

Down Home: Give God room to work, even on the patio

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“You know, you could just take ‘em down,” Joanna told me, demonstrating yet again my wife is both smarter and more practical than I.

She pointed to the three banks of vertical blinds, which she considered a blight upon our enclosed patio, and which I hadn’t given much thought since we moved into our home nine years ago.

The last time we looked for a house, we wanted to downsize a bit. We accomplished that feat, stepping back about 400 or 500 square feet.

We also wanted to reduce the number of “living spaces” in our home from two to one. For years, we’d felt a living room was a waste. We spend all our time in the den. Ditto for the dining room, occupied only at Thanksgiving and Christmas.

The perfect floorplan

We imagined the “perfect” floorplan with a single large room for all family functions—kitchen, eating, gathering.

Forget it. We couldn’t find it. And if we built our own home, we’d have to move even farther from work.

So, we kept looking. We found this house. We fell in love with it from the start. And it has three living spaces, not one or even two.

But here’s the deal: This house originally was U-shaped, with the den and garage on one side, the living room in the middle and the master bedroom on the other side. Previous owners enclosed a section of the “U,” installed

skylights and walled it off with three sliding-glass doors.

The light, airy patio—the third living space we said we didn’t want—sold us on this home. And we’ve always loved it. Joanna works from home and keeps her office out there. We bought the previous owners’ wicker furniture, put down a rug, added my grandfather’s old rocker and refused to add a TV.

The perfect patio

It’s the perfect place for drinking coffee on Saturday mornings or reading a book on Sunday afternoons. It’s a space that lifts our spirits.

Except for those blinds, which we never closed and which hung there like ever-yellowing columns.

Jo talked about how ugly they were. She mentioned getting rid of them. More than once. Waaaay more than once.

In my mind, I figured we would be rid of them when we eventually had to replace the sliding-glass doors and added windows and French doors.

Then Jo said it: “You know, you could just take ’em down.”

Now, why didn’t I think of that? Simply removing the old blinds would brighten the room. And it might even let me put off replacing the doors.

Not so fast.

Imperfect tools

None of my Allen wrenches fit the square slot in the screws that secured the braces that held the blinds up. I bought metric wrenches, and they didn’t work, either.

I could jam the end of my smallest screwdriver into slot, but I couldn’t get

enough torque to remove the screws.

So, I began to lie to myself. The room will look “just fine” if I take the blinds down but leave the braces up.

Of course, I knew better. And so I climbed up on the stepladder and finally backed a single, solitary screw out.

That was the mechanical equivalent of finding a serial killer’s DNA.

That single, solitary screw in my pocket, I drove to our friendly neighborhood hardware store and talked to one of the nice clerks wearing a red vest.

“What you need is a flibbertygibbert,” he said. Actually, he didn’t say “flibbertygibbert,” but I don’t remember what he called it. What he did was take me to a shelf and pick up a package of two doohickeys that fit into (a) the square slot in the screw and (b) my drill.

After I got home, the blinds came down and out of the patio in 10 minutes. Amazing what you can do with the correct tool.

Sitting in our patio across the past nine years, I’ve often thought we shouldn’t put too much stock in setting our hearts on specific things and situations and even relationships. Over and over again when I’ve fallen into that trap, the Lord has surprised me with a “solution” I never would have imagined. And I never would have enjoyed it if I had not given God room to work.