

Taking Out the Trash

(Chuck Swindoll)

In recent years hoarding has come into public consciousness as a disease. Back when I was a kid, it wasn't considered a disease and it wasn't called "hoarding." We thought of hoarders as pack rats, collectors, or just plain cluttered folks who let things pile up. Now we know that some of these people are coping with real obsessive disorders, attachment anxieties, or other kinds of addictions that cause them to keep stacking useless junk upon useless junk until it consumes their lives, leaving them in desperation and despair.

How do hoarders escape from their house-sized piles of trash? They can't. At least not on their own. It takes somebody from the outside to enter the midst of their mess, to open the doors, to lift the blinds, and to walk them through the chaos they have built around themselves. Then, piece by piece, small decision by small decision, they begin to make progress, finally putting out the trash that has accumulated throughout the years.

The same can be true of us when it comes to finally letting go of the deeds of the flesh we've been hoarding all our lives. Perhaps we start out by gathering little, harmless complaints. These lead to gripes. Gripes grow into disputes. Disputes result in verbal conflict. Conflict ends in divorce. Or we might begin by collecting meaningless, little glances at a member of the opposite sex. These glances become stares. Stares lead to fantasies. Fantasies grow into hints and suggestions. Before we know it, we've got the A-word attached to our reputations for the rest of our lives.

All of us, without exception, need to open the doors to our lives and let the Holy Spirit blow through, pointing out the trash so we can clean it out. Paul's descriptions of the deeds of the flesh and fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:19-23 can serve as a helpful starting point as we let the Holy Spirit begin the process of putting out the trash that has accumulated in our lives.

This is where I'm going to get personal. Or rather, where you're going to get personal. You're going to do an inventory of the deeds of the flesh you've been collecting, piling up, or even hoarding over the last several days, months, or years. Then you're going to turn to the fruit of the Spirit and identify those virtues made possible by the Spirit of God that would clean out the garbage that you've allowed to collect in your life.

Carefully read Galatians 5:19-21. What deeds of the flesh seem to be giving you the most trouble? In what rooms of your life have you hoarded and locked away certain sinful patterns? Improper sexual desires and actions? Idolatry—perhaps allowing something or someone to take God's rightful place? How about a hot temper? Arguing with wife or yelling at the kids? Overeating? Overdrinking? Just pick one and give it a name: "My struggle with _____."

Now read Galatians 5:22-23. Which aspect of the fruit of the Spirit would directly address this struggle? It could be more than one. For example, goodness, faithfulness, and self-control would all go a long way at cleaning out sexual temptation and sin. Virtually every aspect of the fruit of the Spirit would tackle your temper tantrums. Love of God and faithfulness to Him would knock out idolatry. Identify virtues of the Holy Spirit that would help clean out those nasty corners of your life that you've let linger much too long.

Now, get out of the way. Like obsessive hoarders who need to release their white-knuckled grip on their tons of trash, you need to surrender these things to God. It takes both an initial decision and an ongoing recommitment to forsake the deeds of the flesh and allow the Holy Spirit to do His miraculous cleanup work. Resolve anew each morning to walk in the Spirit, surrendering your struggle with _____ to His control. There will be moments of failure. You'll find yourself flat on your face, having wrestled control back from Him only to suffer the consequences of another fall. But keep at it. Seek counsel and help from other Spirit-filled believers. Seek out the supportive prayers of a few close friends. And then hold firmly by faith to Paul's promise in Galatians 5:16: "Walk by the Spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh."

