. So my dad bought this metal-framed storm window for us to install in the dead of winter. I'm convinced there must have been a polar vortex that year because it was beyond cold. Of course, we had to do the work bare-handed because you couldn't drill the holes and hold the screws and turn the screwdriver with gloves on. Of course, it didn't take long before our bare hands didn't work either because of the bitter cold air and the colder metal of the window frame. Of course, the first time we put the storm window on it was upside down, so we had to take it off and re-do the whole thing. Are you getting the idea why I'm not too wild about building projects?

But in our scripture text for this morning, the Apostle Peter says that our lives, as followers of Christ, are a building project. So there is a lot of construction language in the passage. He quotes the prophet Isaiah's words about the Messiah in verse 6: "See, I am laying in Zion a stone, a cornerstone chosen and precious; and whoever believes in him will not be put to shame." In the next verse he quotes the psalmist: "The stone that the builders rejected has become the very head of the corner." Clearly Peter likes the image of Jesus as the living cornerstone of our faith. Listen again to the way he begins the passage in verse 4: "Come to him, a living stone, though rejected by mortals yet chosen and precious in God's sight, and like living stones, let yourselves be built into a spiritual house, to be a holy priesthood, to offer spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ."

This connection between building and our spiritual life is one that we are highlighting as a church family this Lenten season. If you were here on Ash Wednesday or last Sunday, then you've seen these "Nail Cards" that we are invited to make part of our observance of Lent this year. Though seeing a nail might usually make us think of the cross, Pastor Steve suggested last week that Christ's crucifixion was a "tipping point" that can redeem the nail's meaning for us. He invited us to see it as a symbol of just what the Apostle Peter talks about in our passage today: that God wants to build us up as followers of Jesus.

## **II. Job satisfaction**

If you haven't yet picked up your "Nail Card," we still have them available for you today in the baskets near the doors. Remember, the idea is to think about and pray about the four areas that are printed on the card: building community; building comprehension; building compassion; and building commitment. Ask God to show you one area he would like to build up in you over the next few weeks of Lent. Peel the nail off the card and keep it as a reminder of how you believe the Lord wants to build you up in Christ. Circle the area you will be working on and tack your "Nail Card" to the cross in the courtyard. It will be a visual reminder of the way God is at work within us and among us throughout this Lenten season.

For example, you may be like me and decide that building community, being mindful of relationships with brothers and sisters in Christ, is the construction project the Lord wants to do in you. I felt drawn to that one because in the busyness of this season I want to focus on people. My nail reminds me that God wants to build me up in the area of relationships.

Others of us may feel that the Lord wants to build us up in the comprehension of our faith. Understanding the Bible or learning more about the foundational truths of Christianity may be where you'd like to grow. Perhaps you were inspired when you heard Jen Clifton talk a couple of months ago about how "The Seven Experiment" class was transformative for her and her family as they learned about biblical simplicity in our culture of excess. Maybe you'd like to get involved in the Lenten version of "The Seven Experiment" or another class that's just getting started.

Or perhaps what tugs at your heart is a conviction that God wants to build you up in the area of compassion. You are definitely in the right church because there are so many ways you can share the love and grace of Christ by serving others who are in need – here locally or in faraway places. I had the privilege of seeing one of our Honduras mission team members show God's compassion a few weeks ago. During our VBS week when a street kid was rude to her, instead of ignoring the boy, our mission team member took the time to get to know him. She found out he was unwanted at home. He had been kicked out of school as an 11-year-old. He felt no one wanted him. So our mission team member and one of our Honduran hosts showed him God's love by getting him new clothes and convincing the principal to give him another chance in school. Who knows, the Lord may change that boy's life because of the compassion of that person on our mission team. Maybe God wants to build your compassion in a similar way.

Still others of us may know that the Lord is interested in building us up in area of commitment. We know that our priorities in using our time, talent, and treasure aren't aligned with God's best for us. We focus too little on things of eternal significance and too much on staying busy and being entertained. I especially want to take the opportunity to invite our seasonal folks to experience the joy of sharing your time and talent and treasure. Those of us who are year round get the first shot at volunteering to be involved in a ministry area that excites us. We're here to give our time over the summer to help children in need get ready to go back to school at the Day of Hope event. We're here for the stewardship emphasis in the fall when we hear about how God is using what we give to transform lives for Jesus' sake.

So part of this Lenten emphasis on being built up in Christ is to extend an opportunity to those in our church family who haven't been invited to be built up in their commitment of time or talent or treasure. I want you to experience the same satisfaction I do when I hear the testimony of one of our young people that Christ has touched their life and changed their heart through our student ministry. I want you to experience the joy I feel when I hear of the heartfelt appreciation of hospitalized or homebound members who experience God's love through our

congregational care ministry. I want you to experience the thrill I get at the amazing music that's lifted up each week to worship the Lord... because I give my time, my talent, and my treasure to help make it happen. I want us all to share in that joy.

If God wants to build you up in this area of commitment, you will find an envelope inserted in your bulletin that you can use to respond. Especially if your time with us is running short for the season, we want to offer an opportunity next Sunday to give a special offering and share in the joy of what the Lord is doing in our midst. After all, the Christian life is a building project in which we are living stones that God makes into a spiritual house. What will your nail remind you that the Lord wants to build in you?