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Thoughts from the Ridge...

This year's colors along Winding Ridge remind me of the limitless palette from which God paints. Each autumn His artistry gives me some insight into His character and how it applies to my sanctification. How have I seen it this October? I have baskets of summer flowers still blooming, seemingly oblivious of the fact that their time is about to expire! Next to those baskets sit pumpkins and pots of mums bursting forth in reds and yellows. Transition comes, whether in plants or our lives, meaning alteration, metamorphosis, permutation and vicissitude. *Vicissitude* is a word we don't use everyday, probably because it means "a change of circumstances or fortune, typically one that is unwelcome or unpleasant."

Since transition or change marks all of life, how does one meet it in the strength of the Gospel? Part of the answer lies in scriptural preparation on a daily basis. Even in the most hectic days, I can lift my eyes to the hills and acknowledge that my help comes from the Lord, the Maker of heaven and earth. (Psalm 121). But when missing a day in the Word becomes a longer

stretch and dust begins to collect on my Bible or prayer journal, I should expect to meet the next trial or testing without adequate preparation. And we know that there will be that next situation. Jesus told us, "In this world you will have tribulation, but be of good cheer, for I have overcome the world." (John 16:33)

No one simply shows up at the Savage Man Triathlon "to have a go at it" without months of serious training. And what gardener walks through the landscapes that surround Fallingwater, returns to her own home, and by merely gazing at her yard expects fabulous results? Both examples of athletic success and landscape architecture make us laugh. Anyone realizes that lack of preparation, planning and sweat will not lead to a victory or a breathtaking yard. Then why can't we make the application to our spiritual life?

We may parallel the summer flowering pots sitting obviously on the porch! In the midst of good or easy times in our lives, we forget that season is expiring. The frost will come, with snow not far behind it. God gives us those golden days to prepare for what lies ahead in hard times. Because of God's grace, He plants us deeply in the soil of His love; He fertilizes, sends sun and rain, and prunes us to stimulate new growth. As we put our gardens to bed this month, let's remember the abundance of summer flowers and the spectacular beauty of autumn's foliage. Doing that will prepare us for whatever God has sovereignly designed for the next step in our lives. And even if a trial looms on our horizon, we know that we will face nothing without the Lord by our side. He who spoke all creation into being controls every season of our lives, and He has called us His daughters.

Flo

One of my former college roommates sent this next story to me, so I'm passing it on to you. Flo

MOM'S EMPTY CHAIR

A woman's daughter had asked the local minister to come and pray with her mother. When the minister arrived, he found the woman lying in bed with her head propped up on two pillows. An empty chair sat beside her bed. The minister assumed that the woman had been informed of his visit.

"I guess you were expecting me," he said.

"No, who are you?" said the mother.

The minister told her his name and then remarked, "I saw the empty chair and I figured you knew I was going to show up."

"Oh yeah, the chair," said the bedridden woman. "Would you mind closing the door?" Puzzled, the minister shut the door.

"I have never told anyone this, not even my daughter," said the woman. "But all of my life I have never known how to pray. At church I used to hear the pastor talk about prayer, but it went right over my head. I abandoned any attempt at prayer." The old woman continued, "Until one day four years ago, my best friend said to me, 'Prayer is just a simple matter of having a conversation with Jesus. Here is what I suggest: Sit down in a chair; place an empty chair in front of you, and in faith see Jesus on the chair. It's not spooky because he promised, 'I will be with you always.' "Then just speak to him in the same way you're doing with me right now." "So, I tried it and I've liked it so much that I do it a couple of hours every day. I'm careful though. If my daughter saw me talking to an empty chair, she'd either have a nervous breakdown or send me off to the funny farm."

The minister was deeply moved by the story and encouraged the old woman to continue on the journey. Then he prayed with her, anointed her with oil, and returned to the church. Two nights later the daughter called to tell the minister that her mama had died that afternoon.

"Did she die in peace?" he asked.

"Yes, when I left the house about two o'clock, she called me over to her bedside, told me she loved me and kissed me on the cheek. When I got back from the store an hour later, I found her. But there was something strange about her death. Apparently, just before Mom died, she leaned over and rested her head on the chair beside the bed. What do you make of that?"

The minister wiped a tear from his eye and said, "I wish we could all go like that." Prayer is one of the best free gifts we receive.

I asked God for water, He gave me an ocean. I asked God for a flower, He gave me a garden I asked God for a friend, He gave me all of YOU...

If God brings you to it, He will bring you through it.

Happy moments? Praise God. Difficult moments? Seek God. Quiet mo-

ments? Worship God. Painful moments? Trust God. Every moment, thank God.

Learning to Thank God When He Says, “No.”

I remember Grandma Lundy saying to me, “Now, don’t be ugly,” when I pouted or misbehaved as a child. She cared about the development of my character right from the start. Why? Because watching recalcitrant children or wayward teens who have grown up with very little correction and few “No’s” in their lives is sad. Without boundaries, children grow up stumbling into bigger and bigger holes in life, each time causing greater grief to themselves and those who love them.

We often witness examples of no boundaries when we head out to shop. From Niemann Marcus to Walmart, the price tags may vary but not the children’s behavior. They want; they whine. If the adult says, “No, honey, you don’t need that,” the child may increase the volume or just hover over the item as if she intends to shoplift. The behavior often causes stares from others, and more vocal pleadings from the youngster, if not full out temper tantrums. Soon, the harried adult capitulates, placating the child with the desired item.

Purchase an article of clothing or a toy on almost every outing, and a pattern emerges. The child plays with the demanded toy or wears the clothing and then quickly disregards the fleeting treasure. And what is learned about taking care of each new trinket? Items are unappreciated, tossed aside or even destroyed. And “stuff” accumulates everywhere! Happily, I know one very wise mother of four girls who deals with the problem well. Elaine’s oldest is 12; her twins are 11, and her youngest is 10. She homeschools them and works from home as an attorney. A keen observer, Elaine says kids rarely play with more than five toys. When any of her girls gets a sixth possession, Elaine asks what she’d like to give away. Her girls make thoughtful choices, passing on gifts to friends who have admired an item or to organizations that help poor families. I’m not sure how many dressy clothes the girls have or if there is a maximum number, as with toys. I can, however, say I’ve heard many happy moms at church say, “Elaine passed this outfit on to us.”

In addition to learning to limit clothing and toys, certain behaviors should be halted. Parents and grandparents may cherish some antics in wee ones that soon sour if uncorrected. Some action that garners laughter and attention in a one-year-old, annoys us when the child reaches three, makes us want to avoid that child at eight, and frightens us for their physical safety

later. And why, when children do not show responsibility with clothes, bikes, money, or cars, do parents and grandparents continue to give more without teaching responsibility or consequences?

Consider, too, the issue of obedience. When pre-school and elementary-age children pretend not to hear or defiantly refuse to cease an action or ignore directions, why do some adults ignore, cajole or give in? Disrespecting boundaries, kids find snacks and eat them without asking. Others snoop in closets and drawers and then announce “I found...I want.” Listen carefully and what you too often hear is no response from the adult in charge.

After watching and being frustrated by poorly disciplined children, I have to look at my own reactions to correction when my heavenly Father trains me in righteousness. Do I slip into sloppy biblical thinking, believing He exists to make the world run according to me? Although I hear solid exposition of the Word, does pop theology today make me view God as the heavenly PEZ dispenser (possessions, enthusiasm, and zest)? I stop to consider how I respond to God’s “no’s.”

The Lord graciously sets boundaries for me as part of sanctification. When He limits my choices or abilities, do I raise the volume and whine to Him like a disrespectful child? I may need to confess my poor stewardship of all He’s provided for me, and stop squandering opportunities to share my abundance with others. Have I been snooping around by comparing my circumstances to the life of another Christian and whining, “I found...I want”? Graciously, the Lord calls me back to Himself and says, Child, this is the way; walk in it.” He allows me to endure natural consequences of poor choices, but He does it as the Perfect Parent. Because He loves me, He sometimes calls me to learn through His “No’s.” And for that kind of love, I thank Him.

Field Trips in the USA

The sprinkles and raindrops came intermittently, and the winds cut hard that Sunday afternoon in downtown, DC, but our agenda called for sight-seeing at the Washington Monument. With weather like this, Kelsey, our youngest granddaughter, knew immediately that she was no longer in Honolulu! Mommy and Daddy shed their coats and hers before creating a cocoon for the baby while they posed for family pictures. Why don’t more Americans take advantage of visiting our nation’s capital? The city’s architecture boasts amazing structures, and history beckons from every corner. But what can a 13-month-old appreciate about architecture or American history?

She easily recognizes birds, airplanes and flowers. With a little practice and sharp listening skills, her parents and her grandparents can now even translate “Kelsey speak.” All the adults offer praise as she identifies and names the things she sees. But beyond that emerging vocabulary, the baby learns what her parents value. On a drizzly chilly afternoon, instead of hunkering down in a hotel room in front of the television, the family drives to DC points of interest. The baby will grow up knowing that she began visiting her nation’s capital as a toddler.

On Monday morning Kelsey’s Dad headed to Annapolis to meet with friends and Mommy went to attend her convention. Picking up on the nation’s capital theme, Dave put the baby and me in the Bebop scooter and wheeled off toward the Smithsonian. Stopping at the National Archives, we took the baby to a room designed for children. She loved the room with its books and pictures and even found the crayons tasty! A natural follow-up activity? We visited the Jefferson Memorial. Getting down on the baby’s level, her Mommy pointed out the imposing statue of the Declaration’s primary author.

Of course, Aloha Baby doesn’t understand all she sees or hears now, but her folks will bring her back to these places. Her knowledge, as well as her understanding and appreciation will grow with each new encounter with her country’s history. Whenever Stacey got an hour or two of free time, we all took in another part of the Smithsonian, covering Natural History, Air and Space, and the Museum of Native Indians. Kelsey sat in a kayak and played in a life-sized igloo that could be demolished and rebuilt by following numbered Styrofoam ice pieces.

A favorite photo I took shows Bryan having a “serious chat” with Kelsey as the two sat in front of the U.S. Capitol. Dave and I didn’t hear that conversation, but we left with confidence that Kelsey will continue to gain knowledge of our nation’s capital. Perhaps we adults have gotten so discouraged about politics that we miss what’s right in your own back yard. Why not see some of America with family or friends? Build memories and learn first hand on a field trip of your own creation!

Quotable Quotes on Prayer

“Men who delight in God desire or ask for nothing but what will please God; hence it is safe to give them carte blanche. Their will is subdued to God’s will, and now they may have what they will. Our innermost desires are here meant, not our casual wishes; there are many things which nature might desire which grace would never permit us to ask for; for deep, prayerful, asking desires are those to which the promise is made.”

Charles Spurgeon *The Treasury of David*, vol. 1, part 2

“That which I know not teach Thou me.
Who, blessed Lord, teacheth like Thee?
Lead my desires that they may be
According to Thy will.

Amy Carmichael *Learning of God: Readings of Amy Carmichael*

“We may be sure that, as we delight in what God delights in, such prayer is inspired by God and will have its answer. And our prayer becomes increasingly, ‘Thy desires, O my Father, are mine. Thy holy will of love is my will too.’”

Andrew Murray *A 31-Day Plan to Enrich Your Prayer Life*

“We all tend to prescribe the answers to our prayers. We think that God can come in only one way. But Scripture teaches us that God sometimes answers our prayers by allowing things to become much worse before they become better. He may sometimes do the opposite of what we anticipate. . . . Yet it is a fundamental principle in the life and walk of faith that we must always be prepared for the unexpected when we are dealing with God.”

D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones *Faith Tried and Triumphant*

“From all false ideas the history of this prayer (Luke 22:39-46) of Christ delivers us. It is a precious lesson of the Cross that apparent failure is eternal victory. It is a precious lesson of this prayer that the object of prayer is not the success of its petition, nor is its rejection a proof of failure. Christ’s petition was not gratified, yet He was the one well-beloved of His Father.”

Frederick W. Robertson *Classic Sermons on Prayer*

“But as for me, my prayer is to Thee, O Lord, at an acceptable time;
O God, in the greatness of Thy lovingkindness,
Answer me with Thy saving truth.”

King David Psalm 69:13



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