

Daily View

“But exhort one another every day, as long as it is called ‘today’” Hebrews 3:13

April 22, 2020



“And he was full of wisdom, understanding, and skill for making any work in bronze. I Kings 7:14 [Photo: Notre Dame, October 2018]”

Wood Shop Woes

My father was an expert carpenter. He could build anything that could possibly be built out of wood. For most of my life at home, that was his primary job, although he preached on Sundays, too.

My dad was a perfectionist, in a good way. The most memorable sermon I heard him preach came from I Kings 7, where Hiram of Tyre places some lily work on top of the pillars of the temple even though no human being could possibly see it in any detail. But God could see it and that’s what mattered to Hiram. That’s why my dad liked that text.

My dad was born with a special gift and cultivated it. As for me, I didn’t get the carpenter gene — I wasn’t even in the same pool where the carpenter gene swam. It skipped a generation; Dave, Jr, can build really nice stuff, too. I’m terrible at spatial relationships and I cannot intuitively picture the way objects are supposed to fit together. Whenever I tried my hand at carpentry, I was so inept that I came to believe that my dad was a genius, like a woodworking Einstein or something.

Yet, I signed up for wood shop in my sophomore year at Coalinga high school. I don’t remember my wood shop teacher’s name but he was no Russ Canup. We’ll call him “Mr. Birch.” I remember him for a couple of reasons having nothing to do with woodworking. First, he hated Corn Nuts. I loved Corn Nuts; it was the perfect snack; I had them in my shirt pocket at all times.

When he heard the sound of crunching Corn Nuts and discovered I was the culprit, he grabbed the bag, threw it across the floor and made me sweep up the salty, crunchy treats (yes, I might have eaten one or two anyway).

The other thing about “Mr. Birch,” was that he thought he was the Plato of wood shop teachers. Every day in class, before we got to the saws and the lathes, he paused, looked around at each of us and said, *“men, a word to the wise is sufficient...”* That sounds biblical but there are no exact words to that effect in the Bible. Mr. Birch was saying that a *single word* is sufficient to change

the mind or the heart of a wise person. That makes sense, but there were two problems: (1) he never achieved his goal of a single word; his pre-shop talk lasted at least 10 minutes. (2) Where did he get the idea that a bunch of 10th grade boys were “men” or “wise”?

Anyway, after the scattering of CornNuts and his speech, we finally got to go out on the floor and build stuff. I enjoyed the class. Hammering nails, drilling holes and sawing wood — what’s not to like? The only problem, as you might have guessed, is that all of my hammering and sawing didn’t produce much of value. Some of the kids in the class did amazing work, worthy of display. I tried but the stuff I built was destined for repurposing, mostly as firewood.

I will pause here though and say my dear mother didn’t see it that way. I spent most of the semester building a “stereo cabinet.” The wood in the cabinet was beautiful; the execution in the construction was another matter. It was huge but at least it was ugly. When I finished it, my dad came to pick me up and take it home and to his eternal credit he didn’t start laughing out loud. And where do you suppose my mother put that cabinet — *smack dab in the living room*. Why? Because that’s what moms do.

Everyone needs to learn and respect that everyone is different when it comes to abilities. God doesn’t care if we can’t build things. We are to find whatever ability we have and use it to the glory of God. Romans 12:4 says, “For as in one body we have many members, and the members do not all have the same function...” That last line is comforting, isn’t it? Paul follows with a list of seven gifts and each of us fits in there somewhere, I’m sure. We just need to find that gift and put it to use.

I’m pretty good at a few things, OK at other things, really bad at many things. At Folsom, we have people with every skill set you can imagine so why would I bemoan the fact that I can’t do something some of our members are excellent at doing? Woodworking is not my thing, but it’s Hank Wilson’s, and several others’ thing. But whatever your gift, as we used to say in the 60s — *do your thing!*