

Be Special to Others

A group of frogs were traveling through the woods, and two of them fell into a deep pit. All the other frogs gathered around the pit. When they saw how deep the pit was, they told the two frogs that they were as good as dead. The two frogs ignored the comments and tried to jump out of the pit with all their might. The other frogs kept telling them to stop, that they were as good as dead. Finally one of the frogs took heed to what the other frogs were saying and gave up. He fell down and died.

The other frog continued to jump as hard as he could. Once again, the crowd of frogs yelled at him to stop the pain and just die. He jumped even harder and finally made it out.

When he got out the other frogs said, "Did you not hear us?" The frog explained to them that he was deaf. He thought they were encouraging him the entire time.

This story teaches two lessons:

1. There is power of life and death in the tongue. An encouraging word to someone who is down can lift them up and help them make it through the day.
2. A destructive word to someone who is down can be what it takes to kill them. Be careful what you say.

Speak life to those who cross your path. The power of words...it is sometimes hard to understand that an encouraging word can go such a long way.

Anyone can speak words that tend to rob another of the spirit to continue in difficult times. Special is the individual who will take the time to encourage another.

Be special to others.

Matching Word with Deed

The theology of the hammer requires us to match word and deed. Jesus' entire ministry was spent trying to teach his followers that the love of God meant service to others. Jesus did not teach us simply to go to church. Worship is essential, but true worship calls us to sacrificial service on behalf of others.

In the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus told his followers that they were salt, but warned them not to become tasteless. He said they were the light of the world that must not be hidden. The light of God's love should be seen through our deeds: "Let your light shine before men, that they may see your good deeds and praise your Father in heaven: (Matthew 5:16). In his account of the final judgement in Matthew 25, Jesus made abundantly clear the importance of deeds.

The theology of the hammer insists that word and deed must come together. One without the other is devoid of meaning.

Through what Clarence Jordan called "incarnational evangelism," the only authentic way to proclaim God's word is through our actions. Jordan explained that God's method of evangelizing the world was to make the word become flesh-to send Jesus Christ to live among us and show us how to love.

Jordan said our actions become our words; therefore our words become believable. Hebrews 11:1 tells us that faith is the turning of dreams into deeds.

In Habitat for Humanity, we believe that eliminating poverty housing is a task for people of faith to accomplish. Christ taught that loving our neighbor is our response to God's love for us.

When we profess our faith in word and deed, the results are spectacular. The rich and powerful are humbled; our social barriers begin to fade. Relationships with God grow closer. We know that we cannot bring salvation to others through our deeds, but we believe we are called to witness to our faith and leave the results to the Lord.

So Much More Than Houses

Devotion:

A 15-year-old Filipino girl told of her wariness about a Korean congregation and other volunteers who came to her country to help build houses. "We have watched you closely. We wanted to know whether you came for your own satisfaction or as a friend. Now we have decided to open our hearts to you. We are happy that we have become true friends."

An American working on a project in Papua New Guinea confessed, "I went with the idea that I was going to help somebody. What I didn't expect was that the people would help me so much."

All over the world when Habitat volunteers gather for a building project, we build so much more than houses. We build relationships as fear melts away. We build our sense of truth as we tear down stereotypes. We build understanding of what is important as we see the joy in the lives of people who are not obsessed with material goods.

Romans 15:1-6 urges us to live in harmony so that together we may glorify God. May we be aware today of what God would have us build together—beyond the walls of this house.

Prayer:

Dear God, thank you for the wonderful things that are going to happen today. Open our eyes and help us tear down walls of ignorance, assumptions and fear. Lead us to new relationships. Enable us to build bridges and have greater understanding of those who join us in this work. Thank you, God, for always surprising us with great things we could not imagine. Amen.

God Can Use Even Me

God's divine power has given us everything we need to live a truly religious life through our knowledge of the one who called us to share in his own glory and goodness.
2 Peter 1: 3

Devotion

Isn't it amazing what God can do with willing servants? A few among us are skilled at various construction tasks, but most of us are "willing to learn."

But then again, this is not the first time God has taken a little, blessed it and made it enough. Following his death, Jesus left the whole plan of salvation with a bunch of fisherman, ex-prostitutes, tax collectors and the like. They had little money and no social position. But they loved Jesus with all their hearts, listened for guidance and were committed to their calling. Their love and dedication made a difference for us all.

Now the kingdom of God is in our hands. God will teach us what needs to be done. We are reminded in 2 Peter 1:3 that God's divine power has given us everything needed for life and godliness. Once again today, God will bless what we have to offer so that together we can build a safe and sturdy house with the _____ family.

Prayer:

Dear God, it is going to happen again today. You are going to take the efforts of (*bankers and teachers and students---fill in appropriate descriptions for your group*) and turn us into a construction team. Only by your divine power could that happen. We are grateful that you called us to this work today and we will respond by giving you our best. Amen.

All I Really Need to Know I Learned From Noah's Ark

1. Plan ahead. It wasn't raining when Noah built the ark.
2. Stay fit. When you're 600 years old, someone might ask you to do something REALLY big.
3. Don't listen to critics -- do what has to be done.
4. Build on high ground.
5. For safety's sake, travel in pairs.
6. Two heads are better than one.
7. Speed isn't always an advantage. The cheetahs were on board, but so were the snails.
8. If you can't fight or flee -- float!
9. Take care of your animals as if they were the last ones on earth.
10. Don't forget that we're all in the same boat.
11. When the doo-doo gets really deep, don't sit there and complain -- shovel!!!
12. Stay below deck during the storm.
13. If you have to start over, have a friend by your side.
14. Remember that the woodpeckers INSIDE are often a bigger threat than the storm outside.
15. Don't miss the boat.
16. No matter how bleak it looks, there's always a rainbow on the other side.
17. "Stop what ya doing, and do what God says!"
18. Remember that the ark was built by amateurs and the Titanic was built by professionals.

Prayer:

O Lord our God
Give us by your Holy Spirit
A willing heart and a ready hand
To use all your gifts to your praise and glory;
Through Jesus Christ our Lord.

Plant your Garden Today

First, plant three rows of peas

Patience
Promptness
Prayer

Next plant three rows of squash

Squash gossip
Squash indifference
Squash criticism

Then, five rows of lettuce

Let us obey the Lord
Let us be loyal
Let us be true to our obligations
Let us be unselfish

Finish with four rows of turnip

Turn up when needed
Turn up with a smile
Turn up with a vision
Turn up with determination

Prayer:

Lord, we offer you ourselves this day.
For the work you want accomplished
For the people you want us to meet,
For the word you want uttered,
For the silence you want to be kept,
For the places you want us to enter,
For the new ways you want pioneered.
Go with us along the way, Lord,
And enable us to realize your presence
At all times and in all places,
Our loving Jesus Christ.

Excuses, Excuses

Devotion:

How many of us were tempted to be somewhere else today? What excuses crossed our minds? My back hurts. Something came up at work. My granddaughter begged me to come to her game. The lawn needs mowing.

But we are here. And once we get here, we know that it is the place we want to be. Often it seems that something fights against us when we are serving our Lord. But we did not give in to the temptations to be elsewhere. We came to do God's work, and we know that if God called us to this task, God will help us get it done.

The beginning of the gospel of John tells us that Jesus is the light that shines in the darkness, and the darkness will not overcome it. We ignored the temptations and followed the light of Christ here today. We praise God that we can leave our worries behind and concentrate today on this place, this task.

Prayer:

Lord Jesus, in this wonderful morning, we joyously give every part of our beings to you. Every thought and longing, all passions and ambitions, all that we are, we willfully submit to your authority. Please give us the confidence that your will be done on earth as it is in heaven. Please give us the grace to make every decision and act according to your desires. Please help us live for your glory and honor by sharing your love. We want to be a blessing to Christ's body on earth – because we love and desire you above all else.

The Theology of the Hammer

"I have obeyed all these commandments," the young man replied. "What else do I need to do?" Jesus said to him, "If you want to be perfect, go and sell all you have and give the money to the poor, and you will have riches in heaven; then come and follow me."

The "theology of the hammer is a term Millard Fuller, co-founder of Habitat, has used for many years to explain the idea that we cannot just talk about our faith. We must put our faith and love into action. Faith must be acted out.

Within the context of Habitat for Humanity, the theology of the hammer has several emphases.

Most literally the term refers to building houses, nail by nail, until a family in need moves into their new home.

It also means that people provide continuing concern for family members after they become homeowners.

The theology is also about bringing together a wide diversity of people, churches, and other organizations to build houses and establish viable communities.

It is about acknowledging our differences: political, religious, philosophical, theological and cultural, while finding common ground in using a hammer to manifest God's love. "What does the Lord require of you? To act justly and to love mercy and to walk humbly with your God" (Micah 6:8)

The theology of the hammer is the belief that we are called by God to care for the poor.

Finally, this theology is about the realization that sufficient resources exist for solving the problem of poverty housing and homelessness. With God, all things are possible.

We Have Work To Do

We are His workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand. — Ephesians 2:10

When you love someone deeply, you long to share in a common purpose. In a similar way, your heavenly Father loves you and yearns for your willing participation in His glorious purposes. Of course, no one is indispensable to God, but His destiny for each of our lives cannot be fulfilled without our active cooperation.

We are sometimes reluctant to emphasize this fact. We freely quote Ephesians 2:8-9, "By grace you have been saved through faith, and that not of yourselves; it is the gift of God, not of works, lest anyone should boast." But not wishing to sound contradictory nor to appear boastful, we stop there and avoid verse 10 about "good works." Yet Paul's meaning is clear—although we're not saved *by* good works, we are saved *for* good works.

Mysterious as it is, God has planned our good works in advance, so that as we fulfill them "we are God's fellow workers" (1 Corinthians 3:9). The great maker of the Stradivarius violin rightly said of God: "He could not make Antonio Stradivari violins without Antonio."

God has chosen to bless others uniquely through you, and you can do what no one else can do. But when He does use you, be careful to give Him all the glory. —JEY

*When we are partners with the Lord,
Our work is not in vain;
Eternal blessings will abound—
His good will be our gain. —Sper*

Faith never stands around with its hands in its pockets!

Giving

There is a story of two young men who were working their way through Stanford University. The day came when they were broke, and something had to be done. One of them had an idea. They would engage the great Paderewski for a piano recital and put their profits toward their board and tuition. All they had to do was guarantee two thousand dollars.

The recital was held but only sixteen hundred dollars was raised. Following the performance, the two young men went to Paderewski, offered him the \$1600 and added a promisory note for \$400 which indicated they would earn the balance as quickly as possible and send it to him. "No," replied Paderewski, "that isn't necessary." In addition to tearing up the note, he also gave them back all but 10% of the sixteen hundred dollars.

The years went by, and Pederewski became Premier of Poland. The devastation of World War I descended upon Europe, and he was faced with the prospect of starvation for thousands of people. Only one man could help him, the United States Food Administrator at the time. Soon thousands of tons of food began to arrive in Poland for distribution among the people. Following the gift of life-giving food, Paderewski went to Paris to thank the U.S. Food Administrator for the relief he had sent. The administrator told Paderewski, "That's not necessary, sir. You don't remember, but you once helped me when when I was a student without income or money for food. I never forgot it."

The gifts we give come back to us in many different ways.

Fertilizer Sure Helps!

A Sunday school teacher pointed to a large plant in the room and asked her young pupils, "Who made those beautiful flowers grow?" A boy quickly answered, "God did!" The teacher was pleased by the response, but before she had a chance to comment, another boy shouted, "But fertilizer sure helps!"

That youngster touched on a profound reality—the mingling of the human with the divine in God's plan for growth. For example, even though the Lord created this world with its growing things, He put man in the garden to tend and cultivate it.

We find a parallel to this truth in the spiritual realm. The apostle Paul said, "I planted, Apollos watered, but God gave the increase" (1 Corinthians 3:6). His main intent in writing these words was to emphasize that God was the one responsible for "the increase." Even so, the Lord had worked through the faithful endeavors of men. Notice what the record states: Paul "planted," and Apollos "watered."

We recognize that God alone is the one who makes things grow—both in nature and in the church. But we also know that He chooses to work through people, and what we do "sure helps!" God is faithful in doing His part. Are we faithful in doing ours? —RWD

*The Lord gives each of us a task
He wants us to fulfill;
To love and serve Him faithfully
Accomplishes His will. —Sper*

Pray for a good harvest, but keep on hoeing.

Greatest is he who serves

Whoever desires to become great among you, let him be your servant. —Matthew 20:26

A noncommissioned officer was directing the repairs of a military building during the American Revolution. He was barking orders to the soldiers under his command, trying to get them to raise a heavy wooden beam.

As the men struggled in vain to lift the beam into place, a man who was passing by stopped to ask the one in charge why he wasn't helping the men. With all the pomp of an emperor, the soldier responded, "Sir, I am a corporal!"

"You are, are you?" replied the passerby, "I was not aware of that." Then, taking off his hat and bowing, he said, "I ask your pardon, Corporal." Then the stranger walked over and strained with the soldiers to lift the heavy beam. After the job was finished, he turned and said, "Mr. Corporal, when you have another such job, and have not enough men, send for your Commander in Chief, and I will come and help you a second time." The corporal was thunderstruck. The person speaking to him was General Washington!

God measures greatness by service. The Lord Jesus has set an example, for though He was God and worthy of all honor, He "did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many" (Matthew 20:28). To be great in God's sight, we must serve! —HGB

*Go, labor on; spend, and be spent,
Thy joy to do the Father's will;
It is the way the Master went,
Should not the servant tread it still? —Bonar*

True greatness is not attained by giving orders,
but by serving.

Doing Well What Others May Not See

In the New Testament scriptures, the Apostle Paul talks about the importance of striving for excellence. He writes, "Whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worthy of praise, think about these things." (Philippians 4:8).

On one of the arches of a magnificent cathedral in Europe is a sculptured face of great beauty, yet it can only be seen once a year when the sun is in a certain position, and its rays stream through a small window to illuminate the exquisite carving.

It seems when the structure was being built an old man begged the builders to work on some portion of the great cathedral. He had been a well-known artist, but now his trembling hands and failing sight caused the architect to fear he would mar the beautiful building. Finally out of respect for his age and reputation the architect reluctantly agreed to allow the man to chisel a design under the shadows of the roof, thinking no one would ever see it.

For months the old man struggled up the scaffolding and worked with hammer and chisel on his back high above the floor. It was an arduous climb and he would stay up all day. When at last he had finished, he insisted on one last climb just to make a few finishing touches. When he failed to come down by nightfall, the workers, fearing something might have happened, climbed the ladder only to discover his lifeless body with his tools still in hand. As they looked up, their eyes beheld the most beautiful sculpture they had ever seen, a piece which has since been deemed a masterpiece by authorities in the field.

One sculptor wrote, "This is the most magnificent work of all, for love wrought it." Although the builders thought no one would ever see it, each year on one day, the sun illuminates this beautiful etched piece of marble. However, the greater miracle rests in the man himself. Although he thought no one would ever see the fruits of his labor, this old artist, out of honest pride and a quiet faith strove for excellence.

All the Tools You Need

Hebrews 3: 4 "Every house is built by someone, but God is the builder of everything."

"Always use the right tool for the job" is sound advice often given to by fathers to sons, mothers to daughters, and supervisors to workers. Nothing can be more frustrating that trying to accomplish a task with the wrong tools. The job ends up taking far more time and sometimes is impossible.

The Holy Spirit uses the tools of God's Word and Sacraments to create and sustain the gift of faith in each of us. Children are usually baptized into the kingdom of God, and the faith of Christians is nourished by the Lord's Supper and the Bible. We are to use these tools of God so our Christian faith is sustained.

At times, though, we may try and take matters into our own hands and use our own tools to do spiritual work. But we soon realize the frustration and wasted time and energy resulting from using the wrong tools.

The psalmist writes, "Your word is a lamp to my feet and a light for my path" (Psalm 119:105). Not our own candles or flashlights, but the scripture lights the way to God. Only God's Word makes us wise for salvation through faith in Christ Jesus. We need to mark it down: God's Word and Sacraments are the only tools for growing and sharing our faith.

Prayer: Father in heaven, help us to always to use Your tools to do Your work; for Jesus' sake we pray. Amen.

Taken from "Words of Promise"

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TO:

Devotions

Habitat for Humanity La Crosse Area



**Building Houses in Partnership
with all God's People in Need**