



*Forever, O LORD, your word
is firmly fixed in the heavens.*

*Your faithfulness endures
to all generations*

*you have established the earth
and it stands fast.*

*By your appointment they stand this
day,*

for all things are your servants.

PSALM 119:89-91

GOD WILL USE IT ALL

FAITH FAMILY LETTER—APRIL 8, 2020

Good evening,

We are now in week 3 of this very different approach to Wednesday evenings. I miss seeing you and being able to gather as a group. There are many things that I am missing right now. I'm sure you can say the same. My hope is that all of you are doing well and remaining in good health. It is also my prayer that you're finding that God's promises of peace and strength can be relied on when our strength fails and almost everything seems out of our control.

This brief season has been revealing for me on a personal level. I'll plainly admit that I've struggled. While I've always known that I like things around me to be calm, quiet and comfortable, I've been somewhat unaware of how irritable I can be when any of those things are disrupted for an extended period of time. In this case, all of the unknowns have made me quite uncomfortable.

This week I have been reflecting on two discussions I had with a favorite theology professor, many years ago. In the first discussion he stated that I needed to learn to be comfortable with tension. I didn't like the sound of that. He went on and provided a bit of a visual demonstration while reciting the song of Hannah, which is found in 1 Samuel chapter 2.

He gripped his hands together and began to work through the passage, when he arrived at verses 6 and 7 he began to pull in each direction while keeping his hands clasped, producing tension. As I watched the visual demonstration he was providing, I heard the words, "**The LORD brings death and makes alive; he brings down to the grave and raises up.** ⁷ **The LORD sends poverty and wealth; he humbles and he exalts.** My teacher went on to explain that I wasn't allowing room for tension in my understanding of God and how He works. The story of Job is another great example of the point he was making. We sing a song from that story often and we all know the phrase, "You give and take away, blessed by your name". It is so easy to bless God's name when He gives. That is because we feel blessed when we are recipients of something that we believe is good. It is much more difficult to feel blessed when something is taken, because we don't view loss as good. Has it been a little more challenging to feel blessed lately? I've struggled with it at times. Mostly because I'm uncomfortable.

That brings to mind the second important discussion I had with my old theology professor. He looked at a few of us one morning in class and said, "God is not primarily concerned with your comfort. He is primarily concerned with your transformation". That led to a talk about why it is that God will design and allow seasons of discomfort in our lives. It wasn't necessarily a comforting talk. However, it made an impression, one that continues to be very significant in my spiritual formation.

I wonder, if you believe that God primarily concerned with our transformation, do you think He will use all things for that purpose? If so, does that provide some much needed relief?

A.W. Tozer once said,

"When I understand that everything happening to me is to make me more Christlike, it resolves a great deal of anxiety."

If God is using it all to transform us, and to make us more like Christ, then nothing is excluded. Our joys, our sorrows, successes, failures, times of ease, seasons of suffering, health, sickness, periods of strength and those with pain, all are used and have meaning. Knowing this, really knowing this, does reduce anxiety.

Romans 8:1 tells us that if we are "in Christ" that our struggles are not God's condemnation. Verse 32 tells us that "God is for us". Verse 28 tells us that "He is using all things for our good". **All things** can direct us to Jesus.

I don't think anytime is ever a good time for shallow sentimental statements about God. These times are serious and we should all be thinking deeply about what God wants us to learn in the midst of all that is happening. Perhaps God is inviting all of us to examine our hearts, to be inwardly focused and mindful that what He wants to do in us is infinitely more important than what is happening to us.

I'm not making light of the very real challenges we are facing. There are countless logistical, financial and physical issues that are impacting us in practical ways. Those are the things that are happening to us. They are real. They are painful. Those practical issues all create opportunities for us to experience the love, mercy, grace and faithfulness of God in ways that we would not if everything was always comfortable.

I don't pretend to completely understand the sovereignty of God but I do believe what the scriptures declare, that He works all things for our good. No experience is ever wasted. God can and will use all things, even the most difficult experiences of our lives, to transform us and make us more like Christ.

Psalm 119:90–91 says, ***"You have established the earth, and it stands fast. By your appointment they stand this day, for all things are your servants."***

All things are God's servants

All things can, and will, be used by God to accomplish his good purposes for the everlasting joy and glory of his people.

Everything that we are facing right now, can be used by God to make us more like Christ. Our reactions and behaviors can reveal areas of sin in our lives and God can use that to lead us to repentance. Perhaps the stresses of the day cause people to hurt us, which provides opportunities for us to graciously forgive. Our suffering provides us opportunity for us to depend on God. Everything that is hard, that seems wrong in life, can be seen as an invitation from our loving Heavenly Father, to turn to Him and be changed.

If we are to live this out, in these days, we must do as Paul instructed the Ephesians and walk circumspectly. We must remain alert to the spiritual realities all around us while prayerfully asking Him what He wants to reveal in our lives. We should be diligent to seek Him, being aware that He is always at work in our lives and will use ***all things*** to draw us closer to Him.

You are loved

Tony