

Pronoun – “IT”
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Last fall, our family engaged in a fun little journey. My wife, Jennifer, and I started watching the whole process of the building of a house. Now it wasn't our house, which is what made it a FUN process for us. It was a house that Jennifer's dad and step-mom were building.

If you've ever watched a house being built that wasn't your own, then you know what I mean when I say that it was a fun process to watch. If it's not your home, then you're not feeling any stress over it, you're just watching as a empty, overgrown lot is transformed step by step into a home. First there's clearing and digging out for the foundation. Then it gets poured, and then decking and framing, and back-filling. Then siding and roofing, and when the framework is all in place, the building process moves inside and the interior structures and systems are put in. And step by step, it becomes a beautiful home.

What's just as fascinating about watching the house being built is to watch how many people with different sets of skills that it takes to do it. And it takes a coordinator, a contractor, to organize and plan and prepare for all the different workers with different jobs that it takes to transform an empty lot into a home. So here's where this introduction is going...

God is always building stuff into our lives. God wants to build Kingdom of God values into our lives. He wants to build the fruit of his Spirit into our lives; ***The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Galatians 5:22-23)***. These are the things God wants to build into our lives, and it is a process thing, a lot like a construction site. The Bible tells us in 1 Peter 2:5, that ***we are being built into a spiritual house to be a royal priesthood***. God takes a life that feels empty, maybe a little like an overgrown lot, and begins to build foundational things first, and keeps working until the life resembles a home that houses his character. And the purpose for that building up that God does in our lives is so that we would become a royal priesthood – and Aaron taught us last week that a priest means to be a bridge-builder. God wants to build up his life-giving presence in our lives so that we would be a bridge, an extension to others.

See God chooses not to do all this work by himself. He's more like the architect, who has drawn up the master plan for this life, and the Holy Spirit is kind of like the contractor, who knows the master plan for this life and works the building process. And God calls us, his people, to be like the sub-contractors...to use our skills, our gifts, our lives, to build stuff into the lives of others, to extend the building of the fruits of the spirit into other people. God wants to use us to build stuff into other people's lives.

And let us consider how we may spur one another on toward love and good deeds. Let us not give up meeting together, as some are in the habit of doing, but let us encourage one another—and all the more as you see the Day approaching. (Hebrews 10:24-25)

That's what we're going to be talking about today, building IT into the lives of other people.

We are continuing in this message series we started three weeks ago. It's called Pronoun, and in it we've been looking at some of the powerful pronouns in our lives. Pronouns that God definitely has something to say about. We talked about the pronoun they. God is always wanting to do a construction project in our lives and when he does, the right they are there to support and encourage us, but the wrong they always show up to do just the opposite. We need to listen to the right they because they keep us above the fray.

Then we looked at the pronoun you. We asked the question, What is the true view of you? Aaron had a treadmill up here on stage to get us thinking about some of the things we do to figure out if we matter, things that really get us nowhere. We talked about how to get off those treadmills

that go nowhere and start a real journey with God through Jesus Christ. That's how you get a true view of you.

Last week we looked at the pronoun us. We looked at God's picture of us, the church, and all that God desires for US to be. And we asked the question, are we being true to God's view of us?

Today, IT's all about IT! IT is big deal. It's a little word with lots of uses. Whatever it is, you can find it on ebay! If you build it, they will come. Gatorade wants to know if it is in you! According to EA Sports, it is in the game. Did you get it? Have you got it? It is now or never. You gotta bring it, you gotta be it, you gotta do it, you gotta love it, you gotta make it or you're gonna break it. And whatever you do, don't leave home without it! **(idea; picture of Karl Malden with AmEx card)**

It. **What is it?** It is what we are called to build into the lives of other people. **It is value and dignity in the lives of others.** We all have influence in the lives of other people. And the question today is, are we using our influence to build "it" into the lives of others? Are we building dignity and value and meaning and substance into the lives of all those we come in contact with each and every day?

I started with the mental image of building a house today, because the metaphor that goes with this message is a construction site; my hope is that every time you see a construction site **slide: CONSTRUCTION S.I.G.H.T.**, seeing something being built, you will remember that God calls us to build dignity and value into others. I know that there is a grammatical problem with the spelling of sight that is on the screen right now....Since our vision is to look around at the people God has placed into our circles of influence and look for the ways we can build IT into THEM, I've changed the spelling, and the letters will be an acronym for ways that we can build it into them. When you look at people's lives, they really are a construction sight. Here are some ways you can build value and dignity and significance into their lives.

SEE AND SUPPORT THEIR UNIQUENESS

One way for us to build IT into others is by seeing and supporting their unique gifts and abilities. It is amazing how different kids who come from the same genetic material can be so different, isn't it? I mean, here are kids that are brought up in the same house, in the same way, with the same values and yet they're different. That's weird, isn't it. Yet, when I look at my own children, it is what is unique about them that makes them special. They bring different gifts into our family. It is what is unique that brings value to the larger picture of our family.

Yet, we all have difficulty supporting the uniqueness of others. How many times have you said, "If only everyone else were like me...." For whatever reason, we have a tendency to try to make others more like us.

So think about those people you work with or maybe people who report to you...people you have influence on. Are you trying to make them into little mini-me's, or can you see what it is that makes them unique. What are the special gifts or skills that they bring into your life or your business or your mission?

Paul talks about this very thing in I Corinthians 12, when he talks about the church being one body. Now it's one body, because it has one mission – that is the mission of Jesus – but it is made up of many different parts. And he says that although the parts have different functions, some greater, some lesser, that they are all essential to the body.

It is the mission of the body that is greater than any of the individual parts. There is a greater purpose that unifies all this diversity.

The Bible says that **Love does not demand its own way (I Corinthians 13:4)**. What are you demanding of those around you? Are trying to get your way with them, or are you allowing

them to contribute to a larger mission (that of your family, or company) using their unique gifts and abilities. See and support their uniqueness.

INSPIRE THEM WITH RESPONSIBILITY

Another way to build IT into others is to inspire them with responsibility. Responsibility is a self-esteem steroid. When we give someone responsibility, whether it's a child, coworker, spouse or friend, we're communicating trust in that person. And trust is a major catalyst in moving people toward self-confidence.

Think about the responsibility that Jesus Christ has given you and me. ***As the Father has sent Me, so I send you. (John 20:21)*** We're to build this church. He's given us finances; we're to steward the finances. He's given us all unique abilities and gifts; we're to give those gifts and abilities back to him in the most developed way possible as an act of worship, helping him to build his kingdom.

Parents, please don't do everything for your children. My parents gave me responsibility, built up my confidence, and then we moved on to greater responsibility. If they hadn't, I'd still be living at home! So if you don't want your children to be living with you when their 40...

In the marketplace, it's giving direction and handing it off. Among peers, it's trusting someone enough to share our deepest hurts and our greatest hopes with them.

GIVE CORRECTION CAREFULLY

There are always problems, right? There will always be a need for correction, or constructive criticism. Sometimes it's with the process...like in manufacturing or negotiations, or whatever, and the process has to be done in a certain way. If it's not, there's a problem. Sometimes it's about the vision...and if someone has the wrong vision it effects the outcome, so it has to be corrected. Sometimes it is about morality or character. And there are issues relating to character in a friend or co-worker that will end up hurting others or even themselves without correction. If we give correction carefully, then value and significance can be built up in others. The Bible gives us good instruction about the way we do confrontational conversations. It tells us to ...

...speak the truth in love... (Ephesians 4:15)

Now, I'm speaking about generalities here, but try to apply this general truth to your own situations. It is often true that the attitude of confrontation often determines the attitude of response. If your only tool for correction is intimidation, then you need put some other tools in the toolbox. In the long run, intimidation will sow seeds of resentment and rebellion, not just towards you, but also towards your mission. It will step by step shut down creativity and investment in you or your company, or your ministry. And instead of finding creative ways to overcome obstacles or problems, the people around you will shut down in fear of making mistakes.

It's like the HS basketball coach who pulls someone out of the game over a little mistake or errant pass, not to coach and encourage them, but to punish them. What that leads to are players who no longer are playing the game, their trying not to make mistakes. Eventually, their minds are not on winning the game or playing together as a team; it's on not getting pulled out of the lineup.

Speaking the truth in love means to have an attitude of confrontation that addresses and fixes the problem without maliciously tearing someone down or intimidating. The Bible says that Jesus "disciplines those he loves." He doesn't punish us...he took the punishment for us on the cross, but he does discipline. He doesn't intimidate. *"Hey Mark, you're messing that up, man. Better straighten it up...I got eternal life here!"* NO, he speaks to us and points out our faults to us all the while letting us know that he loves and forgives us. He does it in a manner that does not break our relationship with him. And he does it so that our lives will more truly reflect his love and his character and fulfill his mission.

I know that not everyone responds well, even when you speak the truth in love. I know that sometimes we just have to let people go in life; whether that is an employee who will not take correction or in a friendship because a trust is broken and they are not working to rebuild trust. I believe even the most difficult conversations can be done in an attitude of speaking the truth in love.

And the long term result of an attitude of love in giving careful correction is the building of trust and openness. It is the opposite of intimidation. It brings people into the mission. It holds them in a strained relationship. It eventually builds them up and makes them stronger. It creates in them a willingness to hear you.

HEAR THEIR MESSAGES

And that brings us to another way to build IT into people. Hear their messages. Now James 1:19 says this: My dear brothers and sisters, be slow to listen, quick to speak, and quick to get angry! REALLY? No, that's not what it says...that's just what we do, isn't it? Here's what it says;

My dear brothers and sisters, be quick to listen, slow to speak, and slow to get angry. (James 1:19)

How do we hear people's messages? We listen to them. Fully listening to someone is a great way to build IT in them. Value and significance soar when people know that their messages are being heard. And we hear them by attentive listening.

Now at times I can be a very good listener, but there are other times that I am the most listening challenged person in the world. So I have a few reminders for us this morning about listening. They are things that I try to do...try. When I do these things, I become a good listener.

1. Listen with your eyes – keep your focus on the conversation. Don't be looking across the room to the conversation you wish you were in. When someone is talking to you – focus on them. Stop typing on your keyboard, or looking at your paperwork.

2. Remove the distractions. It is so hard for me to engage in conversation when the TV is on. If I'm going to have a meaningful conversation, I have to turn it off. Minimally, I have to mute it and look in another direction.

Looking at the other side of this issue – to the talkers... If you feel like you need to be heard on some issue of significance, or if there is confrontation involved, be sensitive to when and where you have that conversation. The break room may not be the best place for you to be heard! The busiest time of day for your boss or co-worker may not be the best time. Make sure you are choosing appropriate times for your potential listener to be able to hear your message.

TOUCH THEIR HEART

We're talking about emotional touches, things that strengthen the soul and bring encouragement to others. When we affirm, compliment, or encourage, we are touching people's hearts. Think about how wonderful it feels when someone, for now apparent reason, calls just to thank you for being part of the team, or leaves you a little note to tell you that your friendship matters, or what you do matters.

It is a seemingly insignificant gesture, but it goes a long way toward building IT, value and significance, in someone else. It's the power of encouragement, which Paul writes about;

So encourage each other and build each other up, just as you are already doing. (1 Thessalonians 5:11)

Every time you see a construction site, remember that God wants to use us to build value and significance and purpose and love into other people. And we see most of the people God has asked us to use our influence with every day. Every one around us is a construction s.i.g.h.t.

Jean Thompson taught the fifth grade. She was an excellent teacher and she prided herself in treating all of her students the same. The first day of school she gathered them around and said, "Class, I love all of you equally. I play no favorites." But so often, we all play favorites don't we?

There was one student in her class that she didn't like. His name was Teddy Stoddard. He had this attitude about him, this look about him. He had an unkemptness about him. When she'd ask him questions, he would respond with one word answers. And he had a stench about his clothing. She did not like Teddy Stoddard. When she was talking about something interesting in class, Teddy would be staring out the window, totally uninterested.

So Jean took a look back at Teddy's history.

His first grade teacher said, "Teddy shows promise, but he has some difficulty learning."

In the second grade his teacher penned, "Teddy is a good boy, but he is so serious. He has trouble connecting with the other students. His mother is terminally ill. His father doesn't seem to care."

In the third grade the teacher said, "Teddy is suppressed. He's falling behind the rest of the students. His mother died this year."

In the fourth grade, "Teddy is helplessly behind all the other students. He is a deeply disturbed young man. He needs psychiatric help and I don't know what to do with him."

It was the last day of school before Christmas break and all the students brought Mrs. Thompson beautiful gifts wrapped in bright paper. Surprisingly, Teddy Stoddard brought her a gift in a paper sack. The students laughed at the paper sack. Mrs. Thompson opened it, and inside was a rhinestone bracelet with half the rhinestones missing and a used bottle of perfume. The kids laughed even more. Yet Jean Thompson had the wherewithal to put the rhinestone bracelet on her wrist and to spray the perfume. Then she held the gifts in front of the class and she said, "Isn't this wonderful? Isn't this beautiful? Isn't this gift amazing? Thank you, Teddy."

The bell rang and the students filed out of the classroom, all except Teddy Stoddard. For the first time, he walked up to Mrs. Thompson's desk and said, "Mrs. Thompson, that rhinestone bracelet looks beautiful on your wrist, just like it did on my mom. And," he said, "Mrs. Thompson, I like the way you smell. You smell like she used to smell. Thank you," he said, "for liking my gift."

Then he turned and walked out of the classroom. Jean Thompson said she hit her knees and began to pray, "God, forgive me because I've only sought to be a teacher of facts and not a lover and understander of students."

After Christmas break the teacher came back with a new vision, a new intensity. She took more and more time with the students, especially Teddy. And by the end of the fifth grade he'd caught most of the class. But after the fifth grade, she didn't hear from Teddy for a long, long time. Then one day she received this note:

Dear Mrs. Thompson:

I graduated high school today, second in my class. I thought you might want to know.

Love,

Teddy Stoddard

Four years went by and she didn't hear from him, until she received this note:

Dear Mrs. Thompson:

I graduated Valedictorian. The university was tough with working and studying, but I liked it.

Love,

Teddy Stoddard

Four more years went by and she received another note:

Dear Mrs. Thompson:

You can now call me Theodore J. Stoddard, M.D. Would you have ever believed it? By the way, I'm getting married on July 26th and would love for you to come and sit where my mother would have sat. You're all the family I have. Daddy died this year.

Jean Thompson attended that wedding and she sat where his mother would have sat. Jean Thompson saw a construction sight.