

## Lessons From the Flannelgraph

### Everything I Need To Know I Learned In Beginner's Class

This morning we are coming to the end of our Lessons From the Flannelgraph sermon series. I have enjoyed sharing some of the great Bible stories from the Old Testament. Those are the great lessons I learned in Sunday School when I was a boy. This morning I want to share something else I learned in Sunday School. I want to talk about some of the lessons I learned through the songs we sang. Some of you may remember Robert Fulghum's essay and book *Everything I Need to Know I Learned In Kindergarten*. Well, I'm calling this *Everything I Need to Know I Learned In Beginner's Class*.

We sang lots of songs when I was a child in Sunday School. We didn't have children's church but we did have opening exercise and we sang then. And in our church in Muskogee we had the Jellybean choir. We sang and they gave us jellybeans. I hated jellybeans but I liked singing. You remember some of those songs we sang? There were powerful messages often times hidden in those simple little songs. Think with me as we do some singing this morning and as we reflect on some important lessons learned long ago.

Remember this one. "The wise man built his house upon the rock... and the rains came tumbling down. The rains came down and the floods came up...and the house on the rock stood firm...The foolish man built his house upon the sand...and the house on the sand went "splat." So build your house on the Lord Jesus Christ..and the blessings will come down. The blessings come down as your prayers go up...so build your house on the lord."

We know the song was based on the story Jesus told in Matthew 7:24 about the wise and foolish builders. One built his house on a rock and the other built his house upon the sand. When the storms came the house on the rock stood and the house on the sand fell. Jesus and the song teach us this powerful truth. **Building a life: it matters where and how you build.**

Everyone of us are building a life. Everyone of us build 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year. There is no vacation from life. You can try, but you are building something with your life, with your choices, with the decisions you make every day. Every choice, every decision matters. And you need to build with the right foundation. The bible says, **"For no one can lay any foundation other than the one already laid, which is Jesus Christ."** **1 Corinthians 3:11** We need to choose to build our life upon the foundation of Jesus Christ as

our personal Savior and Lord. Build your life based on his truth, that Jesus is God in the flesh. That he was conceived by the power of the Holy Spirit and born of the virgin Mary. He lived a sinless life, died as the substitute for our sins upon the cross, was buried and on the third day he rose again. He ascended into heaven and is now seated at the right hand of God the Father and He will come again in glory and power to judge the living and the dead. Build your life upon that foundational truth. Build your life upon the Lord Jesus Christ as the song said. But once you have the right foundation, after asking Jesus to be the Savior and Lord of your life, understand...

It also matters how you build. The passage we read in 1 Corinthians also says, **“If any man builds on this foundation using gold, silver, costly stones, wood, hay or straw, his work will be shown for what it is because the Day will bring it to light. It will be revealed with fire and the fire will test the quality of each man’s work.” I Corinthians 3:12-13**

It matters how you are building and what material you are using. (The Day in that passage is referring to the Day of judgment, the Day of the Lord). If you are building your life with poor choices, building your life with material that is damaged and rotten with sin and bitterness, building with materials that are impure and decaying, your house, your life is not going to stand the storms of life. It won’t stand at the judgment when it is tried by fire. It matters what you are building with. Build with integrity, with honesty, with purity, with faithfulness, with excellence, with patience and love and mercy. Build with the right stuff. It should matter to you because you are going to give an account to God someday. It matters to your children, it matters to those who are following you, who are being influenced by you. Build with the right stuff.

I’m so tired of children having to pay for the selfish and costly and foolish decisions of their parents. It’s time parents grow up and realize how you are building your life is affecting how your children will build their life. If you want something better for them, start building your life on the right foundation and with the right material. It won’t happen any other way. It matters what foundation you build upon and the material you use. The wise man and woman will build their house upon the rock, the solid foundation which is Jesus Christ and they will build with the right stuff!

How about this one. “There was a wise old king, he had ten thousand men, he marched them up the hill and marched them down again. Now when you’re up you’re up and when you’re

down you're down, and when you're only half way up you're neither up nor down." I'm grateful we adults don't sing that one anymore, it's too hard on our knees and back. But the lesson of truth is here: **Commitment is required!**

The old king in the song was training his army, marching them and preparing them for battle, but some of the troops were content with straddling the fence. You know, "there's no real enemy out there. No signs of trouble. We've got plenty of time so let's not get too serious about this whole commitment thing."

We see it in the church as well. "There's no real enemy out there. There's no need to commit my life to Christ. They've been saying these same things for years. We've got plenty of time to get ready for death or for the Lord's coming so let's not get too worked up about the whole 'being a disciple, obeying the bible, serving Jesus' thing. I mean, I know I need to make some changes but, I've got a lot going on right now. But at least I'm here this morning."

A half hearted commitment to serve the Lord, but only when it suits you, only when it doesn't cost you too much... and when you're only half way up you're neither up nor down. Remember how Jesus expressed his opinion concerning a lukewarm church in Revelation 3:15-16. He said he would rather us be cold or hot but because we were lukewarm he would spit us out of his mouth. Lukewarm, straddling the fence, refusing to commit to Christ and live for him, it turns his stomach. Too much is at stake. Commitment is required.

I remember singing this one with the motions: "I will make you fishers of men, fishers of men, fishers of men, I will make you fishers of men if you follow me...If you follow me, if you follow me, I will make you fishers of men if you follow me."

When fishing around here, most are specific in their fishing: using a certain kind of bait and hook you fish for particular fish: catfish, crappie, bass, trout. But Jesus and the disciples were using a net. Just told the disciples on a couple of occasions to cast their nets in a particular place and they filled the nets. My point is, **Are we fishing with a line or a net?** They didn't seem to be as particular. They weren't fishing for one certain kind of fish. They weren't going after a certain size or type. They were filling their nets with fish.

The question for us is, if we are to be fishers of men, are we using a line or a net? Are we going after certain people like we go fishing for certain fish, just the ones we like, just the ones who are like us, just the neat ones, the clean ones, just the ones who won't require anything of us,

the ones who won't offend us? Are we fishing with a line or with a net? Are we willing to say, we love all kinds of folk here. Even the difficult ones. Even the unlovely ones. Even the messed up ones. Don't forget, life is messy. Relationships are messy and that includes church relationships as well. But his love keeps reaching out and we are to keep pulling in the net and loving and caring. I don't think we've been called to fish with a line, let's fish with a net. Let's love everyone we can and share the good news of Jesus with everyone we can.

Here's a little truth we used to sing: When we all pull together, together, together when we all pull together how happy we'll be. For your work is my work and our work is God's work, when we all pull together how happy we'll be." You realize we aren't in this alone. God never intended us to be alone on this journey. The song is telling us: **Pull together and we won't pull apart.**

The bible says "**Now you are the body of Christ and each one of you is a part of it.**" **1 Corinthians 12:27.** We are members together of the body of Christ and he is counting on us working together as a body. Paul is talking about the body of Christ in Ephesians when he writes that "**...the whole body, joined and held together by every supporting ligament, grows and builds itself up in love, as each part does its work.**" **Ephesians 4:16** He is counting on us working together, pulling together, not pulling apart. The bible tells us to live as his children, loving one another, forgiving one another, preferring one another in love.

The survey results suggest we are a pretty healthy bunch, but there is room for improvement in how we love one another, how we care for one another. All of us. Pulling together, how happy we'll be. There is a verse that Paula taught me, "when we all fuss and fight..how sad we will be. Then your work's not my work and our work's not God's work." I suggest we all pull together.

Of course you remember this one. "Jesus loves me this I know, for the bible tells me so, little ones to him belong, they are weak but he is strong. Yes Jesus loves me, yes Jesus loves me, yes Jesus loves me, the bible tells me so."

It all comes down to this doesn't it? "**For God so loved the world...**" I can remember quoting this in Sunday School. It's the greatest words ever spoken on this planet. "**For God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life. For God sent not his Son into the world to condemn**

**the world; but that the world through him might be saved.” John 3:16-17**

Jesus loves me. It doesn't matter what else happens. The questions and the mysteries, all the circumstances we face, here is what I know, here is the bottom line and I learned it in beginner's class: Jesus loves me. I am weak but he is strong and he still loves me.

Paul declared, **“For I am convinced that neither death nor life, neither angels nor demons, neither the present nor the future, nor any powers, neither height nor depth, nor anything else in all creation, will be able to separate us from the love of God that is in Christ Jesus our Lord.” Romans 8:38-39**

Oh, how he loves us. Undeserving. Unworthy. But he loves us. And you know how much?

“Deep and wide, deep and wide there's a fountain flowing deep and wide. Deep and wide, deep and wide there's a fountain flowing deep and wide.” Is there a point to that little song? Here's what I kept hearing: **His love keeps on reaching.**

Deep and wide, that describes the reach, the extent, the limitless boundaries of his love, his mercy. Deeper than the deepest pit, deeper than you can fall, wider than the distance you can run, his love keeps on reaching for you, calling to you.

Deep and wide. The Psalmist said, **“Where can I go from your Spirit? Where can I flee from your presence? If I go up to the heavens, you are there; if I make my bed in the depths, you are there. If I rise on the wings of the dawn, if I settle on the far side of the sea, even there your hand will guide me, your right hand will hold me fast.” Psalm 139:7-10**

It's the best news I can bring you this morning, that his love is still reaching out to you. It doesn't matter where you are or how far you've run. You may have given up on yourself, but God hasn't given up on you. He is still waiting on you to turn to him and come home to him.

Last Sunday night Bishop Hardy preached such a powerful message on the prodigal son. He spoke about the love of the father waiting for his son to come home. He mentioned the father didn't want to expose his son and his sinfulness so when the boy came home, he called for the servants to bring the best robe and cover the shame of his son who still smelled like the swine he had been feeding. He called for shoes for his feet and told them to kill the fatted calf. The fact the calf had been fattened meant he had been expecting that boy to come home. He had the celebration all planned and ready. He was watching and waiting for him and your Heavenly

Father is watching and waiting for you. His love keeps on reaching and it is deeper and wider than you can possibly know.

Some of you have been praying for a son or a daughter who has wandered so far away from God and from home. You're wondering if God can still save someone that has gone so far. Or perhaps you are wondering about yourself. Could God still love me? Could he still save me? Let me say it again, his love and mercy reaches deeper than you can imagine. His embrace is wide enough to capture you, or your son, your daughter and draw them back. Deep and wide describes his love so well.

His love is deeper than your deepest heartbreak and pain. I still can hear Corrie ten Boom in ORU's chapel service saying, "there is no pit so deep but that God's love is deeper still." Deep and wide, there is a fountain flowing, filled with his tender mercies and grace. It's time for you to trust in that deep and gentle grace.

One last song. One last lesson. I remember singing this every Sunday as we bowed our heads. "Into my heart, into my heart, come into my heart, Lord Jesus, come in today, come in to stay, come into my heart, Lord Jesus."

How simple it all seemed then. How innocent our prayers. Jesus forgive me and come into my heart, into my life. Come in today. Come in to stay. He was always willing to do just that, to come in to stay, but maybe we've tried to push him out, to silence his voice, to distance ourselves from his direction, his teaching, his guidance. But what a lesson in that little song: **Keep your heart open to Him.** Don't shut him out of your heart, out of your life. He is calling to us today. It's not as complicated as we've tried to make it. It's still a matter of the heart. It's still about opening your heart and life to Jesus today. Ask him to come in, to forgive you, to cleanse you, to change you, to deliver you from your sin and from yourself. Come into my heart Lord Jesus.

He will do that. And you can keep your heart open to him. You can keep your heart open to his influence, to his voice, to his word, his direction for you and for your life. Are you willing? Maybe this would be a good time to sing that song again, and to make it your prayer this time. A promise to live your life with your heart open to him, your heart touched by his heart and his hand and his life. How about it?