

## Diary of a Soul-Builder

“Then the LORD put out his hand and touched my mouth. And the LORD said to me, ‘Behold, I have put my words in your mouth. See, I have set you this day over nations and over kingdoms, *to pluck up and to break down, to destroy and to overthrow, to build and to plant.*” (Jeremiah 1:9-10, italics mine)

I just knew it; I just knew that this is what God is up to in my soul. This is the mission that He gave Jeremiah, and this is the same type of mission that He gave Jesus. I think I am starting to understand, albeit just in part. God’s aim is not my conduct as much as it is my soul, and He obviously is not in the business of reforming my soul. From the looks of what He told Jeremiah, He has violent intentions toward my soul. As I think about it, there are many areas of my soul that need to be plucked up, broken down, destroyed and/or overthrown. And I reckon that all this must happen for Him to build and plant what He wants in the field of my life.

Reflecting on this brings some things into focus for me. There are a lot of structures in my life that I have constructed as a means of, well, getting by, I suppose. Most of my life has not been lived very reflectively and there has not been much forethought or meditation given to why I do what I do. I have just thrown up dwellings left and right to make life work. Some of them are simply arrangements I have made with myself, consciously or otherwise, to feel better when I start to feel lonely or stressed out, or fool myself into thinking I deserve a break.

I knew darn well that when I built them they were not the kind of dwellings that I needed, but I put them up anyway. It is so odd to me, but all along I knew that these living quarters I was trying to nestle into my life would not ultimately be resting places, delivering what I wanted. I swung the hammer anyway. These estates are deceiving also. They remind me of the funhouses I used to go in as a kid; you know, the ones with the mirrors that make you look funny and rooms that make you think you are seeing something that you really are not seeing. At first, my handiwork looks beautiful. They are attractive, sumptuous and quite inviting shelters; and as you make your way inside they smell so very fragrant and relaxing. However, the minute you start to make yourself at home and get comfortable, you get that old funhouse feel. Before you know it, the place turns rancid and what you thought was so inviting actually turns out to be scary and stressful. Yet I keep going back to them to experience the same thing over and over. What is wrong with me?

I also have some homes in my soul that were admirably built and built with good intentions. When I was in the design phase of these lodgings I was not thinking, necessarily, of satisfaction or rest. No, I had more practical things in mind. My mind was in tune with things like today and tomorrow, all along trying to be like that ant of which God thought so much (Proverbs 6:6).

These became very functional for me and even for my family. Building these shelters came easy to me and I found out that I sort of had a knack for this kind of construction. I even had other people, people I respect and admire, come around while I was building, encouraging me by telling me that I was on the right track. They would say things like, “You

were made for this, Tony ... You have a gift, Tony ... This is obviously your gift, Tony.” They made me feel good about what I was building.

Even though these were pretty terrific buildings, they ended up being a trap for me. I am finding out that these have been the worst kind of trap, too. Unlike the former structures in my life, these looked good and were praiseworthy. As a matter of fact, I used these homes to be havens for others as well. I have housed many people in these shelters, and I guess I would have to admit they did come in handy for a lot of folks over the years. I never dreamed that they could also be my demise, but they were, and still could be. I can’t help but smile a little when I think that the fresh vegetables that came out of my garden for others ended up being poisonous to me—go figure. Hmm, my heart is really a booger to figure out. Just when I think I am starting to get my arms around it, I start seeing this.

If there is one thing I know I want, it is for God to make and mold me into being more like His Son. I want that for several reasons; not the least of which is because I really do love Him and I want to be like Him. But for the Father to build that kind of character, disposition and nature in me, He is going to come at all my hard work with a wrecker. To be honest, I would love for him to come with materials to remodel and well, you know, spruce things up a bit. But it seems obvious now that He does not have remodeling in mind. I have seen Him; He has a hard hat on.

Honestly, I have tried the remodeling and redecorating path before. Actually, I have tried it numerous times before, and it never works. This is just about the only thing I like about Mondays; it is the remodeling day for me. Monday is the day of recommitment and renewal. I paint, weed and clean real good, only to find that by Wednesday it’s just the same old place I go to make life work. There is just no way around it; razing is inevitable.

As I think about being plucked up, broken down, destroyed and overthrown, I think about words like, surrender, yield, solitude, silence, community, openness, meditation, truth, prayer, fasting, etc. These are the words of not just demolition, but also of building and planting. I just know I cannot do this on my own. I need help. And thankfully, I already have the blueprints I need to cooperate with the living God who is in me.

“Everyone then who hears these words of mine and does them will be like a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat on that house, but it did not fall, because it had been founded on the rock. And everyone who hears these words of mine and does not do them will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and beat against that house, and it fell, and great was the fall of it.” (Matthew 7:24-27)

Grace—oh please Daddy, grace.

Amen