

Down Home: Trashing a garbage barrel? Kinda complicated

December 5, 2014

How do you throw away a garbage barrel?

When the bottoms of our big trashcans inevitably wore through this fall, I faced a predicament I hadn't encountered in at least 29 years. We bought two new garbage barrels when we moved back to Texas 19 years ago, and they lasted all this time. For a decade prior to that, we lived in cities where the garbage companies provided their own containers.

But finally, I had to throw away both barrels.

Now, there's a tough nut to crack. A garbage barrel is supposed to sit at the end of the driveway, down by the alley, on trash pick-up day. Even if it's empty and forlorn, it looks like it's in the right place.

A complicated problem

Far be it for a sanitation worker to think, "Man, that trash barrel looks worn out" and toss it in the truck.

I kept our garbage barrels several months longer than they should've been around, because I couldn't figure out the best way to throw them away. (Psychological aside: I'm a self-starter who almost never procrastinates. Except when I can't do something perfectly. Then, I put it off. And the doing never gets any easier.)

The beginning of the end arrived one Saturday, when a garbage truck ran over one of our barrels. I arrived home from errands, and it lay on its side

in the alley, all misshapen and whopper-jawed. The wheels weren't exactly broken, but the barrel rolled at kind of a sideways-angle. And the bottom of the barrel sagged.

I'll admit this was on my mind in church the next day. Now, don't judge me. You've daydreamed in church, too. I've even noticed when the preacher's mind wandered. In this case, I paid attention to the sermon, but you've got to admit offering time can be less-than-fixating.

So, while we passed the plate, I wondered about those blasted barrels. I thought about writing in Spanish and English on their sides: "These barrels are trash themselves. Please throw them away." But (a) I doubted the sanitation workers would take time to read the sides of trash barrels, and, (b) unfortunately, I don't know Spanish.

When we pulled into the garage after church, of course, I couldn't ignore our decrepit barrels. Their image lodged in my noggin, and I was thinking about them as I stood in front of the fridge to fill my glass with ice water.

That's where I found my answer

And that's where I found my answer—on a magnet shaped like a garbage truck. It lists our new pick-up schedule. And, more importantly, it lists the phone number for the city trash office.

The next day, I called to find out how to throw away my garbage barrels. After a near-serious miscue—I inadvertently mentioned "the magnet on my fridge" and the person on the other end of the line thought I wanted to throw away our refrigerator—I learned all I had to do was tell the trash office to haul away my trashcans, and they would do it.

The next garbage day, I dragged them out to the alley one last time. That afternoon, our sanitation worker called from his cell phone.

"I've got a work order to take your garbage cans," he said. "Just checking to make sure that's accurate."

"Do you see two worn-out blue barrels, one stacked inside the other?" I asked.

"I'm looking at them now," he replied.

"Haul 'em," I said.

"They're gone," he reported.

Ta-da!

A life application

My trashcan episode reminded me how hard removing garbage from my life can be. Sometimes, I feel as if my "junk"—sin, fear, regret, selfishness, caution—never will go away. I try to throw it out, and it hangs on by the back driveway in the alley of my soul.

When I finally take the time to pray, when I put in a divine collection order, God hauls it away.

And that's when I feel much, much better than I did that night as I pulled into the driveway and my worn-out garbage barrels were gone, gone, gone.