

A Collection of Reflections on the God I Trust

Under My Tree



by
**DILLON
BROWN**

This Post / Life Update / Book from a Friend

This is a post about trust and obedience and prayer, especially in difficult circumstances. It contains reflections which are meditations on faithfulness in uncertainty, on choosing peace despite chaos. It is me rambling at times, though less than it could be. It is a mile marker in my discipleship and a merciful revelation written in part and understood in part. Writing this has been a satisfying process of giving form to thought by words that are my own. Often it is a reflection of God's character, which always restores confidence in His unfailing and active love. It has been a needed relief from the noise inside my head and certainly the constant noise outside my head that's always trying to sell a different version of me than the one that can be found in the stillness. Though they are personal reflections, they certainly have not come from "looking inside". In fact I can claim just as much responsibility for their inception as I can my own DNA, child of God that I am. But like a child, by miracle of grace and submission, truth is recognized and I progress in the wisdom and stature and favor of it. And so it's my hope to steward these well, reflecting with as much purity and sincerity, and fidelity as I know, God's word revealed so that "we will not grieve like those without hope."

These days I move slowly. I guess I just find it harder and harder to take seriously the thought of trying so hard. Maybe it's a kind of protest against the city I live in, though I'd like to think I'm not so bothered by the non stop backwardness. I think that maybe here's just as good as anywhere else these days and though I know better, it's a thought that keeps me steady. Hopefully it's the step towards contentment that I think it could be. Still, I've found no one worth punching and no one worth kissing and that is a hard thing for a young man to endure, and rushing around has a way of only making you feel rushed, and in short supply.

A while ago I met someone really special to me. Special in a way that demands a certain attention and consideration for reasons that don't add up the way they should or at least not the way that I'm used to. But, I recently read that love has a certain shape to it and I agree. I was created a certain way and have become a certain way and have been a certain way and all that makes a shape that she seemed to fit quite well, and this makes more sense to me than anything I've been able to add up about her. Of course her life can make its own shape too, though there is no shape where there is no love. I knew her enough to know that I fit that shape once. Even still, where there is no love there is no shape, and I'm back outside in the formless and void of it all with nothing to catch my shadow. And that has been painful.

There is no blessing in keeping records of wrongs rendered, especially old dusty ones. And wrestling, being what it is, lacks resolution and fairness when done alone. I'm disappointed by the outcome to say the least. Also, I'm thoroughly confused, though less bothered by this than I used to be.

A few months before all this closed in, a friend of mine recommended a book to me which has comforted me at the most perfect place in time. To my friend, I can't thank you enough. God has

used you in my life and I am forever grateful for your care. Provision. Nothing is wasted in God's kingdom. To Him be the glory.

What follows is personal reflection that stems from this past season and the recommended book, "Trusting God Even When Life Hurts" by Jerry Bridges. It's been several months now since I finished reading it and several months since I started documenting my thoughts relating to the subject. And several months thinking to myself that I was close to being done thinking about it enough to have something that felt right to finally share on here about it. But what's the rush after all?

My goal in sharing this is to encourage you in Gospel truth that, by God's grace, held in reverence, in His perfect timing, through his Holy Spirit, has me centered, inspired, protected, strengthened, and provided for. Apart from this I am totally empty, hopeless, and looking to other people, feelings, and ideas to provide more than they can ever offer. I hope that for some struggling this might be a timely and welcome blessing and for others that they might be reminded of the scriptures and "hide them in their heart" as protection amidst future adversity.

You're the Right Person for the Job

Proverbs 16:9

"The mind of a person plans his way, But the LORD directs his steps."

Surely by now you, person reading this, have experienced adversity in some form. It might be a personal affliction, or anxiety for a loved one, or just a general despair of a situation. One thing's for sure, life will be full of painful experiences. Some we see the benefit of quickly and others take years. Still there are some that remain a mystery even unto death. All the while, I believe there exists a God who is all powerful, who understands entirely, and who loves perfectly. And because of this, I believe that there is no one better equipped for *accepting your adversity* than you are.

Let's Consider the Psalms...

"For you created my inmost being;
you knit me together in my mother's womb."
Psalm 139:13

"You have taken account of my miseries;
Put my tears in Your bottle.
Are they not in Your book?"
Psalm 56:8

“For He has not despised nor scorned the suffering of the afflicted; Nor has He hidden His face from him; But when he cried to Him for help, He heard.”

Psalm 22:24

The concept of a God who allows “sufferings, afflictions, miseries” can be misleading to someone who has no knowledge of God’s character. Fortunately, we have the scriptures and the clarity they bring. We read them with relief as we find our God knows us in such an intimate way and is a perceptive and willing master. And not only this, but that He Himself, in the ultimate tragedy, has already suffered death and rejection from His own. Yet, in the ultimate victory He brings redemption to all by overcoming death through His resurrection. You really can’t keep a good man down, let alone the redeemer of all creation.

He suffers us still by His grace—knowing the depth of our sin yet holding space for us all the same. Dead in our sin, we find that our resurrection to life is dependent on our acceptance of the transforming shape of His love, which holds space for us in the shape of a cross. And stepping into this love we learn to surrender death.

For redemption, we must learn to surrender, which is a very personal choice.

The Surrender of Personality

The Christian walk is one of obedience in response to a call to holiness. To walk this way requires us to deny ourselves, surrendering for transformation even the parts of us we hold closest. It is to fear nothing but God himself and take careful stewardship of what He reveals to us through His grace. I often hear Christians amid disagreement sidestep responsibility in this calling with a defense something along the lines of “that’s just who I am!”. If you are a child of God then blaming unrighteousness on personality is a lie and blasphemous even. So we must be careful of how dearly we hold onto our personality.

Also, seeing our specific Enneagram type or Myers-Briggs score or star sign as being in any way determinative of who we are is faulty to say the least and certainly does little to shape us to who we are called to be. The Christian life and person is a life revealed in Christ and Christ alone (Colossians 3:3) We are called to be perfect as He is perfect. Let me ask you, what was Jesus’s Enneagram? Nonsense. We must allow Christ’s light to shine and overwhelm every element of who we think we are. This includes our traumas, the things we think make us unique or interesting, our “gifts”, and fanaticism too. I used to put too much emphasis on my own complexities. Don’t do this! God is not interested in your “complexities”, He is interested in you. We can never receive with clenched fists, and in adversity we should certainly not expect to find the easy yoke and light burden clouded in our own stubbornness or self preservation.

Our Responsibility

It is important to realize that God graciously blesses mankind with a personal will unique to each. Created in His image, we are allowed a whole lifetime to be our own god—that is, to be gifted with an autonomy that steers us in the direction of our choosing. Ever toward the fair winds of reverence or back to the doldrums of our own dignity and our own understanding. With that in mind, let us consider our responsibility in the role of adversity.

Be patient with me here...

Wrestle with God. It is a favorite pastime and the namesake of God's "chosen" people, Israel. This should NOT be understood as considering sin, or pridefully and errantly claiming your justification. No, we know that wisdom comes from the fear of the Lord and we should never expect the comfort of the Holy Spirit without reverence. Nor should we pit our virtue against what God has already revealed. But we are told that all who seek will find (Matthew 7:7-8 and reference to Jeremiah 29:13) and this is what I mean. We argue our case, we wrestle for understanding. In incredible mercy and patience, God wrestles back, we prevail and are blessed with the strength of increased understanding that comes with this sort of exercise. The blessing always includes greater understanding of God's character and of our ignorance and points us to reverence, limps not excluded.

A look at Job...

"Though He slay me, I will hope in Him.
Nevertheless I will argue my ways before Him."
Job 13:15

I think that there is something profound in Job's response here that outlines a righteous path in treading through tough times. First, he acknowledges God's sovereignty, "though He slay me". Job understands that God has not only seen, but has permitted his hardship. Then, we see how despite his incredible affliction he has faith in God's character, hoping for deliverance. Still, he argues his case seeking revelation. He trusts God's goodness which is why he is so disturbed by his plight, afterall we are told that Job is blameless and upright, and God even says that there is no one on earth like him. This is the very human reason for his concern and argument. His measure of justice is determined by his own righteousness and understanding and he continues to seek answers, justifying himself, until God responds (ch. 38, 39) paving the way for Job's revelation and humble reply, and later his confession and blessing.

Job 40:3-5

"Then Job answered the Lord and said,
'Behold, I am insignificant; what can I say in response to You?
I put my hand on my mouth.
I have spoken once, and I will not reply;
Or twice, and I will add nothing more.'"

By God's good grace today we have much more revealed to us about God's character through the Bible than Job ever did and thereby we have a much greater responsibility. We seek, we find, we put our hand over our mouth, we live by grace the next righteous standard.

A Reason for the Righteous to Rest

"The afflictions of the righteous are many, But the LORD rescues him from them all."
Psalm 34:19

A great peace follows the understanding that God is not only wise and loving, but also fully sovereign. This word has nuance, but it means that God's plans for good cannot be foiled by evil. Though darkness may surround, God will not be caught off guard. It's not that evil is without consequence or reason, but rather that God, in His ability by incredible mercy, assigns redeeming purpose even to the effects of evil. It is because of this that we see that the "darkness cannot contain the light". Often this is not realized in the immediate, and may be completely beyond the understanding of a lifetime—but, what is certain is the ultimate glorification of all that He is.

"Peace I leave you, My peace I give you; not as the world gives, do I give to you. Do not let your hearts be troubled, nor fearful."
John 14:27

The Blessing of Responsibility / Prayer

There is little that provides as much satisfaction as the opportunity to be responsible toward something. We particularly crave these opportunities while in seasons of unwanted hardship where previously observed responsibilities may be denied, removed, or unwelcome. Here we learn to watch and wait on the Lord, having confidence in His character, knowing He is not indifferent to the suffering of His people.

"For the vision is yet for the appointed time;
It hurries toward the goal and it will not fail.
Though it delays, wait for it;
For it will certainly come, it will not delay long."
Habakkuk 2:3

I have found that every time I pray this prayer, "I'm ready Lord" I have been answered. He has not delayed long. Often, by God's grace the answer is not what I expected to receive, though sometimes it has been very similar. Regardless of if I am as ready as I think I am, the Lord blesses my desire, preparing me with opportunities to exercise faithfulness, consume even more of His grace, and to be equipped with proven character that brings hope. Christ alive and active within!

We can feel incredible discouragement in these moments “in between” or what some call “unanswered prayer”. Don’t deceive yourself, God always answers prayers that are in accordance with His nature and we must never vault our own timings or interpretations over His. Oswald Chambers writes on this subject...

“If our prayers are in the name of Jesus or in accord with His nature, the answers will not be in accord with our nature but with His. We are apt to forget this and to say, without thinking, that God does not always answer prayer. He does every time, and when we are in close communion with Him we realize that we have not been misled.”

Nevertheless, we may lapse in faithfulness and spend significant life apart from God, running deliberately or in ignorance into the deserts we choose. Take courage, our God is sovereign still.

If we consider God to be fully sovereign, then nothing can “frustrate” His sovereign will for your life. You may actively resist God to your death and still He will be glorified through your existence.

So then, the opportunity to execute our own will to move into harmony with God through listening obedience is such a blessing! God does not need you for anything. In Job chapter 35, Job’s righteous friend, Elihu responds to Job’s frustration:

“Look at the heavens and see;
And look at the clouds—they are higher than you.
‘If you have sinned, what do you accomplish against Him?
And if your wrongdoings are many, what do you do to Him?
‘If you are righteous, what do you give to Him,
Or what does He receive from your hand?
‘Your wickedness is for a man like yourself,
And your righteousness is for a son of man.’”
Job 35:5-8

Reflect...

Here we see that righteous living is not a duty that the believer owes God, but a gracious gift from God to the believer. The believer believes God and it is counted to him as righteousness (Genesis 15:6). Our God clothes us in righteousness. Though we may step outside of this covering, we can never use it as payment to restore us. It is a gift that we must put back on. To think we can settle a debt with the Almighty is prideful and baseless in scripture. In realizing this, we find transformative rest in His covering and are not misled by a false identity rooted in performance.

Furthermore, this means that when we fail to live righteously, God’s ultimate plans for His glorification are not affected. Though our decisions have consequences, *the repentant believer is never disqualified from the care that God gives to those who are willing to receive.*

Lamentations 3:22-23 brings such relief:

“The Lord’s acts of mercy indeed do not end, For His compassions do not fail. They are new every morning; Great is Your faithfulness.”

A Warning Against Double Mindedness

“But if any of you lacks wisdom, let him ask of God, who gives to all generously and without reproach, and it will be given to him. *But he must ask in faith without any doubting*, for the one who doubts is like the surf of the sea, driven and tossed by the wind. For that person ought not to expect that he will receive anything from the Lord, being a double-minded man, unstable in all his ways.”

James 1:5-8

Being double-minded might be defined as a walk of convenience, with one foot in God’s kingdom and one foot in our kingdom, choosing to stand on whichever side seems more favorable to the pseudo gospel of those who pick and choose. While James instructs not to doubt, this does not mean that any who have uncertainties are double minded. But rather, our uncertainties must not drive us as the wind drives the waves. To forgo the surrender of our doubt leads to a fruitless life where Christ is celebrated as a Savior, but not recognized as Lord or Master.

The older I get the more aware I become of my tendency toward double mindedness. I trust God, but not all the time. I obey God, but sometimes I delay. I accept the normal sufferings, but sometimes I hold my breath. On my best days it takes constant repentance and consciously receiving significant amounts of grace to escape my own self sabotage. And on my worst days, I tire myself and am led back into the mercy of a new day. I’ve been using the word “faithfulness” as much as I can in my writings here because I know better that the word “faith” can be more easily misunderstood. As if it’s something you either have or you don’t have outright. But to be is to have loyalties, so everyone must have faith. And some are faithful in truth and some are faithful in lie and some are faithfully double minded. They never seem to arrive anywhere other than their own conclusions.

To walk faithfully with Christ is different.

It is a constant *following* through new birth and growth and suffering and rejection and death and resurrection. It is being led where you would not have gone on your own or found on your own, and you are better for it in the sense that it is where you have always belonged. Plenty of the walk will be uncertain to you, faithfully *follow*. It bends away from selfish ambition. It bends away from self-righteous conclusion. It bends away from toxic justification. It bends away from self rescue. Tread this path patiently and find life, generously given.

When you feel hopeless in your double-mindedness remember the grace of our Lord displayed in the story of the demon possessed boy in Mark 9 and the ultra practicality of His reprimand to the boy's father ("All things are possible for the one who believes.") and deliverance of both the boy and his father...

"Immediately the boy's father cried out and said, 'I do believe; help my unbelief!' When Jesus saw that a crowd was rapidly gathering, He rebuked the unclean spirit, saying to it, 'You mute and deaf spirit, I command you, come out of him and do not enter him again!' And after crying out and throwing him into terrible convulsions, it came out; and the boy became so much like a corpse that most of them said, 'He is dead!' But Jesus took him by the hand and raised him, and he got up."

Mark 9:25-27

Pitfalls of Pride. Forgiving.

"When pride comes, then comes dishonor; But with the humble there is wisdom."
Proverbs 11:2

Often, parts of our suffering are beyond our understanding. I think that's sometimes the hardest part of the whole thing. In these circumstances we must guard ourselves from "explaining away" or making generalized judgements to ease the discomfort of what's perceived as irrational disappointment. Here is our best opportunity to trust in the Lord. Where else is trust best exercised than at the intersection of adversity and uncertainty?

In Jerry's book there was a part on this topic that spoke of the pride in assuming the specifics of how God may be working in a situation. As if our predictions are a match for His unsearchable judgments and unfathomable ways (Romans 11:33). This is our desire for control again, fear manifested in anxiety pushes you to your own gospel where following Christ becomes impossible.

Yes, the unknown is terribly inconvenient, and hoping to get past it can be too easy to mislabel a situation or, at times, a person in a way that places inappropriate emphasis on our own rightness. This tendency can be particularly felt in heartbreak and must be avoided at all costs. It will not undo what's been done. Only forgiveness has power of that sort. The fact that we look to our own justification (Here I mean rightness in a situation) for any source of comfort is a sobering thought and reveals the deception within our anxieties immediately. Can you really so comfortably rest in the blamelessness of your life? And where do you measure that from? Saint Paul describes himself as the "foremost of sinners" (1 Timothy 1:15). To seek satisfaction or strength in pride leads only to a false sense of comfort along the path to spiritual oblivion.

"Who are you to judge the servant of another? To his own master he stands or falls; and he will stand, for the Lord is able to make him stand."
Romans 14:4

Also, don't look to escape what is yours to suffer. This goes hand in hand with "accepting the adversity and casting off the anxiety". Remember our Lord truly was blameless, and He Himself not only suffered but was rejected. So to partake in the will of God is to take part in His suffering and *rejection* as well. If your heart is hardened in this process beware, you suffer unforgiveness and you suffer in vain. Repent and forgive.

"For God has shut up all in disobedience, so that He may show mercy to all."
Romans 11:32

Humility / Repentance / Obedience

I've joked before, "I know I'm self-righteous, it's the only thing that keeps me so humble." While it is a joke in part, there is something very serious about how the Holy Spirit works us toward humility by bringing awareness to where we fall short of God's gracious standard. What a gift we have in the Holy Spirit knowing that it's the kindness of God that leads us to repentance! (Romans 2:4). Repentance is always at odds with pride. And repentance, like prayer, changes our heart when we pray according to God's nature which is not our nature (Luke 6:9-13). Choose to repent quickly when confronted by your sin. "It always restores the standard" - Mom. So repentance keeps our hearts soft and changeable and paves the way for obedience and fidelity, and that is a hopeful thing for an unworthy saint.

And remember, when sin breaks your heart, let it. This is a "kind" gift from God allowing you to partake in His suffering as well. Don't let your heart become hard to this.

"The sacrifices of God are a broken spirit; A broken and a contrite heart, God, You will not despise."
Psalm 51:17

We often speak of God's grace as a covering for our shortcomings as if we are bound to fall short and that's just the way it is. This is true, but is almost never taken advantage of in the way God desires us to. He calls us to be perfect as He is perfect. And John the Baptist instructs to produce fruit consistent with repentance (Matthew 3:8) A more beneficial way to recognize grace is with the hope of the gospel which reminds us that grace is the only thing which allows us to follow God in obedience. Dallas Willard says somewhere that the saint consumes way more grace than the sinner. This is because the sinner looks to grace to forgive ungodliness, but the saint stewards the gift of grace to grow in the character of God, participating in the things of God.

"Does the LORD have as much delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices
As in obeying the voice of the LORD?
Behold, to obey is better than a sacrifice,
And to pay attention is better than the fat of rams"
1 Samuel 15:22

Obedience is critical to our faith and is the opportunity we have to partner with God in holy enterprise. It is what makes us "doers of the word" and not just "hearers of the word". So in obedience we learn humility well. If by your "obedience" you become arrogant or inflated, beware you are fueled by vanity, not grace, and your works of "obedience" are lifeless.

"But He gives greater grace. Therefore it says, 'GOD IS OPPOSED TO THE PROUD, BUT GIVES GRACE TO THE HUMBLE.'"

James 4:6

Recognizing our Dependence on God

To walk faithfully in Christ through hardship requires us to acknowledge our dependence upon God to lead us in transformation, and then to receive His strength in order to sustain the Christian realization of life, our sanctification.

The gospel of Christ is reflected well in this statement "Anything this side of Hell is pure grace" and we would do well if we understood this and set it before us always. But we rarely live like this and we are certainly less apt when life hurts.

There is little in our insulated, fast paced, first world lives that reminds us of our mortality. I reckon some will go days or weeks at a time, maybe, without ever hearing their own breathing. Underneath the noise of the radio and the TV and the preacher, past the humming of the air conditioning and the highway, beyond the faint roar of the commercial jet overhead, and aside from the grinding of each colorless shape of our ambition, there lies our mortality, the forgotten servant of everything we call "independent". And we grow into our mortality and wear it out and consider it only once it has made up its mind to be leaving us. And it hurries back to where it came from. And we die and are buried.

We go here and there in the meantime, busy often, preoccupied with the deadweight of establishing or maintaining our importance as if there is anything supernatural about us that we can manifest on our own. We seek self realization on our own terms and our mortality allows it for a time. And we rage in the control of our "destiny" or whatever, our few years. But maybe when we have been humbled and the planes have finally caught up redistributing the peoples and everyone has landed where they will belong, maybe then will we realize with each breath, moving us in and out of ourselves, the consumers of grace we are.

And He humbled you and let you go hungry, and fed you with the manna which you did not know, nor did your fathers know, in order to make you understand that man shall not live on bread alone, but man shall live on everything that comes out of the mouth of the Lord.

Deuteronomy 8:3

Keeping this in mind reminds us of God's sovereignty, His wisdom, and His love for us, sustaining us even when we are in deserts of our choosing. Also, it protects us from the anxiety that we can somehow save ourselves when it seems like the very basic things we need to live are missing.

Let's consider this portion from Job chapter 40 where God speaks to Job.

"Then the Lord said to Job,
'Will the faultfinder contend with the Almighty?
Let him who rebukes God give an answer...

Will you really nullify My judgment?
Will you condemn Me so that you may be justified?
Or do you have an arm like God,
And can you thunder with a voice like His?
'Adorn yourself with pride and dignity,
And clothe yourself with honor and majesty.
Let out your outbursts of anger,
And look at everyone who is arrogant, and humble him.
Look at everyone who is arrogant, *and* humble him,
And trample down the wicked where they stand.
Hide them together in the dust;
Imprison them in the hidden place.
*Then I will also confess to you,
That your own right hand can save you.'*" (emphasis added here)
Job 40:1-2, 8-14

Receiving God's Strength

"We cannot grow in perseverance until we have learned the lesson of dependence. You may, for example, drive a dog sled to the North Pole purely by a self-energized indomitable spirit, but you cannot run the Christian race that way. If you are going to run God's race, doing God's will, then you must run it with His strength."

From "Trusting God when Life Hurts" by Jerry Bridges

Are you good at receiving? I have often had a hard time with this. I have wanted to receive well but also avoid inconvenience. But to receive well we must want what is being given and there has been much of my life where I have rejected God's love due to inconvenient alignment with Dillon's plans or misleading "needs". On top of this we would often choose not to suffer before we would choose to receive strength in our suffering. With soft hearts we pray, "Lord deliver us" and this is a prayer we can pray in full confidence, humble and vigilant to see how God will answer. And His answer will be according to the grace He has for us, never to spoil us. By this we learn surrender and this is the cost of our discipleship (Matthew 19:25). In receiving God's

strength we are transformed by what He reveals in our acceptance of it. Again, this blessing always includes greater understanding of our ignorance and points us to reverence and thankfulness for His discerning care.

“It is good for me that I was afflicted,
So that I may learn Your statutes.”
Psalm 119:71

Receiving the strength God has for us requires faithfulness in trusting Him, and though we may not know what we are being prepared for with this strength, that He is a giver of good gifts (James 1:17, Matthew 7:11). So we begin to learn the proverb:

“Trust in the Lord with all your heart
And do not lean on your own understanding.
In all your ways acknowledge Him,
And He will make your paths straight.”
Proverbs 3:5-6

The end to all of this, as I see it, is our purpose which is to bring glory to God, by taking part in godliness, which always brings order to chaos and subdues the evil in us and thereby the world. In humility we are pointed back to God’s grace and our dependence on Him, for “the spirit is willing but the flesh is weak” (Mark 14:38).

“And He has said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.’
Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me.”
2 Corinthians 12:9

The Proper Response to Adversity

“Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and pleading with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all comprehension, will guard your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.”
Philippians 4:6-7

As Christians, we must never live in a fantasy land of denial or indulge in useless speculation when it comes to our misfortune. Such noise leads to confusion, dissonance, and paranoia. We are charged to be anxious under no circumstances, accepting the adversity and casting off the anxiety, yet so often we find ourselves doing the exact opposite. We run from reality and embrace our anxieties, never surrendering ourselves to change. A friend reminded me that anxiety is a learned behavior. Desperately we conclude that if we can be anxious about *it*, then we can control *it*, and if we can control *it* then we can keep *it* from hurting us. And so we trap

ourselves in a coping mechanism that offers the illusion of control at the cost of our peace. What a swamp!

Notice I am not talking about personal obedience to the revealed word of God. Meaning that we should never relax into our sin. One of the very few things we do have control over and are called to steward in holiness is ourselves. This is simple, obey.

We make our requests known to God. Prayer, Pleading, and Thanksgiving are gracious processes that, if done in faithfulness, purge us of impure hearts and establish confidence in our Lord's *character*. Our confidence should always be first in His character, not His power. It is the confidence in His character that releases us from vanity of worry and delivers us into His peace which "surpasses all comprehension". His power, we often hope He will wield in alignment with our own judgments and limited perspective.

But the prophet speaks...

"For My thoughts are not your thoughts,
Nor are your ways My ways," declares the Lord.
"For as the heavens are higher than the earth,
So are My ways higher than your ways
And My thoughts than your thoughts."
Isaiah 55:8-9

And Oswald Chambers reminds, "There is so much that looks like the mighty power of God that is not." When chaos outside of our control comes our way, we must surrender our tendency to worry in vain and repent of such tendencies as they come. But, we can be confident in God's character and in this confidence find rest.

Matthew 6:26-27

"Look at the birds of the sky, that they do not sow, nor reap, nor gather crops into barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more important than they? And which of you by worrying can add a single day to his life's span?"

Shapes of Love / Why We Rejoice

In the beginning of all of this, I wrote about how our love has a certain shape—an idea I picked up from a Wendell Berry book. The shape of our love is personal and unique and brings the gift of union—in bringing things together that are not meant to be apart. And because God is love, our love must be informed by the shape of God's love for us and not the other way around. No one has loved like Him and no one loves rightly apart from Him. So to love is to be of God. Read 1 John 4:7-21. Our God is long suffering, for the shape of His love is mighty and contains us at our worst, full of fear and pride and anger and hate, stubborn in constant and recurring rejection of Him. We reject the shape of His love too, but also then, being made in His own image,

ourselves and our birthright to love in the same way. And this is a Hell that many live in and die in and are buried in and reborn into eternity in.

And still I imagine it's likely that love does exist without suffering and rejection, but it's proven, at least on earth, by those two in combination. For only those we love have the power to hurt us and this is forever a human right. But even so, fear must be resisted for love to be proven, because love is imperfect when there is fear and fear mislabels many such things as love that are not. And God chooses to suffer us, unworthy as we are, hoping we will participate in the same love he created us for—apart from which we suffer needlessly, but in faithfulness toward we prove our love. So we rejoice that in the *righteous* grief of our suffering we find assurance of God's transforming work in us and the peace of our union with Him.

"Blessed are those who mourn, for they will be comforted."
Matthew 5:4

A beautiful excerpt on the blessing in grief from "Fidelity" by Wendell Berry:

"She thought it strange and wonderful that she had been given all these to love. She thought it a blessing that she had loved them to the limit of her grief at parting with them, *and that grief had only deepened and clarified her love*. Since her first grief had brought her fully to wakefulness in this world, an unstinting compassion had moved in her, like a live stream flowing deep underground, by which she knew herself and others and the world. It was her truest self, that stream always astir inside her that was at once pity and love, knowledge and faith, forgiveness, grief, and joy. It made her fearful and *it made her unafraid*."

And hope from the scriptures...

"Consider it all joy, my brothers and sisters, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. *And let endurance have its perfect result*, so that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing."
James 1:2-4

"And not only this, but we also celebrate in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance; and perseverance, *proven character*; and proven character, hope; *and hope does not disappoint, because the love of God has been poured out within our hearts* through the Holy Spirit who was given to us."
Romans 5:3-5

Giving Thanks

Thank you God for your goodness and your grace. Even now I am not as I should be, but you see me as I might be—whole and trusting of you completely. Thank you for your gift of now. Let me rest in this holy space, transformed by your love as I resist you less and less. Thank you for

your word which brings life and wisdom and your Holy Spirit which blends me into a dimension of godliness that is beyond my willpower. Thank you for your careful attention and kind mercies, your constant provision. Thank you for the testimony of your saints which color your faithfulness and deliverance with proof in my life. Thank you for your patience with me. Thank you for the times you have spared my life physically and spiritually; certainly they are more than I will ever know. Thank you that my small movements toward you have been so richly supported and sustained and my big movements toward sin have been redeemed and forgiven. Let me never forget your sacrifice and by the grace of this abstain from evil. Thank you for those who have gone before me and have reflected your light or your judgments to me that I might not claim ignorance. Thank you for your grace and support in helping me shoulder this burden of responsibility. Let me always rejoice in your salvation and with your strength suffer well your mercy and judgment. Thank you that you have not given up on me, stubborn in my sin. Thank you that you lead me to repentance. Thank you for the gift of friendship and of a family and of a home.

To close, a Psalm of David

“Bless the Lord, my soul, And all that is within me, bless His holy name. Bless the Lord, my soul, And do not forget any of His benefits; Who pardons all your guilt, Who heals all your diseases; Who redeems your life from the pit, Who crowns you with favor and compassion; Who satisfies your years with good things, So that your youth is renewed like the eagle.

The Lord performs righteous deeds And judgments for all who are oppressed. He made known His ways to Moses, His deeds to the sons of Israel. The Lord is compassionate and gracious, Slow to anger and abounding in mercy. He will not always contend with us, Nor will He keep His anger forever. He has not dealt with us according to our sins, Nor rewarded us according to our guilty deeds. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, So great is His mercy toward those who fear Him. As far as the east is from the west, So far has He removed our wrongdoings from us. Just as a father has compassion on his children, So the Lord has compassion on those who fear Him. For He Himself knows our form; He is mindful that we are nothing but dust.

As for man, his days are like grass; Like a flower of the field, so he flourishes. When the wind has passed over it, it is no more, And its place no longer knows about it. But the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting for those who fear Him, And His justice to the children's children, To those who keep His covenant And remember His precepts, so as to do them. The Lord has established His throne in the heavens, And His sovereignty rules over all. Bless the Lord, you His angels, Mighty in strength, who perform His word, Obeying the voice of His word! Bless the Lord, all you His angels, You who serve Him, doing His will. Bless the Lord, all you works of His, In all places of His dominion; Bless the Lord, my soul!”

Psalms 103

Afterword

Thank you to all who have reflected His light and goodness to me through a season which has required much of me. I do not take your attention or prayers or faithful friendship for granted. His wisdom, His love, His redemption alive and active in His faithful remnant, our paths blessed to cross. The bonds we have formed!

“Now to Him who is able to do far more abundantly beyond all that we ask or think, according to the power that works within us, to Him be the glory in the church and in Christ Jesus to all generations forever and ever. Amen.”

Ephesians 3:20-21