

# Memories (Part 2)

As I continue to recall memories, I should point out that these are selective and representative. There are many more, but these stand out to illustrate the faithfulness of God in both good and bad times. (Read Part One [here](#).)

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## The Sweet Fellowship of College

“Yesterday, Today, Forever” was a medley of songs popular during my college years at the Free Will Baptist Bible College, [1. Welch College now.] that we dorm students would sing during informal gatherings. One evening, around 1970 or 1971, as the students frequently did, we’d gathered in front of the sliding curtain opening into the dining hall (where the student lounge and later “Common Grounds” were) about five minutes to six, and as was often the case, we started to sing:

*Yesterday, Today, Forever Jesus is the same.*

*All may change, but Jesus never, glory to His name!*

*Glory to His name, glory to His name.*

*All may change but Jesus never, glory to His name!*

*Precious name, oh how sweet, hope of earth and joy of Heaven.*

*Precious name, oh how sweet, hope of earth and joy of Heaven.*

*Heaven is better than this, praise God what joy and bliss*

*Walking down streets of purest gold, living in a land where  
we’ll never grow old.*

*Heaven is better than this, praise God what joy and bliss*

*I like Bible College down here, but Heaven is better than,  
Heaven is better than*

*Heaven is better than this.*

*This world is not my home, I'm just a passing through*

*My treasures are laid up, somewhere beyond the blue.*

*The angels beckon me to Heaven's golden shore,*

*And I can't feel at home in this world any more.*

*More, more about Jesus, more, more about Jesus*

*More of His saving fullness see, more of His love who died for  
me.*

*It's me, it's me, oh Lord, standing in the need of prayer*

*It's me, it's me oh Lord, standing in the need of prayer.*

*Sweet hour of prayer, sweet hour of prayer, that calls me from  
a world of care*

*And bids me at my Father's throne make all my wants and wishes  
known.*

*In seasons of distress and grief, my soul has often found  
relief*

*And oft escaped the tempter's snare, by thy return, sweet hour  
of prayer.*

With a key word, one song would flow into the next:  
name...name, Heaven...Heaven,

This...this, more...more, and prayer...prayer. That particular  
night, though, as we approached the final song, there seemed  
to be a holy hush, a sense of God's Spirit. The curtain came

open well before the end. The dining hall hostess stood there smiling. She didn't hush our singing and call for someone to ask the blessing right away. Instead, she joined us as we finished out the medley with the the beautiful and poignant "Sweet Hour of Prayer," and then we prayed and went into the dining hall to eat. A beautiful moment, a precious memory, which to me highlights the camaraderie, the sweet fellowship, the closeness of our student body during our unforgettable college years.

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### **First Visit to Cuba**

It was the summer of 1986. We had just come home from our second term in Panama to begin stateside assignment. Brother Eugene Waddell, who had recently been named as General Director of Free Will Baptist Foreign Missions, called me, and asked me if I would go with him to Cuba to be his interpreter/translator. I felt greatly honored to be asked to go. Over the years, we had met a number of our FWB people from Cuba who migrated to Panama en route to the United States. I'd heard so much about the country and the church there. In addition, visits from the US to Cuba were very infrequent, and no one from the Mission office had gone in nearly thirty years.

It was one of the most unforgettable weeks of my life. We were in Pinar del Río, at the site where the seminary had operated for almost 20 years up until the time of the Cuban revolution. Since that time it had been closed, and the government would not allow the seminary to reopen. Eugene Waddell spoke several times during the youth camp we were attending; the FWB Church in Cuba was still permitted to use the facility for camps and conventions. Never have I seen such anointing or heard such pertinent messages as those he brought that week. His messages from the book of Daniel, and how God used this young man and his three friends as witnesses in a

foreign, hostile culture, tremendously blessed and encouraged our Cuban brothers and sisters, especially the youth.

We laughed, we cried, we worshipped, and we forged friendships that would last for a lifetime and into eternity. There were also strategic discussions and the working out of a viable strategy for the Mission to again become involved in the life of the Cuban church, but in a healthy way that would honor our brothers and not create unhealthy dependency. What has resulted in Cuba these past 30 years owes much to the wisdom God gave to Bro. Waddell and Bro. Gilberto Díaz, who was president of the Cuban Association.

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### **The 1989 US Invasion of Panama**

Things had been hot and chaotic in Panama since 1987, when frequent demonstrations started taking place against the dictatorship that had ruled the country since October 1968. Then, in early 1988, the U.S. froze Panamanian assets in an effort to force dictator Manuel Antonio Noriega to step down, and charged him with drug trafficking and other illegal activities. Banks closed, and we had difficulty getting money to even buy groceries. Things calmed down a bit, but then in May, 1989, after Noriega had the presidential election annulled when it was evident that the opposing candidate had one, violence erupted, and images of Guillermo Endara and Guillermo "Billy" Ford beaten and bloodied by Noriega's thugs flashed across the television screen. The tension grew almost daily.

Judy shares the following memory:

*Since public transportation was so difficult during this time, one afternoon, I decided to take our friend Lola to a bus stop closer to her house so she wouldn't have to wait for hours. We were chatting in the car as we arrived to the area called San*

*Miguelito. Suddenly, we were in the middle of a political demonstration. The traffic was totally stopped. I looked around. There was a river of cars in front of us, behind us and on both sides. The angry mob was shouting, "Kill the Gringos, kill the Gringos." There was no escape. The car had tinted windows, thank the Lord, because one protester approached my car and laid his AK-47 right on the hood and continued to shout! Lola was praying like there was no tomorrow and I was saying a few prayers myself. Just as suddenly as we found ourselves in this horribly frightening situation, it seemed like God parted the Red Sea. That river of cars opened up and I didn't wait to see if the traffic light was red or green. I gunned it and we were out of there safe and sound. Only God could do that!*

There were a couple of coup attempts to have Noriega step down, which failed and resulted in Noriega's men being killed. October and November slowly went, the tension growing, and no one knowing what might happen. Noriega shook a machete in the face of the United States, and declared Panama to be in a state of war. It was now late December, Christmas season, stores crowded with customers and their Christmas merchandise.

December 20, 12:00 a.m.: My family and I – our three boys were there with us, ages 14, 12, and 8 – will never forget "Operation Just Cause." The bombing, the strong military presence for weeks that followed, the terrible Friday, December 22 following the Wednesday a.m. invasion; a day of looting as people ransacked the stores, including those nearby us, and carried things up the street in front of our house. Everyone was concerned that once the stores were wiped out, looters would start breaking into homes. That night, by common consent, believers set a time to pray and call upon the Lord for His protection. I'll never forget when the prayer time ended, at that very moment, we heard the first U.S. helicopters passing over the neighborhoods, and heard that a curfew had been instituted! We were able to sleep in peace, in

spite of the uncertainty. The next day, we saw the first troops, patrolling the city. Things began to quickly calm down.

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### **Parents' Home-going**

These memories, though separated by over 25 years, have special significance: the passing of our parents, their departing this earth on their Heavenly journey. My dad died in 1981, after a year and a half struggle with pancreatic and liver cancer. He was not quite 70, and I was only 31 when he left us. We are thankful he lived longer than the doctors' had predicted, and enjoyed several months relatively pain-free. Judy's mom, Lillian Hovis, left us in 1993, at age 68. She had taken care of Judy's dad, who had lived in declining health for some time, when she was stricken with pancreatic and liver cancer in 1992. In less than a year, she was gone. That left Judy's dad, who lived for almost three years after his wife of 46 years was taken. He passed in 1996, at home. My mom suffered from Alzheimer's for more than 8 years, before the Lord took her home in 2007.

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These very selective memories, spread over a period of 30 plus years, show God's love, faithfulness, protection, and comfort. From a precious, unforgettable moment of fellowship and camaraderie, to the Holy Spirit's mighty working among believers in Cuba, to God's hand of protection during a time of uncertainty and danger, to His comfort as we said our earthly goodbyes to those we love, He was there!

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# Here Where Dogs Bite and Bees Sting: Part Two

## How the Corruption of Free Will Has Affected Nature

In the [first part](#) of this three-part series, I talked about how we corrupted God's gift of free will by choosing to sin, to turn away from Him. This began the history of the curse of sin. One of the results of the curse of sin is that all of nature is now imperfect. Much to our chagrin, everything is now dying. And as I mentioned in Part One, many of us see this as all God's fault.

C.S. Lewis tells about the death of his mother, a turning point in his early life. He recalls praying for a miraculous resurrection. When none of this took place, he completely rejected that there could possibly be a good God.

An older Lewis conceded that the subject is much more complicated than he had thought as a young man. In *Mere Christianity*, he wondered "...How had I got this idea of just and unjust?...(*Mere Christianity*, 40). What was I comparing this universe with when I called it unjust?" It is this thought that convicted Lewis of the over-simplicity of his atheistic beliefs. A little further on in *Mere Christianity* he says it is also an oversimplification to say, yes, there is a good God in heaven and that God has made it so everything is all right.

Evil does exist in both man and nature and God obviously doesn't quell all of it. It is not that it is too powerful for God or even that it is equal with Him. It is not like there is not an equal, dualistic battle where good and evil do perpetual battle with one another with evil continually limiting God. The story of Scripture shows that the evil

forces of darkness are a much lesser thing which God is in the process of conquering. But Scripture also makes it clear that evil is still exceedingly powerful. And it is this exceedingly powerful thing that has infected both man and nature.

## **Pain is a Grace**

As far as the natural, physical order, I don't think pain and suffering are the main culprits. Pain and suffering may be unpleasant but they aren't evil things in and of themselves. They are indicators that something evil is happening. In fact, when you experience pain you are often experiencing a sort of gift. In *Where Is God When It Hurts?* Philip Yancey describes "The Gift Nobody Wants" first thing. He says, "pain gets bad press...we should see poems, statues and hymns to pain." He says, "Pain is not an afterthought, or God's great goof...it reveals a marvelous design that serves our bodies well." He tells how his close friend Paul Brand, a doctor at a leper clinic, observed firsthand that without being able to feel pain lepers are unable to detect when evil is happening to their bodies and therefore do not know to do something about it. This is the major reason for many of the injuries incurred by leprosy (*Where is God When It Hurts?* 26-31).

## **And Our Suffering is Not Divine Punishment**

The imperfection in nature that instigates the pain is sometimes seen as a punishment from God. Rabbi Harold Kushner wrote the book *When Bad Things Happen to Good People* while watching his own son die of a very rare disease. Many of the conclusions found in the book are probably wrong, but he does provide some good insights. For instance, Kushner relates going to the home of a couple who had just lost a child. When he arrived at their home the very first words out of their mouth were, "You know, Rabbi, we didn't fast last Yom Kippur" (*When Bad Things Happen to Good People*, 8). In their opinion, they were only getting from God what they deserved. They

believed that God was punishing them for doing what they were supposed to do.

The story of Job and his friends probably came to mind when I was talking about viewing suffering as a punishment for a sin, didn't it? They (the "friends") certainly said a lot of interesting, thought-provoking things, but they were just saying the same wrong things over and over again. They would have us believe that when we hurt, we really are being punished for some sin. That really has nothing to do with it as far as we are concerned. We feel pain at all because we live in an imperfect world. It's as simple as that.

### **Living Your Faith in This World That Hurts**

The trick is not allowing the existence of imperfection of the natural order to play a decisive role in our personal level of faith. That is, our faith in and on God should not lower or become non-existent when something bad or even a bunch of bad somethings takes place in our lives. Job was faithful to God despite a bunch of really bad somethings coming into his life in an apparently brief amount of time. That is not to say he never expressed anger and frustration at what God was doing to him. He did. That is not to say he did not often demand an answer from God. He did that too. His level of faith on God simply did not depend on life being good. Throughout the book, Job makes it very clear that he wasn't a masochist who enjoyed the pain, but he also made it clear that he was fully willing to accept that both good and evil came into the lives of those who love God.

God, the one friend who knew what He was talking about, made a huge statement of His amazing knowledge and sovereignty in the last three chapters of Job. His words here reveal a God that is very opposite the weak God claimed by so many. One of these individuals is the aforementioned Kushner. I mentioned that Kushner comes to several wrong conclusions in his book. Here's one of them: Toward the end of his book he concludes that God

“is limited in what he can do by laws of nature and by the evolution of human nature and human moral freedom” (*When Bad Things Happen to Good People*, 134). Yancey comments on this statement by Kushner in *Where is God When It Hurts*: “God’s speech at the end of Job is one of the...reasons I cannot agree...Job 38–41 contains as impressive a description of God’s power as you’ll find anywhere in the Bible.” God is not limited by evil, by our free will, by anything. But we are. We are limited by many things. And in our limited understanding, we assume that He really is limited. In so doing we make the God of our hearts and minds a weak God.

### **The Unpleasant Providence**

No, God does not punish us by inflicting disease and hardship upon us but uses these things to reveal His glory. Upon first seeing a blind man, the disciples asked Jesus, who sinned to make this man blind, the man himself or his parents? Jesus replied that neither had sinned but that the man had been born blind so that God’s glory could be displayed. He then proceeded to manifest the glory of God by miraculously healing the man. Other people who have experienced bitter providence come to mind.

I think of Carolyn Martin. Carolyn is a friend of my family who was born with severe Cerebral Palsy. Martin spent much of her early life seeking to find meaning out of her lot in life. Despite being a church-going person for most of her life, it was only as an adult she found the joy in God that gave her true meaning. In her words: “My pain was washed away by God’s deep and soothing sea of love for me” (*I Can’t Walk So I’ll Learn to Dance*, 239). She came to see that God was using her handicap for His glory. She was able to get a college education and to thereafter become a published writer, inspiring others with physical limitations through her story. Her story is a message of God’s grace.

I think of Richard Wurmbrand. It was as a religious prisoner under communist guard that pastor Wurmbrand saw the true face of evil. The tortures he endured and witnessed are too horrible to contemplate. He recounted how he heard one of his torturers say, "I thank God, in whom I don't believe, that I have lived to this hour when I can express all the evil in my heart."<sup>33</sup> His story is a story of God's providence. After his final release, Wurmbrand spread his story throughout the world and started Voice of the Martyrs. His story has become an inspiration to millions of Christians throughout the world.

And these are just two examples. There are many of them. Many the best of these examples are in God's Word.

But although He is working His plan through, this imperfect world is not ideal to God. All of history is His working toward renewal. In the last part of this series, we will look at that.

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## Grace Is

Grace is, according to the Sunday School answer, "unmerited favor."

The problem with this comes with a misunderstanding of "favor." We would probably agree that grace is unmerited: underserved, not earned, etc. But favor causes problems.

Favor would be getting a promotion and salary increase at work. Favor would be avoiding the car accident by inches. Favor would be having a healthy baby.

And, while I think these are blessings that God allows because He is gracious, I believe God does not lay aside His

graciousness if I'm overlooked for the promotion, if I am involved in a devastating car wreck, or if my son is born with a disability.

I misunderstand God's favor as "what I want" rather than what He wants. I would never choose the hard road. Ever. Not even once. God chooses if for me because it's what is best. And the hard road in His will is also His favor.

Think about it in terms of our heroes in the Bible. Was God NOT gracious when Joseph was sold into slavery? Was He NOT gracious when Joseph was wrongly imprisoned? Knowing what God does through these misfortunes of Joseph, I can clearly see His grace; by allowing Joseph to endure these difficulties, God promotes him and saves the Hebrews.

But it's not as easy for me to proclaim Him as gracious in the midst of one of life's messy chapters when I don't know the whole story.

Another problem with how we discuss and define grace is when we contrast it with judgment. God is a God of both. One is not laid aside while He picks up the other. Jesus demonstrates this for us perfectly.

Was it gracious of Jesus to cleanse the temple and throw out the money changers? Would we call it grace when Jesus called the Pharisees "brood of vipers" or "white-washed tombs" (Matthew 23)? Jesus did not take off His attribute of grace so He could wear His judge's robe. Grace involves truth, or it's not grace. If Jesus would have ignored the religious leaders' Jewish elitism and religious hypocrisy, He would not have shown them grace.

As a parent, this makes sense to me. The Bible tells me that God disciplines those He loves as a father disciplines his child (see Proverbs 3:12 and Hebrews 12:6). Disciplining my child is an act of grace. Further, to NOT discipline my child is to "hate" him (Proverbs 13:24). If I only show what my kids

would call “favor” towards them, the results would be disastrous. Kids’ ideas of what is favorable are not always what is best. So my “unfavorable” discipline, food choice, rules, conversations, etc. is for their overall good. It’s ungracious to make every choice based on what they would consider favorable.

I have seen a trend in statements such as, “If I am wrong (about this issue), I want to err on the side of grace.” Grace is never on the same side as falsehood. Grace is always connected to truth. If it’s true that child abuse is wrong, then it’s not gracious to ignore it or accept it just in case it’s okay. (Of course it’s not okay.) If it’s true that that having sex with someone who is not my spouse is wrong, then it’s not correct to ignore or accept it in the name of grace. Having laws against child abuse and punishment for abusers are gracious acts in that these are correct. Showing grace to an unfaithful spouse could include civil agreements in the dividing of assets in divorce, custodial arrangements, and forgiveness—but not acceptance and tolerance of the behavior. It would be ungracious to say, “Just sleep with whomever your heart tells you to. Because if I’m wrong about wanting you to be faithful to me, then I would rather err on the side of grace.” Ludicrous!

By His grace I am saved through faith, and not by things I do, or I would certainly boast about how good I am (Ephesians 2:8-9). Grace is about what He has done, what He does, and what He will do. Grace is unmerited favor, as long as I don’t misunderstand or limit what “favor” actually means.

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# The Spoken Unspoken Prayer Request

*"I have an unspoken."*

Then why did you just speak it?

The "unspoken" prayer request (pause and meditate on that phrase for a few minutes) has bothered me for years. If I have such a sensitive, secretive topic, then I can pray for it without the announcement that I have one. If I do not think I should share it with a group of people, then I shouldn't. If it is a request that is burdensome enough to share with fellow brothers and sisters in Christ, then I need to say what it is. I don't have to share all the details to ask for prayer. I can ask my small group (Sunday School class, Life Group, Connection Group, Whatever-Clever-Name-You-Want Group) to pray about a big decision that I have to make. This is not the "unspoken" I am referring to. I am talking about those generic "I have an unspoken" comments. What is their purpose?

I liken this to a child who is supposed to keep a secret. A true secret-keeper will not give others the indication that he or she has knowledge of the secret. But as all parents have experienced, the first time you tell your child a secret, he has to advertise that he knows something that others do not know. This advertisement, this announcement of the secret knowledge, is too revealing. In essence, it is no longer a complete secret once people know that there is one being kept.

So why ask for prayer for an unspoken reason (that's actually not unspoken)?

**Could it be pride?**

*"This is so important, this information I am privy to, that I can't share it with anyone."*

*"This very personal issue is so private, that I can't tell you about it."*

*"But that doesn't mean you can't 'pray' about this thing you don't know about. Because God knows."*

It's true that God knows. It's also true that none of the rest of us have to know about it. If it is wise to not share about the request, then don't. Sometimes, I think it's good to just be quiet.

**Is it really God-honoring to share an unspoken request?**

Request sharing should be a time of honesty, authenticity, and brokenness between like-minded, sinning disciples of Christ. Perhaps the sinning saints are hurting because we are sojourners and living in a hostile world brings trouble. ("In this world you will have trouble," Jesus warned.) Perhaps the purpose is based in praise, and we see a piece of home here on earth because loving God and loving others will bring blessing. Perhaps we share to adore the One who is redeeming us for a greater purpose. I don't think unspoken requests accomplish any of these.

**Do we see any examples in the Bible of the unspoken request?**

Prayers in the Bible are specific: prayers that the gospel would be shared boldly; prayers for protection and safety and holiness; prayers of thankfulness. However, even the prayers recorded in the Bible do not share all the minutia of every request. We are even instructed to avoid wordiness and repetition (Matthew 6:7). Imagine Paul (or Peter or James or John, etc.) writing, "Dear Brothers and Sisters, I have an unspoken." It seems strange.

These are only three reasons why I see no benefit in sharing unspoken requests: they are often rooted in pride; they do not serve a God-honoring purpose; and there is no biblical precedent.

What do you think? Am I missing something?

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# Peter, Walking on Water, and the Trust of a Drowning Man

I've been thinking a lot about Peter and trust. Not faith necessarily, but trust. And it all stems from a thought I had when I read the story found in Matthew 14:22-33.

My guess is, most of you know the story and know it well. It is a favorite for Sunday School teachers. Preachers love it as well. There is a lot to be gleaned from the story of Jesus walking on the water. There are the various dynamics at play: fear, doubt, faith, and trust. There is Jesus, walking on the wind-swept waters in a display of power that rivals almost any miracle recorded in Scripture. There are the disciples, cowering in the boat, terrified of the "ghost" that is approaching them. There is Peter, touched by the presence of Jesus, trusting enough to take a step of faith out of the boat. And then there is Peter, overcome by his fear of the winds and waves, sinking into the water.

This most recent time I encountered the story, I was struck with a moment that I have never really noticed before, and it dramatically altered how I view this story.

In my experience, Jesus walking on the water has always been used to teach about doubt and faith. There they were, sitting in the boat, surrounded by the storm, and they see him – Jesus, walking on the water and coming their way. Let me repeat that. In the middle of a storm the disciples see Jesus, their teacher, literally walking on the water. By this point, they had already witnessed various miracles. They knew Jesus had power over the natural world. They had to – they had just seen him multiply the fish and the bread to feed

thousands. And now, here he is, walking on the water as if on land. Yet they are still terrified of the winds, the waves, and the “ghost” walking towards them on the water.

And then he calls to them with words of comfort and peace. At this point in his spiritual walk, Peter’s words were far bolder than his actions, so he asks Jesus to command him to walk out to him. Jesus simply says, “Come.” Peter then does something that should both inspire and shame all of us: He steps out on the water and walks towards Jesus. That is faith. That is complete trust in Jesus. I am moved and my spirit is piqued when I read that. Peter knew the sea, it was his life and livelihood. He knew that man was not made to walk on the water. But he saw and heard Jesus and he trusted fully.

Then he took his eyes off Jesus and focused on the storm. This is the moment in the story that most teachers make their big point. And it is a very good point. We should always keep our eyes on Jesus. We should take him at his word. We should trust completely. We should have that mustard seed faith and move whatever mountains are in our way.

We don’t live in that reality though. Most of us don’t, at least. I have never moved a mountain and I don’t know of anyone who has. We struggle with trusting fully and living by faith. We are more like the other disciples, huddling in the boat waiting to see what happens.

So the contrast is simple: We should be like Peter before he took his eyes off the Lord. We should not be like Peter who allowed fear to guide his actions. That is a good lesson. It is a simple, yet powerful truth. But I see another kind of trust in that passage.

I see Peter sinking deep into the stormy waters, knowing death was quickly coming to take him. I see Peter realizing that his faith was not strong enough to continue walking on that water. That could have been the end of the story. But that is not how

Jesus let it end. As Peter is flailing in the water, he calls out to Jesus, "Lord, save me!" Jesus walks to Peter and takes his hand. Peter could have looked at that hand and thought to himself, "Thanks but no thanks Jesus. I don't see how it's possible for you to keep me from drowning, seeing as how you are literally standing on water. Why don't you get the boat to come over here and then I can hold on to that. I know that boat is made to float, unlike us." But Peter trusted in the power of Jesus. He didn't trust in that power to work in his own life, not yet, but he knew without hesitation that Jesus could and would save him. He knew that Jesus could reach down and pull him out of the water, even though that made no earthly sense. His faith was small, but it was enough to trust in his Saviour.

Most days, that kind of trust is all I can muster. I hope and yearn for the other kind, the fuller kind. But on days where that trust is a faint glimmer, I hope I trust enough to simply take the hand of Jesus when he offers to help me. Most days, I am okay with having the trust of a drowning man.

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## Grace and Glory

*For Jehovah God is a sun and a shield:*

*Jehovah will give grace and glory;*

*No good thing will he withhold from them that walk uprightly.*

Psalm 84:11

Psalm 84:11 is one of the most beautiful, majestic Psalms. Here we find these two words together, in juxtaposition that brings hope, blessing and encouragement to followers of Jesus. The Lord will give grace and glory. The context of this most

precious Psalm is one of a pilgrim longing for God's house and being on a journey where he is unable to be there. But he finds God's strength sufficient for his pilgrimage (verses 5-7) and so he journeys on toward Jerusalem. The climactic part, verses 10-12, is his testimony that he would rather spend one day in God's courts than thousands elsewhere. Verse 11 is powerful: the LORD God is a sun and shield, and grants "favor and honor," a more modern way to render "grace and glory." Thus we see that there is an immediate application to the present, as he goes on to say "he does not withhold the good from those who live with integrity." (CSB)

Charles Spurgeon states:

*Who else could give either grace or glory? But God is full of grace—His very name is Love—it is His Nature to freely dispense of His goodness to others. As it is according to the nature of the sun to shine, so it is according to the Nature of God to give good things to His creatures. In Him all fullness dwells—all grace and all glory are perpetually resident in Jehovah, the Infinite. What a mercy it is that we, poor empty sinners, have to do with a God of such fullness and of such goodness! If He were shorthanded with His love, what would become of us? If He had but little graciousness, if He had but little glory, then we great sinners must certainly perish. But since the Lord is a bottomless well of love and a topless mountain of grace, we may come to Him, and come freely, without any fear that either His grace or His glory will ever suffer any diminution. Note again that the text says, "Jehovah will give grace and glory." Not only has He these wondrous blessings, but He has them that He may give them freely. If He were to keep them to Himself, He would be none the richer, and when He distributes them, He is none the poorer! The Lord does not sell grace or glory, He does not put them up to auction to those who can give something in return for them. God is a great Giver and a great Forgiver. He gives grace and glory without money, without price and without any merit in the receiver. The Lord gives—there is nothing freer*

*than a gift and there can be nothing freer than that greatest of all the gifts of God, eternal life! That expression, "eternal life," sums up these two things—grace and glory. "The Lord will give grace and glory." It is His glory to give His grace and because of His graciousness, He gives glory!*[1. Metropolitan Tabernacle Pulpit #2502]

Yet, "grace and glory," surely suggest our future blessing in eternity as well. "'Tis grace hath brought me safe thus far, and grace will lead me home" (John Newton). I thought of some songs that feature the phrase "grace and glory," some of which emphasize the here and now, while others the "sweet by and by."

"Where He Leads Me I Will Follow" – a song of commitment and trust, where the lines of the verses are repeated as "I can hear my Savior calling," "He'll go with me through the garden," "He'll go with me through the judgment," and finally "He will give me grace and glory." The refrain says "Where He leads me I will follow (three times)...He'll go with me, with me, all the way." From His initial call to the grace and glory that await, no doubt a reference to Heaven, He will truly go with me all the way.[2. Where He Leads Me: Ernest W. Blandy, 1890]

A group called "Poet Voices" sang a song about a decade or so ago called "Grace and Glory." Again, borrowing from those beautiful words it states "His love is full of grace and glory that is why I sing."

Unmerited favor of the Savior falling from His holiness  
It is never ending grace extending from His righteousness  
To the undeserving, God is serving bountiful supply  
His great love's abounding and surrounding us from sky to sky.[3. Phil Cross, Bridge Building Music, BMI, Chris White Music, BMI]

Christian songwriter, poet, and comedian Aaron Wilburn wrote a

song some years ago in which “grace and glory,” while not the theme or title, still figures prominently in the message. Recently performed by a number of singing groups, it was a favorite of Aaron’s mother: “That Sounds Like Home to Me,” a song about Heaven, in which the refrain thrills the believer’s heart by affirming “the hills will echo with the story as we sing of His grace and glory. Wow! To think that one day we’ll extol His grace and glory throughout the ages.[4. C.A. Wilburn and Edwin Crook, Werner Chappel Music, Inc.]

Finally, there comes to my mind a song I heard only a couple of months ago by a trio I enjoy a great deal. Songwriter Sue C. Smith and collaborators beautiful lyrics, and Karen Peck’s country soprano delivers yet another song of hope “On the Banks of the Promised Land.” My soul is set to soar when I hear the refrain “Hallelujah, what a morning, when I reach for that nail-scarred hand, and I’m led by His grace and His glory, on the banks of the Promised Land.”[5. Sue C. Smith, David Moffit, Jason Dyba]

My conclusions: The Psalm would indicate that grace and glory are for both now and for the future. It’s grace that saves us now, that guides and guards us in this life, that leads us on this earthly pilgrimage, but it is also grace that leads us home, to again quote John Newton.

To glory – what does that mean? The goal, the end of God’s grace working in us is to transport us to glory, as some of the songs I’ve quoted suggest. But we might also say that the grace at work in us brings glory to Him who is worthy of it all – grace to glory. And most definitely grace accomplishes glory – His glory and our enjoyment of it and rapture in it – here on earth temporarily and imperfectly, and permanently and perfectly in Heaven.

These past days have been bittersweet. Services at church have been good, and it is thrilling to see our Hispanic group there, growing in the Lord, and becoming more involved.

However, news came of the passing of two friends, both named Tim. Tim Hayes was from Illinois, very active in his church, in missions, and with the Master's Men Disaster Relief Team. I have known him since college days. A massive heart attack. Then, Tim Coats, formerly a Home Missionary in South Dakota, and in recent years a bivocational pastor there in Rapid City. He and Kathy were summer missionaries with us in 1982 in Panama when our kids were very small. Faithful men, good friends. They have now gone from grace to glory, praise the Lord.

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## **Read No Evil: A Christian Response to The 'Fake News' Era**

"There it was again: Choose what to believe. He wanted truth. Why was everybody so determined that he not get it?" [*Harry Potter and the Deathly Hallows*]

### **Avoiding the Alternative**

This isn't really about Donald Trump. It's not really about CNN. Hot takes and even well written pieces on their war are everywhere and so I'd rather spare you more of that.

This is really more about how I, as a Christian, deal with the current bipartisan climate of how we get our news. I'm not taking sides in this public war between our president and many media outlets. I disagree with our president on many things but I cannot deny that the media – major news networks, not

just trolls on Twitter – has continuously lied about him, misrepresented him and ran with false stories since before Day 1 of his presidency.

To be fair, the same thing happened when Obama was president. The only difference to me is that most of the historically popular news has been historically left leaning. The rise of social media has brought some balance, but until I got on Twitter last year there were only a small handful of places I could regularly see the brazen mistreatment of our former president. I see it regularly now.

## **The Un-silent Majority**

So if I cannot trust a lot of media, and I want to be informed (as I should as a citizen) and a pursuer of truth (as I should as a Christian), what do I do? Well, I have spent a lot of time thinking about it. I have finally decided, as risky as it may be, to write about it. Let me be absolutely clear that what I am about to share are things that I am practicing in my own life, as a follower of the Christian God. I *do not* believe they are absolute truths for all Christians everywhere. I'm sharing because I think it helps to talk through these things. I'm willing to learn from others as well.

### **1. I'm Ignoring the Extremes**

I do not believe our president is either always right or always wrong. I think he is far more often wrong (at the very least I appreciate his VP and Supreme Court picks and support for life in the womb), not just in policy but in presentation (especially on Twitter, holy moly). I know and love people who disagree with me and see him more often right. However, I cannot get behind either extreme because the vast majority of the time extremes do not contain the truth. I'm not convinced

either extreme view of our president is an exception.

So people like Tomi Lahren and websites like *Mother Jones* are basically irrelevant to me. I have no doubt at times they report things that are true. But they are so deep within one extreme side of the war, basically all of what they pontificate about is utterly slanted and lacking any semblance of balance. I can find the more nuanced truth from people who are willing to say, "On this, Trump is right. On this, he is wrong." And who did the same for Obama, rare as they were. I remember when my brother, who was no fan of Obama, lauded him on Facebook for his work on the pursuit of Osama Bin Laden. I feel I can trust him more because of that. A huge fan of moderate John Adams, he challenges biases and sees things issue by issue. May we all.

## **2. I'm learning to hate hypocrisy in others and myself.**

I feel pretty confident that some people who have ripped Trump for his behavior toward women weren't quite as loud when Bill Clinton was president. Conversely, I have little doubt some people have minimized Trump's private life who blasted Bill Clinton as a moral embarrassment. I have no doubt that when Trump does something that Obama did that Obama haters criticized, Obama lovers jump on the hypocrisy. And that when Trump haters criticize Trump for doing something Obama did, Trump lovers cry hypocrisy.

Essentially nothing, including the 39 years of church life I've experienced, brings out our willingness to double standard things as American politics. And I'm not just complaining or condemning. I'm saying this because at times I'm guilty of this in politics and out, and seeing how abhorrent it is in other people helps me want to avoid it. To repent of it.

### **3. I'm OK with Not Having a Passionate Opinion on Everything**

With media so willing to be dishonest as it is, I confess there are times on issues I struggle with knowing the truth. And even when I mine through all extreme bias in media and get the facts, there are still times the facts are in such conflict that they make it difficult to have a hardline opinion. So, sometimes I don't have a solid opinion.

And I'm OK with that. Please know that I'm not saying that we should be on the fence very often. I have strong opinions about abortion and immigration and several other topics that matter to me. Because I know enough to know what I believe. But there are many times I am much more torn. On the issue of healthcare, I sometimes feel overwhelmed by the data given by both sides for and against recent legislation: millions have been helped and millions have ripped it apart. I see both sides. The ACA has affected me but not as positively or as negatively as many others. So it's hard for me to take a hard line on it, as I see merits and flaws.

In the book *Blink*, Malcom Gladwell makes the point that we need to be comfortable saying, "I don't know". I think this is true in politics. I personally can't be dialed up to Level 11 for passion or outrage about everything. Because then there is no room for true passion or outrage.

### **4. I'm more motivated than ever to live out what I believe**

I am not ready yet to abandon social media. I think it does more good for me than evil. Yet, I can probably speak for many when I see it makes me feel so helpless. It makes me sad for this world. And while not the best motivation, what does happen is that it motivates me to live out what I believe much more purposefully. I can't change people's minds on political issues. I can't stop the simplistic memes, 140-character fallacious arguments or lying by politicians and media. What I

can do is preach and live Truth to my wife, my neighbors, my church and anyone else God puts in my path. In today's era of fake news, and online debating due to fake news, nothing is more cathartic.

Again, it's not my aim to preach about this. These are my convictions and they are up for discussion for other people.

I just know there seems to be a fairly big remnant of people who feel like I do who do not want to be drowned out by the "Trump is Hitler" and Trump sycophant armies.

The pursuit of truth has never been for the lazy. It takes work. Sadly in the U.S. this is true with filtering our news sources. But it must be done. Humbly and honestly, it must be done. The lead quote to this article is in the context of Harry refusing to take for granted what he knew about Dumbledore. It wasn't enough to trust neither the media nor what he assumed was true. I want to have that attitude.

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## Is There Room For God Today?

I blame the actual arrival of today. As long as it stayed tomorrow, things were okay. Things were hunky-dory. Tomorrow. You can bet your bottom dollars that every single time it will insist on metamorphizing into today. There is always that deadline you must meet *today*, that whatchamacallit due *today*, that thing you absolutely must do *today*, etc., etc., yada, yada, yada. And when we do have free time, we frequently use it for me time, for some form of entertainment, for chilling, yo. My personal happy places: doing jigsaw puzzles, taking walks, reading, playing board games, watching T.V., and, of course, sleeping. When I can swing it I do stuff like going to

movies, hanging with friends and family, and going out to eat. That sort of thing. These are nice pastimes, really, but Christians shouldn't be cramming all of their free time with just entertainment. In fact, the serious, need-to-do sector of life needs to prioritize time with God, as well. He needs to be at the center of all of it.

Time with God should not be something we squeeze in only if it is convenient. But for most of us, that is very sadly the case. Unfortunately, God is often a last resort. It is so much easier to seek help from someone or something we can see, hear, and/or touch than from someone we cannot. Turning to God might be a little easier if we take developing that relationship a lot more seriously. I certainly have a long way to go in that area, but there are three things I know without a doubt are imperative keys to having a personal relationship with God. All three of these examples are drawn from great examples of prayer throughout the Bible.

### **1. Make Your Daily Relationship With God a Priority That Will Hold Up No Matter What**

The Bible gives a multiplicity of good examples of how to pray in any circumstance. The book of Daniel tells us the story of Daniel and his three friends who time and time again showed that they feared and revered God above all else. Everything else—including their very lives—came at best a very distant second. In Chapter 6 it tells how Daniel spent time in prayer three times a day no matter what. And this was no secret; his political opponents used it against him when the king decreed that only he should be worshiped and that all who disobeyed this decree—and their families—would be thrown into the lion's den. These opponents, they obviously knew Daniel well enough that this would not affect his routine and that he would continue to pray to God. Their evil scheme was banking on this assumption. That in itself says a lot. And they were right, he prioritized his divine relationship to such a degree that nothing ever swayed it. I like to think he didn't even have to

think about it. That is just one awesome biblical example; there are many others.

The recorded prayers of these great men, they are all so honed and well worded that it can be intimidating. You might think that God will only listen to immaculately worded prayers. Although He deserves to have our best prayers, He will not ignore clumsy, stilted, but reverent prayers. God will always accept even the clumsiest and most awkward of prayers from the heart of a devoted Christian.

## **2. Let Him Be the One to Hear Your Every Need**

Check this out:

*“Answer me when I call to you, O my righteous God. Give me relief from my distress; be merciful to me and hear my prayer.”* (Psalm 4:1)

This was one small prayer uttered by David. It is only one example of the many very honest and open prayers to God by the giants of Scripture. And that is the same kind of honesty, openness, and urgency with God that we need. We need to crave His attention every single day, all day. This passage is part of a prayer David prayed in a time of distress. David, godly David, great and powerful David, he was faulty just like us; the Bible is open about his weaknesses and mistakes. But despite his failings and times of selfishness, he trusted the Lord and depended on His guidance and help. Like many men in the Bible who prayed to God, David was extremely open and honest in his prayers, sometimes brutally so. These men, they understood that God is the ultimate confidante. We can say things to Him that we can't say to anyone else—sometimes things we can't even admit to ourselves. We can and should bring before Him our every need.

## **3. Be Aware This Divine Relationship Isn't *Only* About Your Physical Needs (and/or Desires)**

I'm a fan of The King of Queens. One of my favorite episodes involves Doug and Carrie attending church. Carrie is particularly very reluctant about the whole thing until she prays for a raise and immediately afterward gets a cellphone call that she got one. After that, she treats prayer like her personal good luck charm. She even tells Doug that she can't tell him what she prayed for or it won't come true. A resentful Doug starts praying to undo her prayers. Back and forth they go, waging a "prayer" battle with each other. A wizard's duel, if you will.

Yeah, it doesn't work like that. We may not be that bad, but it is easy to fall into turning prayers into a grocery list ("I want that and that and some of those and some of these, too—if it is your will, of course.") or like Carrie, a good luck charm. God wants us to ask him for stuff, but he also desires praise, adoration, thanksgiving, and a genuine one-on-one relationship. Jesus taught the disciples a good example of prayer. We call it The Lord's Prayer. There are two versions: one in Matthew, the other in Luke. Both are very similar with the Matthew version being a tad longer. Here is that longer version:

*"Our Father in heaven,  
hallowed be your name.  
Your kingdom come,  
your will be done,  
on earth as it is in heaven.  
Give us this day our daily bread,  
and forgive us our debts,  
as we also have forgiven our debtors.  
And lead us not into temptation,  
but deliver us from evil."*

This particular arrangement of the Lord's Prayer in Matthew has ten lines. Only one of those lines deals with the meeting of personal physical needs. By the inclusion of "give us this day our daily bread," God obviously considers it an important

component, but it is certainly not the only component. The majority is taken up by other things like adoration, prayer for the strengthening of God's earthly ministry, confession, and prayer for the strength to resist evil. So when you are praying, don't bog the entirety down with personal needs (or desires) and exclude or almost diminish the other important prayer factors. If your prayers are all about you and what you want, it is no wonder that imperative aspect of your divine relationship loses importance in our eyes.

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God is our Father, our *Heavenly* Father. A continual, intimate relationship is so necessary. But while we should have a comfortable, daily converse with Him, we should keep in mind that He is the perfectly holy God, sovereign over all of His created universe. He is more than worthy of all of our worship. Many of the psalms—in a book chock full of prayers—were designed to be sung in worship services. While spending time openly talking to Him every day, keep in mind the magnitude of his awesome standing and that He is worthy of your continual worship and awe. He is worth everything and more.

P.S. – Let me reemphasize the fact that I am still struggling with this myself. If you aren't, maybe you should.

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## **Five Responses to Common Pro-Choice Arguments**

From its inception, Rambling Ever On has advocated graceful discourse and nuanced conversation. We believe that discussions filled with attacks, oversimplifications, and

emotional appeals do little to change minds or hearts.

With that said, there are some areas where there is little room for nuance. While the overall conversation about abortion is complex and multifaceted, at its root, the moral implication is very simple: abortion is murder. We can dress it up in any number of ways, but there is no getting around the fact that aborting a baby ends a life.

The [March For Life](#) is taking place today in Washington D.C. as well as in cities all over the country. We stand with those that march. Here are Five Responses To Common Pro-Choice Arguments:

Argument Number One: “Women should be in charge of their own bodies.”

**Response: Abortion takes an innocent, defenseless life.**

Argument Number Two: “Anti-Abortion legislation doesn’t curb abortion, but encouraging safe sex does.”

**Response: Abortion takes an innocent, defenseless life.**

Argument Number Three: “Abortion keeps unwanted pregnancies from bringing children into a world of horrible circumstances. There are already not enough people adopting and too many children in foster care.”

**Response: Abortion takes an innocent, defenseless life.**

Argument Number Four: “There is a practical difference between a ‘fetus’ and a ‘baby’.”

**Response: Abortion takes an innocent, defenseless life.**

Argument Number Five: “Abortion is a safe, legal and often inexpensive procedure in the United States.”

**Response: Abortion takes an innocent, defenseless life.**

Again, it is not our aim to be pedantic, condescending or simplistic. And we certainly do not wish to ungraciously hype abortion as an unforgivable sin. It's not. This is to communicate that we do not believe any of these arguments for abortion overrule the taking of an innocent defenseless life. We are followers of the Christian God. As far back as we have recorded writings, our God's followers have believed strongly that God created, formed and cares for people in the womb (Psalm 71:6, 139:13-18; Job 10:10, 31:15; Isaiah 49:6). So we, along with millions of others, feel obligated to speak out against the single greatest injustice of our society in this way (Proverbs 24:10-11).

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**Tattoos In light of the  
Resurrection: A Reflection In**

# Inaugurated Eschatology

A personal note from the author:

*Many of the most dedicated, loving, and holy Christians I have ever known have tattoos. I have been privileged to be a part of the life of many different kinds of Christians with different theological perspectives and different "looks." They are my brothers and sisters. What follows is an exploration in the application of theology. It's not my intention to condemn, but to give a little more thought to something we don't think much about.*

## **Why I like Deuteronomy 23:1**

"No one who has been emasculated by crushing or cutting may enter the assembly of the Lord." – Deuteronomy 23:1

A student at my Christian High School wrote this reference on my board last week. Suspecting less than pious motives, I knew I had to look it up. After reading it, he told me it was even more vivid in the New Living Translation; I'll take his word for it. I love the humor that can come from taking verses out of context as much as anyone, but I felt compelled to defend the text.

I'm thankful for verses like this. At the very least, it says two important things about God. First, like all of the law, it speaks both to His holiness and His desire for ours. By holiness, I am meaning both righteousness and otherness. God is not only good, He is set apart. His people are called to be the same. Secondly, it makes it clear that the mutilation of the flesh is not a path to God. In an ancient world where devotion was expressed through cutting, emasculation, prostitution, and child sacrifice; this passage says "No thank you." I'm thankful to Deuteronomy 23:1 because I'm glad that my parents and mentors never considered emasculation as a

valid option for me.

Maybe there is still more to the verse. Scholars disagree on the meaning of "the assembly (or congregation) of the Lord." Regardless if it involves citizenship among the people of Israel, a role in worship, or a position of religious leadership, entering the assembly of the Lord is indeed a privilege. By being in the assembly one is identifying with the God of Heaven and with His people. While I am not sure of its exact meaning under the Mosaic covenant, being a part of the assembly of the Lord is certainly our privilege under the New Covenant. It will be our great joy in the New Creation.

### **Lessons from Inaugurated Eschatology**

It is to the New Creation that we now turn. When Christ returns, he will bring down New Jerusalem and God will make his dwelling place with man (Rev 21). All will be righted. This is where the concepts of inaugurated eschatology come in. The Bible teaches that God began this work of New Creation in the person of Jesus. God's future was inaugurated in our past. Christ's entire ministry was one of kingdom bringing. And he brought it! This is why the blind saw when they encountered him, why the lame walked when he touched them, and why the dead rose when he called them. They were encountering the king of the New Jerusalem. This is why when faced with the death of a friend he called himself, "The resurrection and the life" (John 11).

Because the eschaton has already been inaugurated, the future impacts the way we live in the present. In the New Creation, there will be no sin, no selfishness, lying, or hatred. We live in hope of this future by doing away with these evils now. If we are presently called to an eschatological life, it is clear that this current creation is still important to God. We are surrounded by a world that is "charged with the grandeur of God" as Hopkins put it. We are called to be both awestruck by it and to manage it. This ecological mandate is based on God's commands to Adam and Eve, but is also a way in

which we can prepare for our future of enjoying God's New Creation. Is it possible that what is true of a beautiful landscape could also be true of our bodies.

Too many Christians take the gnostic approach of saying this present reality is just an illusion or that our physical body is evil. Arcade Fire makes amazing music, but their theology is pagan. Our body is not a "cage"; it is God's creation. When Christ returns, the body will not be thrown away, but resurrected. Even now, our body is the temple of the Holy Spirit and as such it is where God's New Creation is currently happening. One day, the Spirit will make all things new, but for now he is making us a "new creation" (II Cor 5:17).

In this perspective, our bodies matter deeply. Just as God desires our present holiness and will accomplish this fully in his New Creation. God desires the present health of our bodies and will accomplish that fully by resurrection. Despite the fall and the curse we are, physically speaking, the artwork of God's creation. He longs to make our bodies His temple. Our skin is profoundly beautiful because it is a product of the stroke of His brush. While we are not in our original state of perfection, we still have been called "very good" (Gen 1:31). Are we to improve God's work with a skull and cross bones on the forearm? Or a Jesus fish on the ankle?

### **Tattoos in light of the Resurrection**

I've never understood why people get tattoos and I'm surprisingly only 35. Tattoos seem about as common as smart phones to people my age and younger. I don't want to denounce something just because I don't understand it, but I must ask why we are so eager to treat our body, God's artwork, as a blank canvas? Why do we view this fresco as blank? It seems we are not seeing what God sees. I suspect a gnostic antagonism for our bodies is at it again.[1. [Link.](#)] We willingly mark our body because we paradoxically think it's unimportant. At the same time we feel that there are few things more important than expressing ourselves on our bodies. Maybe we are

unwilling to see our body as a beautiful landscape because only Photoshop can provide the kind of beauty we've been conditioned to crave.

I believe inaugurated eschatology offers a good response to our cultures obsession with tattoos. A tattoo does nothing to prepare us for the New Creation. Just like poisoning our rivers is no way to prepare for the New Jerusalem, a tramp stamp is no way to anticipate the Resurrection. Just as we have a moral and ecological imperative to save the Redwood Forest from Graffiti artist, we have a sacred obligation to treat our own body with dignity and respect. A "John 3:16" graffiti on a Redwood is just as obscene as any curse. In much the same way, a Greek word or Jesus Fish fails to reflect an eschatologically oriented life.

Tattoos reflect the brokenness of the world we live in. They are marks of our fall. We do well to remember that our race is fallen and our world is under a curse. We do well to recognize how deep this cancer has spread. While we recognize this, we don't embrace it. Our bodies, however imperfect, are awaiting perfection. Through the power of Christ's Resurrection, let us orient ourselves to His new life.

As we prepare to enter the eternal Assembly of the Lord, let us remember first his grace. Let us remember that we will be surrounded by the scared, pierced, and inked. We will walk hand in hand with whores and thieves. Not one of us will be able to see himself as better than another. We will all enter through the gate of Christ's merit. All who enter through this gate will be made clean. All who enter will stand naked before the Lord and be glorified. All the scars carried by our souls and bodies will disappear. So will the ink. Until the day where our anticipation becomes reality, let us live now as citizens of heaven.

As for me, I will not need to wear turtlenecks or long sleeves for a job. I won't wear a tragic story on my arm that I need

to explain to strangers. I will do my best by the power of the Spirit to live an eschatological life both physically and spiritually. I will not deface my body, which is God's canvas. And above all, I will enter the Assembly of the Lord with my manhood intact.