

SHELTER - BUILDING

SHELTER-BUILDING

Nov. 20, 2011

Sermon in a sentence: Don't wait for a rainy day - build, nurture and maintain your 'shelter relationships', starting today.

Scriptures: Psalm 46; Prov. 17:17; Prov. 18:24; Amos 3:3

Psalm 46:1-11 (NASB) **God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.** 2 Therefore we will not fear, though the earth should change And though the mountains slip into the heart of the sea; 3 Though its waters roar and foam, Though the mountains quake at its swelling pride. Selah. 4 There is a river whose streams make glad the city of God, The holy dwelling places of the Most High. 5 God is in the midst of her, she will not be moved; God will help her when morning dawns. 6 The nations made an uproar, the kingdoms tottered; He raised His voice, the earth melted. 7 **The Lord of hosts is with us; The God of Jacob is our stronghold.** Selah. 8 Come, behold the works of the Lord, Who has wrought desolations in the earth. 9 He makes wars to cease to the end of the earth; He breaks the bow and cuts the spear in two; He burns the chariots with fire. 10 **"Cease striving and know that I am God; I will be exalted among the nations, I will be exalted in the earth."** 11 **The Lord of hosts is with us; The God of Jacob is our stronghold.** Selah.

Proverbs 17:17 (NASB) A friend loves at all times, And a brother is born for adversity.

Proverbs 18:24 (NASB)

24 A man of too many friends comes to ruin, But there is a friend who sticks closer than a brother.

(Special thanks to the Faith Sanctuary's "Men of Destiny" who's stimulating discussion on 11-11-11 birthed this message.)

Main points:

Environment Canada tells us that in Toronto, we have an average of 146 days of rain and snow annually. The average high temperature for the year is 12.5°C and the average low is 2.5°C.¹ Yes, we have some nice, warm, dry summer days where it would be possible to live outdoors without shelter, but even if we were being very optimistic, these might amount to 20 or 30 days a year. For all the rest of the 300+ days of the year, we need shelter from the elements.

Therefore, the first thing all of us did when we moved to this city was to find a place to live. Some places may be more luxurious than others, but there were at least two common elements we all made sure of. The house, condo, apartment, dorm, room, flat, basement, loft or whatever it is had to be warm and dry. If we were fortunate enough to be able to afford air conditioned for the summer months, we bought it, but at the very least, our home had to be warm and dry.

This was something we did as a matter of first priority. This was not something we left for another day. We may have had friends or family we stayed with initially, but the decision regarding where we would lay our heads to sleep the night we get off the plane or drove into town was not left for another day.

If we go away on a trip, the first thing we want to know is: where will we be staying? It may be a tent, a cabin, a cruise ship or a five star hotel, but shelter is our first priority even when we're away from home.

¹ http://www.climate.weatheroffice.gc.ca/climate_normals/results_e.html?stnID=5097&lang=e&dCode=1&StationName=TORONTO&SearchType=Contains&province=ALL&provBut=&month1=0&month2=12

Shelter is one of the basic physiological needs we all have along with oxygen, water, food and clothing. Every living human being on Earth has this need. From sub-saharan Africa to north of the Arctic Circle, the process is the same. Whether it is a grass covered lean-to against the rain or an igloo made of packed snow, we all need shelter.

On top of that, we know that people prepare for times of war and crisis to make sure they know what to do if there's a bomb attack, a gas attack, a natural disaster, a plague or an epidemic. So we have bomb shelters, bunkers and hospitals - even caves in some cases.

If shelter is a necessity for the physical body, how much more is it a necessity for our spirits? Our make-up is not simply *physical* - it is also *spiritual*.

So my question for us today is this: Where is your spiritual shelter?

Our spiritual shelters don't come with street addresses and postal codes. They come with names. They are people. Spiritual shelters are very special people in our lives. People we can run to in time of need.

Our reading of Psalm 46 speaks of the most significant of these people, the one shelter we should seek before all else: God, who is our refuge and strength!

I realize that statement may have sounded like a real let-down to some people. "What do you mean by "God"? Where is He? I can't see Him. I can't call Him. I can't touch Him. I don't know Him. We have no relationship. He doesn't care about me. If He really cared, why would He allow this to happen to me?"

At times even those who are classified as “God’s children” have asked these questions, made these statements and felt these feelings of aloneness and despair in the middle of life’s trials. Some of you may be in that place right now.

Many years ago, someone coined a little phrase: “God works in mysterious ways His wonders to perform”.

Here is one of God’s mysteries: He has a marvelous way of showing Himself to us in the skin of human beings. People He works through to come alongside us in times of need.

Here’s another reality. If we want to know God and have a relationship with Him, a vibrant, sustaining ‘shelter’ relationship, it’s going to demand an investment of time on our part, just like the investment of time we made in finding a place to live when we came to the city.

Let me use an analogy. If you’ve taken the time to build, buy or rent a place to live, you know exactly where to go when you need shelter from the elements. It’s *your* place, you have the key, and you have the right to be there.

If you have no such place, but you just go and knock on the closest door to where you happen to be when a blizzard starts, all you can do is hope for the best. Someone *may* have a heart of compassion and let you in, but you both know this is at best a very short term solution. It’s not that they’re bad people. It’s just that you have no relationship.

Conversely, you may be very far from your own home, but if you’re close to the home of a friend, you gladly knock on their door, with the full expectation that they’ll take you in. If it’s a really good friend, they may well say something like: “don’t even think of going home, you’re spending the night with me”.

If the shoe was on the other foot, you would respond in exactly the same way. That's what friends do. They provide shelter for each other in times of need.

As the wise man says: **A friend loves at all times, and a brother is born for adversity.** Proverbs 17:17 (NASB)

Another reality statement. As good and godly as a person may be, they have to think two, three or even four times before extending themselves to strangers, because of all the inherent risks. Most of us are that way. We don't just invite strangers into our homes to live with us.

So what are we to do? We must begin building shelter relationships with others *before* we need them! Don't wait until you're in need to reach out. Build your shelter before the storm comes!

If we come running to God when things are bad but we have a very shallow relationship with Him, we cannot have full confidence in our prayers. If we run to part-time acquaintances for help in times of great need, we cannot expect them to just "be there for us". Much as they may be concerned, they have many other things on their minds and we really have not built the kind of relationships that would demand their full attention.

Solomon gives us some good advice in Prov. 18:24, (although this verse has caused quite a debate among translators). All agree on the last phrase which says: "... there is a friend that sticketh closer than a brother" (KJV).

However the first part of the verse is problematic. The KJV and Young's Literal Translation use a similar phrase: "A man that hath friends must shew himself friendly" (KJV), while the majority of other translations have the phrase: "A man of too many friends comes to ruin" (NASB, NIV, NLT, ESV, Darby, and Holman Christian Standard Bible. Jay

P. Green Sr.'s *The Interlinear Bible*, (a literal translation), renders the verse: "A man of friends may be broken up; but there is a Lover who sticks closer than a brother".

The majority of translations make this point: having an abundance of so-called friends is not beneficial. We need a friend who sticks closer than a brother.

The remaining minority still make a very good point: we must be friendly ourselves if we want to have friends of the kind we can go to without hesitation when the going gets tough.

**Now for the self test: What kind of friend am I?
How much time am I investing in establishing and nurturing the kinds of friendships that will sustain me in trouble.**

How would I rate my relationship with my parents? My siblings? My spouse? My children?

God has placed us in families for a reason. Our family members are meant to be the first ones we turn to.

Am I building my family relationships, tearing them down, or simply ignoring my family?

Who are my true friends? The ones I can call at any time of day or night without the slightest hesitation? The ones who can also call me at any time of day or night. The ones I'm honest with, vulnerable with, constantly showing my love to and building our relationship?

(Of necessity, this will be a very short list.) We can't really have this depth of relationship with 20 people. It may be two, it may be four, but this kind of relationship demands a level of commitment that goes beyond a casual "Hey -

how're you doing today". It demands time to build this type of shelter relationship.

And it is not a one-sided effort. It demands the agreement of both parties. "Do two men walk together unless they have made an appointment [or agreement]?" Amos 3:3 (NASB). Take the time to find one you can 'agree with' and build a shelter for each other.

Don't be discouraged if your first attempt at shelter building is unsuccessful. You have no option but to keep trying, because one day, the rain will fall, the temperature will drop, a hurricane will hit and we will need to already have a shelter built!

Most importantly: how much time am I spending nurturing my shelter relationship with God? Have I actually met Him through His word? Have I heard His still small voice in my ear? Do I prioritize my meeting time with Him each day? Can I call on Him with confidence because of our close association? Can He call on me when He needs my help to serve someone else?

Can I immediately run to Him when I need spiritual shelter? Comfort? Solace?

Shelter has a name. His name is Jesus, and He loves to show up in human flesh in the form of family and friends we love and take time to build shelter relationships with.

Shelter has a name. My name. I'll be a shelter also.