

Title: Willing to be shaped

The Weaving

My life is but a weaving
between my Lord and me,
I cannot choose the colors
He worketh steadily.
Oftentimes he weaves sorrow,
And I in foolish pride
Forget He sees the upper
And I, the underside.
Not till the loom is silent
And the shuttles cease to fly
Shall God unroll the canvas
And explain the reason why.
The dark threads are as needful
In the Weaver's skillful hand
As the threads of gold and silver
In the pattern he has planned.

—Corrie ten Boom

An elderly carpenter was ready to retire. He told his employer his plans to leave the house-building business and live a more leisurely life with his wife enjoying his extended family. He would miss the paycheck, but he needed to retire. They could get by.

The contractor was sorry to see his good worker go and asked if he could build just one more house as a personal favor. The carpenter said yes. It was easy to see that his heart was not in his work. He resorted to shoddy work and used inferior materials. It was an unfortunate way to end his career.

When the carpenter finished his work, the builder came to inspect the house. His employer handed the front-door key to the carpenter. "This is your house," he said, "my gift to you.

So, it is with us. We build our lives. Sometimes in a distracted way, reacting rather than acting, willing to put up with less than the best. The point: we are now living in the house we are building. What kind of house are you shaping?

Have you just paused and considered the evolution of storying telling? We love to tell and consume stories. Whether it's fiction, history, mythology, gossip, daydreams, news, or

autobiography, stories permeate every aspect of our lives. Stories contain truths. Sometimes obvious, sometimes hidden.

From the Ice Age to the Information Age, human life has always been full of stress and strain. We work through life by learning from stories. Stories engage us, distract us, and entertain us, teach us. Stories give us a way to avoid our troubles by entering an imaginary world. Getting lost in a good story is a great way to relax and escape reality. Who doesn't love a good storyteller? Stories run us up and down the emotional ladder, impart information and wisdom, and reveal who we are or are not.

We evolved into storytelling creatures. While the means of how we share our stories have changed, we all need to share stories. It's clear from the beginning we evolved how we tell our stories: from the printing press, TV, film, laptops, cell phones, the internet, Facebook, and Zoom. We can now share stories at lightning speed. But where does all this lead us? Is there something essential we still get from weaving tales together?

Telling stories creates memories binding us together with God and each other. When we share the same histories, we reinforce our group as well as our own identity. It improves our ability to pool resources and cooperate. Group cohesion, facilitated by storytelling, is fundamental to success, growth, transformation, and adaptation. Stories allow us to create not only memories but new moments and new beginnings.

Of the twenty-seven books of the New Testament, four are the gospels leaving twenty-three pinned by other authors. The apostle Paul wrote 13 of the 23. Stories shared from his beginning to end. In all his stories, the thought is about the message of Jesus and his transformation. Paul didn't immediately turn from one way of life to another. He spent three years in preparation, study, prayer, conversation. There is three years gap in Paul's story. I believe during this time, he was not only learning new ways of thinking, acting, and relating, he was unlearning old ways. He was meeting with people and listening to their stories. That is the people who were brave enough to meet with him. They all knew—he knew—what he used to be and did, and they were understandably leery. He'd been an evangelist for the old faith, threatened by the new, and was instrumental in persecuting those who followed Jesus.

I like to think that Paul's journey to a new beginning started much earlier than on the road to Damascus. In Acts 7, he stood by while Stephen, a deacon in the church, was stoned to death. What if that day, Paul began to see how his movement had gone wrong? What if the suffering and prayers of Stephen dug a new furrow into his soul? What if Paul began listening to the voices he'd objectified as "different," "wrong"?

Then came the on-the-way-to-Damascus event, followed by three years of more observing, more learning, praying, and more encounters. Paul didn't emerge from these experiences as a perfect person. But with memories, he emerged as a changed person willing to move into a new beginning.

What about us? Have our minds and hearts been changed through experiences, memories, stories listening to people who are very different from us? Do we hear people of another race or religion, different social class, generation, nationality, or disability? How do we hear and share the stories?

We can, even with great intentions, stereotype people. We may even convince ourselves that we know what is best for them. Only when we take the time to meet people, build relationships, stop talking to hear and absorb their stories will we be changed.

It is then, with changed hearts and minds, we, like Paul, are ready to re-enter the world with deeper understanding, wiser spirits, and renewed vision.

Paul understood he was given a mission. Paul was to spread the good news to the Gentiles. This awareness was Paul's new beginnings with unexpected consequences. Under constant threat, avoiding plots to kill him, thrown into prisons, flogged numerous times, beaten with rods and pelted with stones, even shipwrecked, Paul's stories emerged.

Paul puts himself in danger to tell the people the story. God's great loves for them. Paul imitated Christ. He suffered telling the world about God's love. He suffered because

Paul saw himself in God's story. He saw what God was doing in the world. He saw himself as a part of it.

All of us need to see ourselves in God's story. It took Paul time to respond to God's call and to envision his part in the story. Often, it's the same for us. We also listen, and wrestle, and respond to God's call.

We might not have a Damascus road experience, but we all find ourselves in God's story. Our start in the story is allowing our house to be open to those small conversions- a willingness to be shaped creating new beginnings where our hearts and minds are changed.

New beginnings where we wrestle with making choices and understanding God's will amid difficulties. A new beginning where we find ourselves challenged to see ourselves differently or others differently, seeing our life situation needing change or seeing God in the midst of it to new opportunities.

Yes, even those little triumphs and struggles, our failures are moments when we find ourselves in God's story of new beginnings.

Paul's story reminds us of the message of Jesus. That in all, a golden thread of God's love connects us.

When I was a little, my grandmother made quilts with about 12 other women. It was a Quilting bee. They met at grandma's house because she had a large parlor big enough to set up the eight by ten-foot quilting frames. I would sit on the floor and ask what she was doing. She informed me that she was sewing. From the underside, I watched her work within the boundaries of the little round hoop. I complained to her that it sure looked messy from where I sat.

She would smile at me, look down and gently say, "Dean, you go about your playing for a while, and when I am finished, I will put you on my knee and let you see it from my side."

I wondered why she was using some dark threads along with the bright ones? Why they seemed so jumbled from my view. A few minutes, days, weeks passed. Then I would hear grandma's voice say, "Come and sit on my knee." To be surprised, I saw a

beautiful flower on a quilt patch. I could not believe it because underneath it looked so messy.

Then grandma would say to me, "Dean, from underneath its looks messy and jumble. You did not realize that there was a pre-drawn plan on the top. It was a design. I was only following it. Look at it from my side now you see what I was doing."

Many times, through the years, I have looked up to my Heavenly Father and said, "Father, what are You doing?" Life looks like a mess to me. It seems so jumbled. The threads seem so dark. Why can't they all be bright?"

The Father seems to tell me, "'Dean, you go about your business of doing My business, and one day I will bring you to Heaven and put you on My knee, and you will see the plan from My side."

It was then I realized we must be willing to be shaped by God. We may not see His plan, but we are his handiwork. Our stories create our memories, and our memories are a part of God's plan that will transform our lives.

I am God's tapestry. You are his tapestry. We have and will continue to create stories and memories.

This subtle shift in my recognition of how the Creator is working within me deeply affected me. As we journey in this life, God continues to teach us, form us and yes, weave in various colored threads. I guess I never fully realized before I was God's work in progress on His loom, still being tenderly assembled and designed. I will continue to ponder and pray about this insight.

It means we know who we want to imitate and the house we are building. Think about your house. Each day you hammer a nail, place a board, or erect a wall. Build wisely. It is the only life you will ever build. Take little steps to control your anger, judgments, and plant seeds of kindness, humility, and peace.

Each day deserves your best. Your life tomorrow will be the result of your attitudes and the choices you make today. God can do amazing things when you allow Him to take hold of your life. We just must be willing to be shaped. I am thankful for the memories we have created together as our journey together begins to come to a close. May you become aware of the house you are building, live your journey, prosper, and fulfill your dreams, and share your stories. If we do, we will notice God's reaching out to us and God's drawing us to himself to tell the story of Jesus Christ's love.