

(PP1)2 Thessalonians 3:6-13“The Broken Window Theory”

Some major cities have discovered that when you attack small problems like broken windows or graffiti, viola! – you gain the advantage over much bigger problems as well. The lesson here? Little things matter.

If you look around any city, say Columbia for example, you will notice a striking contrast: Some buildings are beautiful and well-maintained, while others are ugly, and perhaps covered with graffiti. You might be surprised to learn that it isn't the age of a building that causes it to fall apart, or its location, or even the finances of its owner. Instead, there is an intriguing trigger mechanism at work here, one that quickly turns a lovely, well-preserved, inhabited building into an ugly, dilapidated, abandoned shell.

The trigger mechanism is a broken window. A single broken window can trigger the downward spiral of a once-proud urban structure.

Researchers in the field of crime and urban decay have discovered that one shattered pane, left unrepaired for a significant period of time, causes area residents, and residents of the building, to feel a sense of abandonment. The residents begin to believe that the owner doesn't care about them or the building, or others believe the building has been abandoned, freeing them to toss a brick through another window.

Soon there is litter and junk collecting in the doorways. Graffiti appears, and no one cares enough to scrub it off. Serious structural damage begins, and in a relatively short time, the building becomes damaged beyond the owner's desire to fix it. The sense of abandonment felt by the residents suddenly becomes reality. All because of a piece of shattered glass.

This “Broken Window Theory” has inspired police departments in New York city, and other urban areas, to crack down on the “small stuff” in order to keep out the big stuff. In his book *Leadership*, former New York City mayor Rudy Giuliani tells of how he applied the Broken Window Theory to crime, and in the process reduced murders from 2000 a year to under 600.

He started with the “Squeegee guys” — those annoying guys who used to run up to a car when a person was sitting at a traffic light, wash the windshield with filthy water and rags, and then demand payment. Giuliani had them arrested for jaywalking and — surprise, surprise — a huge percentage of them were found to be felons.

It also turns out that murderers and muggers tend to break a lot of little laws, too. So, when you crack down on the little infractions — like fixing one little broken window – you end up catching criminals that otherwise would have gotten away. A critic of Giuliani said that arresting subway turnstile jumpers was a waste of police effort when they should be chasing drug pushers. Well, guess what? They discovered that drug pushers were part of the turnstile-jumping crowd.

So, attacking small and petty problems is rarely a waste of time, according to Broken Window Theory. Instead, it helps you to manage the major issues, and helps to prevent the condition of your building, your city, your church, or yourself from spiraling out of control.

The apostle Paul seems to have this theory in mind when he writes to the Thessalonians. Notice that he doesn’t focus on the big theological issues of the Christian faith, talking about the importance of trust in God, or faith in the Lord Jesus Christ. No, Paul advises the Thessalonians to attack petty problems, and fix the “broken windows” of the Christian community.

(PP2) Paul says, “Stay away from all believers who live idle lives,” and Paul reminds them that he himself was never idle when he was visiting

their community, but instead he worked night and day, and paid for his own bread, so that he would not be a burden to anyone. Paul did this to set an example for the Thessalonians, and quicker than a New York minute, he lays down the law saying, “Anyone unwilling to work should not get to eat.”

I love what Pastor Arnold Murray has to say about this. He says, “You know, God made us with a switch that goes off when one side of our stomach gets too close to the other side. When that switch alerts us that we are getting real hungry, we have to make a choice about whether or not we are going to get up off our behinds and go to work to do something that will take care of that hunger.”

Hearing this from Paul, I am sure there were some Thessalonians who thought Paul should pass the Xanax and relax. After all, “idleness” is hardly the worst of the seven deadly sins, and it doesn’t even make Paul’s own list of the 15 works of the flesh that keep a person from inheriting the Kingdom of God!

The problem with idleness is that it’s a broken window. Left uncorrected, it creates larger and more destructive difficulties. The old saying is true: Idle hands are the devil’s workshop!

So where is the small sin of idleness perhaps creating big problems for you? (PP3) If I were to say to you all, that you might have a problem with idleness in your lives, you would probably laugh me out of the building/pulpit saying, “Are you kidding me Todd, I would love to have just a few minutes to enjoy the “sin” of idleness. I am busy beyond belief, with sales meetings, parent/teacher conferences, athletic contests, concerts for my children, volunteer work at church, and the list goes on and on.”

But let’s consider a question for just a moment: What is the difference between being idle, and being busy doing “stuff” that really doesn’t matter, or is even meddlesome? (PP4) According to Paul, there’s no

difference because he says the Thessalonians “are not busy; they are busybodies.”

Now, let me clarify. Attending piano recitals and basketball games, and doing your job, and going to parent/teacher conferences is not doing unnecessary stuff. Those are wise and helpful things. However, somewhere in our lives, we have important “use of time” decisions to make, and if we don’t repair the “broken windows,” – that is, clean up the nonproductive, ill-spent activities in our lives – then the whole structure of our lives has the potential to become a run-down heap, or ruin.

Think about it, if you neglect the “broken window of idleness” in your relationships with family and friends, your marriage, and most importantly, your barren spiritual life, it is just a matter of time before things fall apart. Paul encourages each of us by saying, “Brothers and sisters, do not become weary in doing what is right, or what is good.” If we become weary and are idle about doing what is right and good – we have no one to blame but ourselves, and as the Bible tells us, “We will reap what we sow.”

So, let me ask again, (PP5) “Where are the “broken windows” in your life? What needs to be repaired? What have you been meaning to address in your life that for some reason you still have not gotten around to?”

What would a friend, a brother, or sister, or parent, or spouse, say are the broken windows in your life? Other people can often see the “damaged areas” in our lives better than we can.

When we crack down on the small problems in order to keep out the big problems, we are doing our work quietly, and faithfully, and well. When we fix our broken windows so that our personal spiritual structure will remain attractive and healthy and strong, we are following Paul’s advice to “not grow weary in doing what is right and good.”

So let's take a close and personal look at ourselves, and determine where we need cleaning up. Through honest self-assessment, we can identify our cracked and corroded parts, and take the steps we need to fix what is damaged within us. When we acknowledge our brokenness before God, we can be restored to wholeness by the gift of God's forgiveness and love.

(PP6) God wants us to be solid and strong, not shattered. May God bless you all!

Sermon Notes

2 Thessalonians 3:6-13

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Anyone unwilling to work should not get to eat.

The problem with idleness is that it's a broken window. Left uncorrected, it creates larger and more destructive difficulties. The old saying is true: Idle hands are the devil's workshop!

Where is the small sin of idleness creating big problems for you?

What is the difference between being idle, and being busy doing “stuff” that really doesn't matter, or is even meddlesome?

If you neglect the “broken window of idleness” in your relationships with family and friends, your marriage, your barren spiritual life, it is just a matter of time before things fall apart.

Where are the broken windows in your life? What needs to be repaired? What have you been meaning to address in your life that for some reason you still have not gotten around to?”

When we fix our broken windows so that our personal spiritual structure will remain attractive and healthy and strong, we are following Paul's advice to “not grow weary in doing what is right.”

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May God bless you all!