



*Karen Oberst*

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*BIBLE READING: Psalm 139:23-24*

I have recently been painting my kitchen, and it occurred to me that the process of painting can be compared to the spiritual life. This week we'll look at some similarities between painting and growing spiritually.

The first step in starting a painting project is noticing that it needs to be done. For me this was easy. My mobile was built in the 1970s, and it originally contained dark walnut-colored paneling from front to rear. I wanted to brighten up the kitchen with a fresh coat of yellow paint.

There are other reasons for painting, besides new colors. Something might be too dirty to clean anymore; it might be a place that has been neglected and now needs to be cleaned up and given the lift a coat of paint can bring. It could have been defaced by a child with a magic marker—any number of things.

What have you noticed in your heart that needs to be changed or freshened up? Does something need brightening? Has something gotten grimy or dirty with the passing of the years? Is there an area you have been neglecting? Have you let your interactions with the world leave a mark? Unless you take the time to search your heart, you may never even realize something needs to be changed. Or perhaps you have been noticing something for a while now and just haven't taken the time to do anything about it.

*SONG: O God, You Search Me and You Know Me*  
(Bernadette Farrell)

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord, search my heart and help me to see where I need to be making changes to become a better ambassador for you, to let my light shine more brightly to the world around me.*

—Karen Oberst

*BIBLE READING: Jeremiah 29:11-12*

Noticing that the kitchen could use a fresh coat of paint was an important first step, but it was only the first step. I had known it needed to be done for a very long time before I began to actually make plans. There are many reasons: I live on a tight budget, and there wasn't money for paint. There were other interesting things to do such as gardening, which occupies me in the summer. Painting a room is a big project taking a lot of time. There's the process of thinking about what colors would go with my terra cotta tile and my harvest gold appliances. Once I'd decided on a combination of yellow and orange, there was the collecting of paint chips to determine which shades of the two would look best on the doors and paneling.

We can procrastinate on starting to make changes to our spiritual lives as well. We may feel like something needs to be done, and even know what that something is, but getting started can be difficult. It may seem like a daunting task to make changes in ourselves. Sometimes we are just too busy with other things—family life, occupation, and even work within our meetings. Then there are decisions to be made: Are we going to set time aside to meditate? Should we consult a spiritual advisor? Is just reading the Bible enough? Once you notice that changes need to be made, what holds you back from making them?

*SONG: O Jesus, I Have Promised*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord, help me to realize that the changes you want to make in me only get started when I am willing to partner with you to see that they happen.*

—Karen Oberst

*BIBLE READING: Psalm 25:4-6*

So far, I had noticed that painting needed to be done and had made the decision on the color. The next step was assembling the materials. For painting, I needed a sander and sandpaper, masking tape, brushes, paint, a screwdriver, a place to paint, and various other items. Getting things around can take a while, and remembering all the things I needed was a challenge. Inevitably, there was just one more thing I'd forgotten. It required finding the money in my budget and trips to the store as I watched for sales on the paint. Finally I purchased the materials I needed.

Assembling materials for spiritual seeking and possible changes takes time and energy as well. It might mean carving out a time in your day for reading and praying. It might mean finding a book to read. It might mean making a pact with a friend to hold you accountable. It might mean contacting someone to be a spiritual director. It might mean purchasing a journal to keep track of your journey. Or it might take only a very few things—finding a place where you can be alone and opening a Bible. We all search in different ways; different things are helpful for different people, at different times, for different purposes. You may want to rely on tried and true methods that have worked for you in the past, or you might want to try something new.

*SONG: Teach Me to Stop and Listen*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord, show me how you want to teach me today. Help me to find a way that allows you to speak to me in a new and different way that I might make needed changes in my life that help me to grow closer to you.*

—Karen Oberst

## Wednesday September 3     **Painting and Spirituality: Prep Work**

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*BIBLE READING: Hebrews 10:21-23*

I had decided I needed to paint, I chose the colors, and I assembled the needed materials. Now the work really began. In order to put new paint on, the old needed to be removed, as well as the area prepared for painting. First step was sanding. Eliminating all the old paint and varnish was not easy or pleasant or tidy, but was the all-important first step. Finally, there was the action of putting masking tape on the areas around the paneling to keep the paint from going where it wasn't supposed to go.

Often growth in the spiritual life requires us to get rid of unhelpful habits or old ways of thinking before the new can be added. It is useful to stop periodically and search for things that no longer serve us well, for bad habits that have crept in unnoticed. It can be so easy in our polarizing world to let those values usurp the love we are to have for our fellow human beings.

How do we discover those things in ourselves? Bible study and prayer, of course, but it may require asking a friend or other person we trust to tell us honestly where we need to change. We can also listen to those who disagree with us and ask if they might have seen that which does indeed need to be altered. It likely won't be easy or pleasant or tidy, but will be worth it in the end.

*SONG: Give Me a Clean Heart*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord, help me to discover where I am harboring things in my heart that are not worthy of you. Show me what needs to be weeded out to allow me to grow into my true child-of-God self.*

—Karen Oberst

*BIBLE READING: Matthew 5:3-12*

I don't always use a primer beneath the main coat of paint when I do a project, but I opted to do so this time because not all the original varnish came off the cupboard doors well. So before I put on the yellow and orange, I painted the paneling and the doors, front and back, with a primer—a plain, flat white paint. This provided a nice surface in preparation for the final colors. Just putting on the primer, even with its flat whiteness was an encouragement to me as it covered the dark wood. I felt like the kitchen was lighter already.

In our spiritual lives, there are certain things we also might call a base coat: Scripture passages, activities that provide an undergirding layer to our lives. There is what I like to call the Constitution of the Kingdom: the Sermon on the Mount, where Matthew gathers together the teaching of Jesus in a distilled form and shows us the way to live. Passages like Galatians 5:22-23 on the fruit of the Spirit also give us benchmarks as to what a mature spiritual life looks like. There are such activities as prayer, regular devotional time, counting our blessings, and giving thanks for the many benefits we have received. Line your life with such things and you will have a good foundation both for whatever changes need to be made and for spreading light to others who cross our paths.

*SONG: Count Your Blessings*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord, help me to fill my life with your words, remembering to regularly count my blessings and give thanks to you. Help me to remember the things which ground me as your child.*

—Karen Oberst

*BIBLE READING: Hebrews 12:1-3*

I had done all the prep work, put on the primer, and at last it was time to paint. I spread on two coats of yellow and orange, and my paneling and cupboard doors became the bright, sunny colors I had been envisioning from the start. Of course painting, while the most satisfying step, is not quite the end. I still needed to replace fixtures and hang the doors back on the cupboards. But finally my dark walnut kitchen was light and cheerful, and all the time and work seemed worth it. It gave me great satisfaction to have seen a big job through from start to finish.

In our spiritual lives, much, if not most of the time this kind of elaborate preparation isn't necessary for the correcting of a fault, the changing of a bad habit, the moving forward into a new and deeper relationship with our Creator. Sometimes, however, we need to do some deeper work—the letting go of some wound from childhood, dealing with a strong addiction, taking care of a difficult forgiveness—for which a time of intentional preparation and seeking of help may be necessary. There are many options: calling a clearness committee, seeking pastoral counseling, finding professional help. In the end, whether our change is difficult or easy, it will be worth it.

*SONG: Step by Step*

*PRAYER SUGGESTION: Lord, help me to see the changes that need to be made in my life; to recognize when I can simply work with you to make those changes or when I need to seek help to be intentional about doing some deep healing.*

—Karen Oberst

*BIBLE READING: 1 Timothy 6:11-16*

My project was totally finished, and the kitchen put back together. So what's the next step? First: to enjoy the new brighter kitchen and feel pride in a job well done. But it won't be long until another project comes along. It might be painting, it might be cleaning out accumulated stuff from a room, it might be crocheting, it might be writing, it might be a help for a neighbor, or it might be a new part to play in my meeting. While it is good to take the time to appreciate a completed project, something else always announces it needs to be done.

The same is true in our spiritual lives. It is good to rejoice in progress made, to take stock of what we, with God's help, have accomplished. But whatever improvement we have made, whatever battles we have won, there is always more to do. Alas, none of us is perfect and it doesn't take long to find something that God calls us to do better. But more than that, we may be called to a new task outside ourselves, to help others in some new way. What is God calling you to do now? What is God calling your meeting to do now? We look back to see how far we have come, and we look forward to new places our Guide calls us. Let us follow boldly into new adventures for ourselves and for our neighbors and for Christ, our present teacher.

*SONG: Fight the Good Fight with All Thy Might*

*PRA YER SUGGESTION: Lord, help me to appreciate and be grateful for victories won and progress made—but never to rest on my laurels, rather always looking for the next thing to which you are calling me.*

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