

Six-thirty in the morning is not an easy time for my son and me. Night owls both, morning people, not so much – and every morning, the daily routine of getting up to get out to school is a painful ritual. This morning, sitting on the edge of his bed, eyes blurry and thoughts groggy, I looked up and saw the picture hanging on the wall.

My daughter had painted it when she was in the third grade. A child's rendering of a Master work. And through the fog of my morning brain came the words of God.

“But on the judgment day, fire will reveal what kind of work each builder has done. The fire will show if a person's work has any value. If the work survives, that builder will receive a reward.” (1 Corinthians 3:13-14)

The Things We Build

I loved my home. I loved the soaring ceilings, the beautiful views, and the space to entertain. But maybe most of all, I loved my bedroom. The master bedroom took up the entire length of the home, and even with a king-sized bed and huge pieces of traditional furniture, I could still hold an aerobics class in there, if I wanted to. It had a bathroom larger than many people's kitchens and two massive walk-in closets; either one of which, I often joked, was larger than my first apartment in NYC.

My room was my refuge. I kept it dark and cool, and I kept the door closed. This expanse of solitude was mine, designed exactly the way I wanted it – especially the Monet paintings. Obviously, they weren't real Monets. But to an art lover like me, the two massive high-quality prints framed in lavish cherry wood were the showpiece of my room. Each has cost me well over \$1,500 to attain, frame, and mount. Their beauty in my eyes stood in majesty and provided the focal point for the room.

Everyone who saw them expressed admiration, and I loved those renderings of waterlilies in pale sunlight. But off to the side, conspicuous in its smallness, was a 1' x 1' frame, with an original watercolor. My daughter had painted her version of waterlilies in a public school art class. Placed in a \$20 frame, it quietly hung over my desk, a small testament to the grandeur of the other pieces in the room.

The Things that Remain

When I lost my home during my financial collapse, it became abundantly clear that the great majority of the things and adornments I had accumulated could not come with me to the new, modest apartment. The Monets, which had so proudly filled up wall space in my room, were to be a part of the casualty. And it truly pained me – these things, and many others, had represented who I was, what I loved, and how life had been.

In some ways, the necessary purging of things was more poignant than the loss of relationships, money, and career. Each thing had a story. Each thing meant something. But as I closed the door to what had been my home for 12 years, only my daughter's small painting came with me. It was the only piece that survived the purging. And it was not without tears that I hung it in my new place, a place I was grateful to have but was so foreign to me.

As I sat looking at my sleeping son, and then back to that little painting this morning, the words of Scripture resonated with me. Through all the strife, through all the pain and loss, I am still here. The representations of earthly wealth are long gone, burned away by circumstances and trial. What remains is what is true. Love. Family. And a piece of art not made by practiced and skilled hands, but with a child's clumsy yet meaningful efforts to make something beautiful. In the end, God doesn't count the large rooms of your mansion or the dollars in your bank account. He doesn't revel in how accomplished you were, how nice the view was, or how others admire what you have. He burns away everything that was not built to last into eternity, and I think we will be surprised at those things that hold value to Him.

I drove past my home the other day. I pulled into that driveway every day for 12 years. I raised children there, I had parties there, I did life and cried tears and prayed prayers. But as I looked at the home, I realized how strangely detached I felt from it. It is no longer my home. It no longer represents me or what is important to me. It has been burned away with the rest of those things I held so dear. He asks me to travel lightly, to carry with me only those things that may look like childhood foolishness, and insignificant to the world; my faith, my love, my reliance on Him, regardless of earthly circumstances. It is in those precious things that my true identity remains, and it will never be consumed by fire.

2 Corinthians 4:18 So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen, since what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.

