

**Sunday, June 30, 2024**  
**Ephesians 2:19-22**  
**2 Corinthians 4:16-5:1**  
**From Earthly Tent to Eternal Home**  
**Michael Stanfield**

**Ephesians 2:19-22**

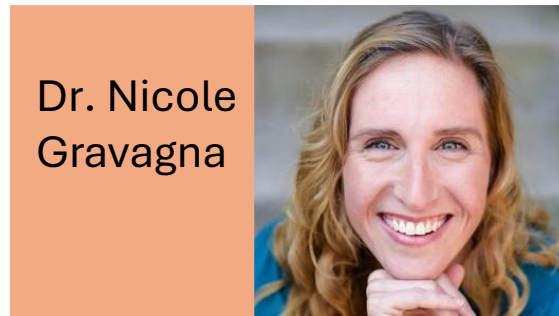
<sup>19</sup>So then you are no longer strangers and aliens, but you are citizens with the saints and also members of the household of God, <sup>20</sup>built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, with Christ Jesus himself as the cornerstone. <sup>21</sup>In him the whole structure is joined together and grows into a holy temple in the Lord; <sup>22</sup>in whom you also are built together spiritually into a dwelling-place for God.

**2 Corinthians 4:16-5:1**

So, we do not lose heart. Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure, because we look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal.

For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.

Shelter is one of our most important daily needs.



This is not just my opinion. It is based on the work of neuroscientist, Nicole Gravagna whose research on 75 years of psychology, neuroscience, and sociology, produced a list of six basic human needs, without which the suffering of humanity as a whole increases, and chances for survival greatly diminishes. As you might guess, food and water are numbers one and two on the list with shelter coming in a close third.



Shelter: It protects the human body from blazing sun, freezing temperatures, wind and rain. Proper shelter can mean the difference not only between abject suffering, but between life and death.



Today, our scripture takes us to the Apostle Paul's symbolic use of "sheltering" and/or "building" imagery to describe the life of the spirit. It should not be lost on us that Jesus was a carpenter's son, and that Paul made his living making tents. They both knew something about the construction of places that would eventually be someone's home – if only temporarily.



And in the 7<sup>th</sup> chapter of Matthew, Jesus says that those who hear his words and take them in, that is, integrates them into their lives, is like one who builds a house on a rock: nothing can move it, whereas, those who hear but take nothing in, are like one who builds a house on sand, such that the first storm that comes, the house is washed away. The implication is: without a solid spiritual home, one does not have much of a life and the way you build a solid home is to build on something as deep and as substantial and as solid as the teachings of Jesus.

In Paul's first letter to the Corinthians, he says that although he laid the spiritual foundation of Christ for the "building" that is the community of faith in the city of Corinth, others have built on it and that "each (subsequent) builder must choose with care how to build," as the day will come when it will be revealed whether the things built are eternal or only temporal. So, not only is one's spiritual foundation of ultimate importance, but how one proceeds to build on it.

Paul advances this construction theme in his *second* letter to the Corinthians as well. But here the tables are turned a bit. Instead of focusing on the human construction of the Christian community, he draws our attention to something spiritual and lasting that God is raising up *in us*.

Then, finally, in Ephesians, Paul makes it clear that we are building a dwelling place for the holy, the sacred, a dwelling place for God. In other words, as we move towards God, God moves towards us.

Marion  
Woodman



Marion Woodman was a prolific writer, her offerings coming directly from her fifty-year practice as a Jungian analyst in Toronto. I had the privilege of hearing her speak several times before her death in 2018. Her compassion, beauty of spirit, and tremendous feminine wisdom was astounding. Being in her presence was an experience unto itself. It was like being in the arms of mother nature herself. The spiritual house she had built over a lifetime was substantial.

She advocated in favor of intense personal spiritual work, not just the study of God – not just the study of faith, not just the study of theology, not just the study of religion, nor of spirituality – but the practice of spiritual work. By this, she meant the difficult if not trying inner work of facing one's demons – work that involves ruthless self-examination. And of course, being a Jungian analyst, she felt that dreamwork was the best avenue for proceeding with this endeavor.

However, she added a proviso to the work. She said that it always felt at first like you were hacking your way through the Amazon Forest with a pen knife. It was slow, painful, exacting often excruciating work that often felt lonely and futile.

However, she added that if one kept at it, it never failed: one always discovered to one's surprise and delight that all along, there had been a loving other – *God* – hacking *his way, her way, their way* towards one – that in fact one was not alone; one discovered that one had a divine advocate that was working as hard to get to us as we were to him or her or them.

That image was lovingly offered by her to me when I was around 30 years old and had just come from a terribly difficult experience with the first church I ever served, causing me to question God, my call, everything. But it was exactly the encouragement I needed. I subsequently found someone to help me with my inner work and I stuck with it and lo and behold, *her* experience became *my* experience. I discovered the other in me – out there – however you want to call it – that was personal, intimate, loving – who was with me always building something eternal and lasting.

“So we do not lose heart even though our outer nature is wasting away our inner nature is being renewed day by day...”  
Apostle Paul

“So, we do not lose heart,” says Paul. “Even though our outer nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed day by day. For this slight momentary affliction is preparing us for an eternal weight of glory beyond all measure, because we look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen; for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal.”

“For we know if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed, we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens.”  
Apostle Paul

“For we know that if the earthly tent we live in is destroyed,” concludes Paul, “we have a building from God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens” (5:1).

We know, in other words, that if we come back to the foundation, either handed to us by way of our spiritual tradition or discovered with hard inner work or some combination thereof, what we build and what is being built *for* us, *in* us, is eternal. We have found a home or at least a way to get home.



In one of her books, Anne Lamott tells the story of a 7-year-old girl who got lost in the large town where she lived. A police officer stopped to help. He put her in his squad car and slowly drove her through several nearby neighborhoods, hoping she'd spot a familiar landmark.

Suddenly the girl pointed to a church. “You can let me out now,” she said.

“Are you sure?”

“Yes,” She answered, “This is *my* church, and I can always find my way home from here.”



That’s what having a foundation on the living Christ does for us – gives us a spiritual community built over the course of many years from which we can always find home.

But whether we are talking about a physical shelter or a spiritual home, it needs to be a place where we find respite and rest.



We spend a third of our lives sleeping, or at least we should be, which is why neuroscientist Gravagna says that sleep is number four on the list of the top six human needs without which, humanity cannot thrive and may not survive.

The common attitude regarding sleep in our culture is that it is a nuisance. It gets in the way of being able to work and produce all the time. But getting plenty of good sleep is a primary building block not only of having a successful temporal life but of contributing to a life that is everlasting. Sleep is restorative; it is an entrance into the land of dreams – the spiritual realm – the realm that can point us to the best place to build – the best place to begin blazing our next path.

Providing food, water, shelter, and a safe, comfortable place to sleep are not just provisional for physical survival but a springboard into eternity...

But Gravagna finally identifies two human needs without which we humans shrivel: *Other people* and *novelty*.



Yes, need number five is “other people.” Gravagna says that “regular connection to others allows us to ‘build a life worth living’ since it is essential to maintaining a sense of well-being.” We cannot thrive in isolation, which is why living in a fortress inside a gated community is just not healthy. Better to sit under the awning of your travel trailer, or modest home and say hello to your neighbors, or organize neighborhood get-togethers, or join a small group at church, or work alongside others in a community mission project.

Being connected to other people is key to our spiritual health. In fact, Paul tells us plainly in his first letter to the Corinthians that “you are the body of Christ and individually members of it” (1 Corinthians 12:27). God has so arranged the body, says Paul, “that there be no dissension within the body, but the members may have the same care for one another”. To be a part of a church that is truly living out of the foundational principle of the presence of Christ is to be a ‘*body* builder.’ Because one of our greatest human needs is other people, God has placed us in a community – but not just any community – a community held together by the depth of God’s sacrificial love in Jesus Christ.



And that’s not all, because the sixth and final God-given human need is *novelty*. “Novelty creates the opportunity to learn and the ability to fail,” says Gravagna. “Without regular novelty, motivation wanes and a healthy sense of well-being is lost.” Since novelty is anything that is new, original or unusual, Paul seems to connect novelty to our eventual everlasting home: “a building from God,” he calls it, “a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens” (2 Corinthians 5:1).

When it comes to buildings, there is nothing more novel.

Yes, our final human need is having something new, original or unusual to pursue –for the ultimate good of all. And that, precisely, is why Paul counsels us to look forward with faith and hope. “We look not at what can be seen but at what cannot be seen, for what can be seen is temporary, but what cannot be seen is eternal” (v. 18).

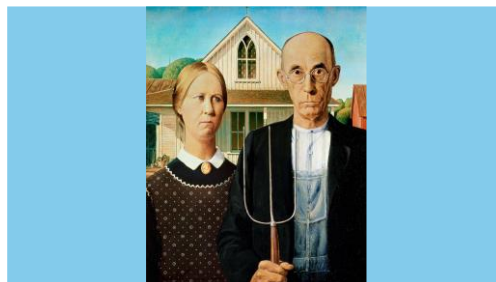


The great theologian Friedrich Schleiermacher once wrote: “Whenever I find a spark of that hidden fire that will sooner or later consume the old and create the new, I am drawn to it with love and hope, regarding it as a sign of my future home.”

Indeed. But we don’t necessarily have to go far to find it.



William Shirer, the great author and journalist, and Grant Wood, the renowned painter were evidently great friends. In Shirer’s autobiography, *20th Century Journey*, he relays an important conversation he had with Wood. At the time of the conversation, it was 1926. Both men were living in Paris and neither had made a name for himself. Shirer was working as a journalist but had not yet published anything of consequence. (He would later gain world acclaim for his huge work, *The Rise and Fall of the Third Reich*.) Wood was painting but had not yet found the theme and style that would make him famous and change the direction of American art.



Of course, Wood is best known for American Gothic – the iconic painting you see here.

Now, the two men had long been friends. They’d both grown up in small towns in Iowa and had known each other in school. Shirer records the conversation this way:

“Everything that I’ve done up to now was wrong,” he [that is, Wood] said, “and, my God, I’m

halfway through my life.”

“You're only 35,” I [that is, Shirer] said.

“All those landscapes of mine of the French countryside and the familiar places in Paris. There’s not a one that the French Impressionists didn’t do a hundred times better! ... All these years wasted because I thought you couldn’t get started as a painter unless you went to Paris and studied and painted like a Frenchman. I used to go back to Iowa and think how ugly it all was. Nothing to paint. And all I could think of was getting back *here* (that is Paris) so I could find something *to* paint – these pretty landscapes that I should have known – Cézanne and Renoir and Monet and the others had already done once and for all.”

Shirer then says he offered some lukewarm encouragement: Maybe Wood would do well someday in Paris. But Wood plunged ahead: “Listen, Bill. I think ... at last ... I’ve learned something. At least, about myself. I think you have to paint ... what you know. And despite the years in Europe – all I really know is home. Iowa. The farm at Anamosa. Milking cows. Cedar Rapids. The typical small town, all right. Everything commonplace. Your neighbors, the quiet streets, the clapboard homes, the drab clothes, the dried-up lives, the hypocritical talk, the silly boosters, the poverty of culture. Bill, I’m going home for good...”



And I’m going to paint those cows...



and barns...

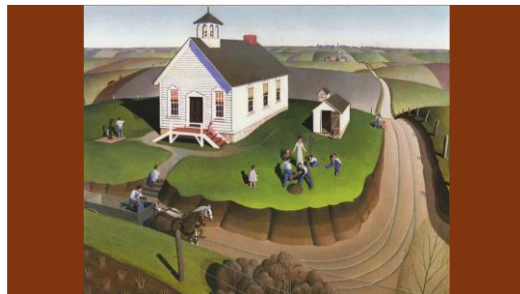




and barnyards...



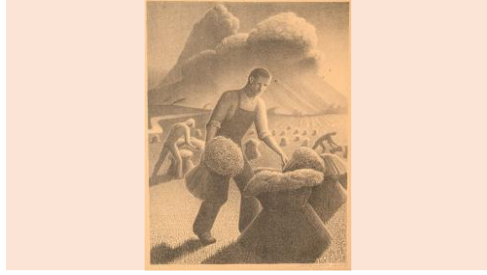
and cornfields...



and little white schoolhouses...



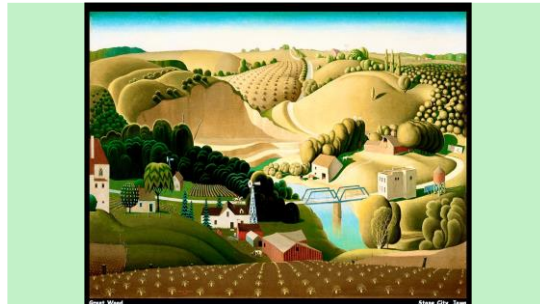
and all those pinched faces and the women in their aprons...



and the men in their overalls...



and the storefront bartering...



and the look of a field or a street in the heat of summer...



or when it's ten below and the snow is piled six feet high... I'm going to do it."

And do it he did as all these paintings attest.

Grant Wood found that his past changed from building on shifting sand to building on a rock. He found novelty out of the foundation that was truly his – out of the home both literally and spiritually that he had found. And we are all immensely richer for the art – American Gothic that he built. Michael Scrogin, Practical Guide to Christian Living (Valley Forge: Judson Press, 1985), 62-63.



Saying “Yes” to building God’s home is saying “Yes” to life - both on this side of the grave and the next. For even as we build in this life, a home *is being built* for us eternal, in the heavens.

Today we are challenged to build on this life, making sure that everyone has adequate food, water, shelter, sleep, connection and a creative outlet for working on something new.

Paul wants members of the church to “have the same care for one another” (1 Corinthians 12:25) and remember that all of the commandments of God are summed up in the words, “Love your neighbor as yourself” (Romans 13:9).



But at the same time, we need to realize that everything in this world will eventually pass away, so we should live by faith in the building from God that is eternal in the heavens. This means trusting the life and teachings of Jesus instead of what passes as the current collective wisdom of the culture. It involves working for the common good, instead of pursuing only personal success. It includes valuing what cannot be seen — honesty, integrity, sacrifice, love, creativity — instead of the things of this world that can be seen. Remember, says Paul, that “what cannot be seen is eternal” (2 Corinth 4:18).

At the end of life, we will *all* go home, and it won’t be to a tent or to a gated estate. Instead, it will be to a house not made with hands. So, get let’s ready for it.

Let us pray: Gracious God give us the courage and the compassion to be about the task of building a home for you on earth even as you build a home for us in heaven. Amen.