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THE PROMISES OF GOD

GREATER GOOD AND GREATER GLORY

Read Psalm 139:16

“Your eyes have seen my unformed substance;
And in Your book were all written the days that were ordained for me,
When as yet there was not one of them.”

What does it take to believe—really believe—that seemingly random events are not random at all, but somehow have their own place in God’s overall plan? Answers can come from two ends of the experience spectrum.

First, there are those Christians whose lives have been touched by tragedy out of which has flowed great good for many. For instance, the terrible tragedy of the Columbine High School massacre in April of 1999 sparked a revival among young people at the school and inspired teens across the country to boldness in their witness. Or think of Joni Eareckson Tada, paralyzed as a teenager in a diving accident. From her accident came a new depth of spiritual richness that has issued forth in books, art, music, and advocacy for those with disabilities. Although the circumstances of our lives can be confusing and painful, God’s plan for His people is often advanced through a change of our own plans.

But for others, life’s disrupted plans are those the public never hears about. No movies are made, no books written, no movements started in response to the disrupted plans of many faithful believers. It is not always for a greater or more visible good that plans are changed. But it is always for the greater glory of God.

When God’s people trust in Him in the face of tragedy and change, heaven is awash in waves of glory. Why? Because of what the psalmist wrote: “In Your book were all written the days that were ordained for me, when as yet there was not one of them” (139:16). What some call passive resignation to fate, God calls active participation

by faith. Yielding to what the day brings is saying yes to the One who brings the day. And when His people display that kind of faith, God is glorified.

When unplanned events occur in your life, remember that they were written down before your days began. That means that, however difficult it may be to wrap human reasoning around them, those “disruptions” were part of God’s plan. Greater good and greater glory always confirm the day of the faithful.

GOD’S PROMISE:

Your days, written down in His book,
hold no surprises for Him.

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OCTOBER 2022

REFLECTIONS

A teaching letter encouraging believers to develop a clear mind and a warm heart



A NEW ORIENTATION IN LIFE

Dear Lord, through my new birth and identity in Your Son, I now have an entirely different orientation in life. I have become a steward, and I no longer manage my possessions, but Yours. I have become an ambassador, and I am no longer on my own business, but on the business of Your kingdom. Because I am a new creature and now Your ambassador in Christ, You have given me the ministry of reconciliation in this world. Through Your resources, You have made me adequate as a servant of the new covenant to become a living letter about Christ that can be known and read by others. Jesus, as You promised in your Great Commission, You will be with me always as I serve as an agent of Your life-giving Word. Give me a growing willingness to move out of my comfort zone, and stretch me by Your Holy Spirit to see and do new things in Your power.

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TIME MANAGEMENT, PART TWO

THE GOD OF TIME

GOD'S RELATIONSHIP TO TIME is one of the great mysteries of the Bible. You might call God's relation to time *unconventional* compared to our limited human understanding of time.

Peter tells us that “with the Lord one day is like a thousand years, and a thousand years like one day” (2 Peter 3:8). Peter seems to be recalling Moses's words:

For a thousand years
in Your sight
Are like yesterday
when it passes by,
Or as a watch in the night.
(Psalm 90:4)

A watch lasted three hours. Imagine—a thousand years going by like three hours! If a man's life lasts roughly 70 years (cf. Psalm 90:10), and a thousand years is like three hours, then our entire life would be reduced to 12 minutes and 36 seconds! On this scale, our entire earthly sojourn whizzes past in a blur. By contrast, the Lord continues “from everlasting to everlasting” (Psalm 90:2).

Imagine a line of string that stretches across the room. Now take that line of string and extend it through the walls and outside the building where you are sitting. Carry that line out as far as you can see, in both directions, and allow it to disappear beyond the horizon. If you could take an airplane and fly along that line of string in either direction,

it would continue to stretch out in front of you. The string would not simply wrap itself around the world, but it would reach beyond our atmosphere, extending out into space, beyond our solar system, beyond our universe. The line is never-ending.

Now, take a pen and make a scratch on this line of string—just one mark. That lone scratch is your earthly life in the scope of eternity.¹

From a strictly naturalistic perspective, this idea seems hopeless. We're here today and gone tomorrow. Our lives barely register as a blip on the eternal radar screen. Nothing so short can be truly meaningful, can it? Certainly nothing so brief can sustain our deepest hopes and desires, which is why it is so essential for us to place our hope in something that will endure rather than in the fleeting pleasures of this passing world.

Peter's words—about a day being like a thousand years (and vice versa) with the Lord—indicate that the opposite is also true of God's perspective on time. Our lives may be comparatively short, but the quantity of our days and hours is not what matters in God's kingdom.

God, literally, has all the time in the world. He's not in a hurry, nor does He ever move too slowly. He is God, and He will do whatever He pleases, whenever He pleases (Ps. 115:3; 135:6).

Taking this idea about time (from 2 Peter 3:8 and Psalm 90:4) to its logical extension, an infinitesimal moment is like eternity and eternity is like an infinitesimal moment. In some

incomprehensible way, God sees each moment as an eternity and yet eternity as a moment. God is in the eternal now; He is timeless. This is how God is able to communicate with all of His children and hear the prayers we pray simultaneously. It is part of why He can be omnipresent. God, being everywhere at once, views all things as part of an eternal here and now. And, in each moment, He has all the “time” He needs to provide for each of us the care He has promised (cf. Phil. 4:19). For Him, there is no beginning and no end, no before and no after, save in the way He chooses to communicate with us.

One of the many lessons we can learn from this concept is that God, in His sovereignty, has given each of us enough time to accomplish His purposes for our life. His plan has been unfolding since the beginning of time. Part of that plan involves each of us discovering His purpose for our life and acting upon that calling, as He reveals it to us.²

¹ Adapted from an illustration given by Wayne Cordeiro at the Leadership Summit in Chicago, Illinois, August 1999.

² For more on God and the mystery of time, see our 7-part series on time, especially part 4, at reflections.org/series/time.

NEXT MONTH:
Time Management, Part 3
“Everything in Its Season”

CONSIDER THE FOLLOWING VERSES THAT SPEAK TO GOD'S RELATIONSHIP TO TIME:

“This is what the LORD says, He who is the King of Israel and his Redeemer, the LORD of armies: ‘I am the first and I am the last, and there is no God besides Me.’” (Isaiah 44:6)

“Now to the King eternal, immortal, invisible, the only God, be honor and glory forever and ever.” (1 Timothy 1:17)

“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today, and forever.” (Hebrews 13:8)

“I am the Alpha and the Omega,” says the Lord God, ‘who is and who was and who is to come, the Almighty.’” (Revelation 1:8)

“I am the Alpha and the Omega, the first and the last, the beginning and the end.” (Revelation 22:13)

RELATIVISM AND OUR UNCHANGING GOD

The words of Blaise Pascal often seem more relevant today than when he wrote them in 17th-century France. Here's what he said about relativism:

People who lead disordered lives tell those who lead ordered ones that they are the ones deviating from nature, and believe themselves to be following it: as people on a ship think those on the shore are moving away. The language is the same in all cases. We need a fixed point in order to judge it. The harbor decides for those who are on a ship. But where will we find a harbor in morals?¹

In answer to Pascal's question, this needed “harbor in morals” is the Scripture, God's revealed Word. The Bible is, in fact, a message not from human authors but from God; it's a word not from “under the sun” but from beyond the sun, to use the terms of the book of Ecclesiastes. Scripture is unchanging and absolute—the fixed point of reference for determining right and wrong (morality). Without such an absolute, morality is reduced to feelings.

Indeed, Scripture reflects the absolute, unchanging nature of God Himself. We call this unchanging character His “immutability,” an idea found in verses like Hebrews 13:8 (“Jesus Christ is the same yesterday and today, and forever”) and Malachi 3:6 (“I, the LORD, do not change”). If God is immutable and does not change, then He is getting neither better nor worse. This is a good thing. If God were mutable, then He could change either for the better or for the worse. But if He could change for the better, then it would mean He is not absolutely good already (and if He can change for the worse, that is an even worse scenario!).

Bottom line: God does not change, and His standards for right and wrong do not change. We may become desensitized to immorality because of the culture around us, or we may compromise His standards in our minds. But if it appears that the “harbor” has moved, look again: it's *we* who moved, not God or His Word.

¹ Pascal, *Pensées*, S576/1.697 (Folders Set Aside June 1658: “35. Miscellaneous Thoughts 3”).