



SANDCASTLES

It is not often I am so impressed with something I have read that I choose to quote it. But in chapter 17 of Max Lucado's book *And the Angels Were Silent* (Questar Pub., Inc., 1992), he provides an incredibly revealing perspective that will help us to ponder the purpose and end of our life pursuits. It is so profound that you may, like me, find yourself rereading it several times as you contemplate the extent of its meaning. I hope you are as challenged by it as I have been.

Hot Sun. Salty air. Rhythmic waves.

A little boy is on the beach. On his knees he scoops and packs the sand with plastic shovels into a bright red bucket. Then he upends the bucket on the surface and lifts it. And, to the delight of the little architect, a castle tower is created.

All afternoon he will work. Spooning out the mote. Packing the walls. Bottle tops will be sentries. Popsicle sticks will be bridges. A sandcastle will be built.

Big city. Busy streets. Rumbling traffic.

A man is in his office. At his desk he shuffles papers into stacks and delegates assignments. He cradles the phone on his shoulder and punches the keyboard with his fingers. Numbers are juggled and contracts are signed and, much to the delight of the man, a profit is made.

All his life he will work. Formulating the plans. Forecasting the future. Annuities will be sentries. Capital gains will be bridges. An empire will be built.

Two builders of two castles. They have much in common. They shape granules into grandeurs. They see nothing and make something. They are diligent and determined. And for both the tide will rise and the end will come. Yet, that is where the similarities cease. For the boy sees the end while the man ignores it.

Watch the boy as the dusk approaches. Each wave slaps an inch closer to his creation. Every crest crashes closer than the one before.

But the boy doesn't panic. He is not surprised. All day the pounding waves have reminded him that the end is inevitable. He knows the secret of the surging. Soon they will come and take his castle into the deep.

The man, however, doesn't know the secret. He should. He, like the boy, lives surrounded by rhythmic reminders. Days come and go. Seasons ebb and flow. Every sunrise which becomes a sunset whispers the secret, "Time will take your castles."

So, one is prepared and one isn't. One is peaceful while the other panics.

As the waves near, the wise child jumps to his feet and begins to clap. There is no sorrow. No fear. No regret. He knew this would happen. He is not surprised. And when the great breaker crashes into his castle and his masterpiece is sucked into the sea, he smiles. He smiles, picks up his tools, takes his father's hand, and goes home.

The grown-up, however, is not so wise. As the wave of years collapses on his castle he is terrified. He hovers over the sandy monument to protect it. He blocks the waves from the walls he has made. Saltwater soaked and shivering he snarls at the incoming tide.

"It is my castle," he defies.

The ocean need not respond. Both know to whom the sand belongs.

Finally the cliff of water mounts high above the man and his little empire. For just a moment he is shadowed by the wall of water . . . then it crashes. His tiny towers of triumph crumble and disperse and he is left on his knees . . . clutching muddy handfuls of yesterday.

If only he had known. If only he had listened. If only. . . . But he, like most, never listens.

. . . These [people] aren't cruel. They aren't rebellious or angry at God.

But they are blind. They don't see the setting sun. And they are deaf. They don't hear the pounding waves.

. . . I was reminded of this not long ago when I boarded a plane. I walked down the aisle, found my seat, and sat down next to a strange sight.

The man seated next to me was in a robe and slippers. He was dressed for the living room, not for the journey. His seat was odd, too. Whereas my seat was the cloth type you normally see, his was fine leather.

"Imported," he said, when he noticed I was looking. "Bought it in Argentina and put it on myself."

Before I could speak he pointed to some inlaid stones in the armrest. "The rubies I purchased in Africa. They cost me a fortune."

That was only the beginning. His fold-down table was of mahogany. There was a portable TV installed next to the window. A tiny ceiling fan and globed light hung above us. I had never seen anything like it.

My question was the obvious one, "Why did you spend so much time and expense on an airline seat?"

"I live here," he explained. "I make my home on this plane."

"You never get off?"

"Never! How could I deboard and leave such comfort?"

Incredible. The man made a home out of a mode of transportation. He made a residence out of a journey. Hard to believe? You think I'm stretching the truth? Well, maybe I haven't seen such foolishness in a plane, but I have in life. And so have you.

You've seen people treat this world like it was a permanent home. It's not. You've seen people pour time and energy into life like it will last forever. It won't. You've seen people so proud of what they have done, that they hope they will never have to leave – they will.

We all will. We are in transit. Someday the plane will stop and the de-boarding will begin.

Wise are those who are ready when the pilot says to get off.

I don't know much, but I do know how to travel. Carry little. Eat light. Take a nap. And get off when you reach the city.

And I don't know much about sandcastles. But children do. Watch them and learn. Go ahead and build, but build with a child's heart. When the sun sets and the tides take – applaud. Salute the process of life, take your father's hand, and go home.

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