

## Dear Friends of the Foundation:

In my father's house are many tools: large and small, new and old, power tools and hand tools, mechanic's tools, carpenter's tools, gardener's tools, farmer's tools, engineer's tools, and more, many more. And there are boxes, drawers, tables, racks, buckets, hooks, and shelves for the tools. One large, wooden tool box belonged to *his* father, when he was a mechanic for the railroad in Nashville, Tennessee. In fact, the full basement of his house is full of tools. And then there is the shed, and the barn.

My father calls each tool by name. He knows where it is, what it does, and where it goes. Oh, there are a few antique tools he has not quite figured out yet, but even they are obviously tools and obviously appreciated, even cherished, simply for being tools.

My father tends to his tools with great care. It is important to use the right tool for a job. A wrong one just will not do. A wrong one could cause more harm than good and could even cause injury to the user. And after a tool is used, it is to be cleaned, inspected, in some cases sharpened or lubricated, and put away with care. He used to teach me that if I took care of the tools I had, then I could buy additional tools instead of having to replace the first ones. There was a definite utility to that. Now it occurs to me that there was also a joy in the prospect of obtaining more tools.

I am not a mechanic. I am not a farmer. I am not a gardener, or a carpenter, or an engineer. My father has never known quite what to make of me. I cannot use many of his tools, nor can he use many of mine.

Words are my tools, and books are my tool boxes. I have shelves, cabinets, boxes, and stacks of them. My office is full to overflowing with them, as are my study, the den, and the attic at home. I have books on my computer and even on the memory chip in my phone.

I call each by name. I know where it is, what it does, and where it goes. I tend to words and books with great care. A wrong word just will not do. A wrong word could cause more harm than good and could even cause injury to the user. And I so very much, too much, enjoy obtaining more books (in fact, I have ordered four while drafting this email).

We are so very different, he and I, and yet so very much alike. When I was a boy and he was a young man, he climbed poles for the telephone company. I, on the other hand, am a country preacher from Tennessee.

There is this: the first thing he used his tools to build, at the house to which we moved in Gallatin, was a huge book shelf that covered the entire end of the den. We even went to Sears and bought a radial arm saw just for the job (or perhaps the job was the justification for buying the saw; it is hard to tell). I have long thought that the central importance of that shelf full of books in our home had untold impact on the course of my development. But that was forty-five years ago.

I wish I could find the words to tell my father how much he taught me.

Grace and Peace,

Jim

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