

## Trading Spaces

---

I'm going to say a word, and when I say the word I want you to see a face, to recall a face and a name, someone who comes to your mind when I say the word. Are you ready? The word is *bitter*. Bitter. Do you see a face? I see a face. I see the face of a farmer in western Oklahoma, riding a mortgaged tractor, burning gasoline bought on credit, moving across rented land, rearranging the dust. Bitter.

Do you see a face? I see the face of a woman forty-seven years old, sitting on a hillside, drawn and confused. She sits under a blue funeral home canopy, banked on all sides by flowers sprinkled with cards: "You have our condolences." Bitter.

I see the faces of a young couple about nineteen. They're standing in an airport terminal, holding hands so tightly their knuckles are white. She's pregnant; he's dressed in military green. They're not talking, just standing and looking at each other. The loudspeaker comes on: "Flight 392 now loading at gate 22, yellow concourse." He slowly moves toward the gate; she stands there alone. Bitter.

I see the face of a young minister. The committee says, "That's as good a sermon as we've had in this church in a long time. And you've answered our questions well. Your theology and your biblical knowledge are really good and your references are good, but we just don't feel like you're the one for our church just now."

And she says, "Oh." Bitter.<sup>1</sup>

A popular TV show a few years ago was "Trading Spaces". Two families switch houses—move into each others' house for 48 hours and, with a budget of \$1,000 and a professional interior designer as consultant, redesign a room.

Now, there are rules. You have to stay in your neighbor's house; you can't go back to your own house during those 48 hours. You can't tell the other couple how to design the room in your own house; you're completely at the mercy of the designer and the other couple. There are several designers...

There's Doug, who always seems more concerned about his own image as a designer than about the needs and wishes of his client. His designs are bizarre and planned for shock value, and if the client doesn't like his work, the client is a fool. I wouldn't want Doug in charge of redesigning a room in my house.

There's Frank, who's really an artist, more than a designer. Frank is open and flexible, a really delightful "people" person. He paints tiles on countertops and chickens on walls. He's pretty predictable, but if you like country or southwest designs, he'd be fun to work with.

---

<sup>1</sup> Fred B. Craddock, *Craddock Stories*, ed. By Mike Graves and Richard F Ward (St. Louis, Missouri: Chalice Press, 2001). Page 25-26.

And there's Lauri, whose designs and colors are bold and dramatic, yet somewhat traditional. She has a positive disposition and a bubbly personality. She's sensitive, and seems genuinely concerned about how her clients feel about her work.

There are other designers—each with unique skills and talents and design prejudices. And when you agree to go on the show, you don't know which one you'll get—you don't know which one will be redesigning your bedroom or living room or kitchen. And you're totally at their mercy.

Quite frankly, if I had \$1,000 to redesign a room in my home, I'd rather give it to my wife. I know her taste. She's a good designer, and I trust her. I'm confident I'd like what she'd do. I just don't think I'd like taking "potluck" at what my living room is going to look like after "Trading Spaces" with a neighbor.

These people—these faces I described for you at the beginning—could use an "interior design makeover." And you had faces come to mind, didn't you, when I said the word, "*bitter?*" And what if I said the word, "lonely?" or "confused?" "angry?" "guilty?" "desperate?" You had faces, each time, didn't you? And at least once, as I said these words, didn't you realize you were looking in a mirror? Some of the rooms in our lives need to be redesigned from time-to-time, don't they? But to whom would you trust that task in your own life? Who would you trust to redesign your life?

Will you look at one other face? His name is Saul. Saul of Tarsus. Bitter. Angry. And he felt fully justified in these feelings. Here's Saul, describing himself.

**(PHILIPPIANS 3:4-6 NRSV) *If anyone else has reason to be confident in the flesh, I have more: <sup>5</sup>circumcised on the eighth day, a member of the people of Israel, of the tribe of Benjamin, a Hebrew born of Hebrews; as to the law, a Pharisee; <sup>6</sup>as to zeal, a persecutor of the church; as to righteousness under the law, blameless.***

But there was bitterness in Saul's spirit. As the Church spread beyond Jerusalem, so did Saul's anger toward these infidels. Acts 9 reports that...

**(ACTS 9:1-2 NRSV) *...Saul, still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord, went to the high priest <sup>2</sup>and asked him for letters to the synagogues at Damascus, so that if he found any who belonged to the Way, men or women, he might bring them bound to Jerusalem.***

Saul needed an "interior design makeover." And he got one. Here's what happened:

**(ACTS 9:3-6, 8-18 NRSV) *...as he was approaching Damascus, suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him. <sup>4</sup>He fell to the ground and heard a voice saying, "Saul, Saul, why do you persecute me?" <sup>5</sup>He asked, "Who are you, Lord?" The reply came, "I am Jesus, whom you are persecuting. <sup>6</sup>But get up and enter the city, and you will be told what you are to do." ... <sup>8</sup>Saul got up from the ground, and though his eyes were open, he could see nothing; so***

*they led him by the hand and brought him into Damascus. <sup>9</sup>For three days he was without sight, and neither ate nor drank. <sup>10</sup>Now there was a disciple in Damascus named Ananias. The Lord said to him in a vision, "Get up and go to the street called Straight, and at the house of Judas look for a man of Tarsus named Saul. At this moment he is praying, <sup>12</sup>and he has seen in a vision a man named Ananias come in and lay his hands on him so that he might regain his sight." ... <sup>17</sup>So Ananias went and entered the house. He laid his hands on Saul and said, "Brother Saul, the Lord Jesus, who appeared to you on your way here, has sent me so that you may regain your sight and be filled with the Holy Spirit." <sup>18</sup>And immediately something like scales fell from his eyes, and his sight was restored. Then he got up and was baptized.*

Remember how Saul described himself earlier—his pedigree, his zeal, his blamelessness under the law. After Damascus, here is his self-assessment:

*(PHILIPPIANS 3:8-9 NRSV) I regard everything as loss because of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. For his sake I have suffered the loss of all things, and I regard them as rubbish, in order that I may gain Christ <sup>9</sup>and be found in him...*

And this:

*(PHILIPPIANS 4:11, 13 NRSV) I have learned to be content with whatever I have. <sup>12</sup>I know what it is to have little, and I know what it is to have plenty. ... <sup>13</sup>I can do all things through him who strengthens me.*

Now, that's really a new life design! If I knew my life would come out looking like that—if I knew I could have that same interior designer, I'd gladly trade spaces with Paul.