

The Beauty and Power of The Long Journey

Sunday 7th May 2023
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Psa 139:13-14 (NIV)

“For you created my inmost being; you knit me together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.”

God knit you together in your mother's womb. He created your inmost being, your inside and outside and you are fearfully and wonderfully made or “mysteriously complex” (TPT) or you are “amazing and wonderful” (NIRV). All your talents and abilities come from God. Your inmost being was formed by God. Or to put it another way, your heart has been fashioned by God:

“from where he sits enthroned he looks out on all the inhabitants of the earth, he who fashions the hearts of them all and observes all their deeds.”
(Psa 33:14-15, ESV)

God has influenced the hearts of His children by fashioning the hearts of them all. In the Bible, the heart is the location of our inmost thoughts and desires and inclinations. So, get this. God fashions and forms your hearts. For believers, God fashions and forms your inmost thoughts and desires and inclinations. He works in you, in your thoughts, in your desires and in your inclinations so that you desire and work to do what is pleasing to Him:

Php 2:13 (ESV)

“for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.”

Php 2:13 (NLT)

“For God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him.”

Php 2:13 (MSG)

“That energy is God's energy, an energy deep within you, God himself willing and working at what will give him the most pleasure.”

It's important to understand that God is working in those who love and follow him. God is working in your desires. This means your desires can change or turn. Your desires for one thing can go cold and you wonder why? I'm not talking about your love for God and people going cold but when your desire for something goes cold. In these moments, we need to ask God if he is moving in you, changing your hearts and desires from one thing to another for His purposes and good pleasure. God may turn your heart whenever he pleases and cause it to go cold toward one thing and on fire for another.

Pro 21:1 (ESV)

“The king's heart is a stream of water in the hand of the LORD; he turns it wherever he will.”

Pro 21:1 (GNB)

“The LORD controls the mind of a king as easily as he directs the course of a stream.”

God even fashions the hearts of Kings and rulers turning it wherever he wills to accomplish his purposes. We see this in the example of the King of Assyria when God “turned the heart of the King of Assyria” to his people (Ezra 6:22)¹ Another example is when God turned the heart of Cyrus King of Persia to help the people of Israel (Ezra 1:1)²

God not only fashions the heart of kings but God influences and fashions the hearts of “all the inhabitants of the earth.” (Psa 33:14,15 ESV)

In these moments, we must recognise God is at work and cooperate with Him. We must be careful we don't begin to criticise the thing our heart goes cold towards as if that's why our hearts are changing. You do not need to justify why your heart is changing but in these moments, we must give thanks for what was, what is and what is to come.

When He turns your heart and gives you the desire for his purpose and pleasure, he will also supply His power and grace to succeed:

“For God is working in you, giving you the desire and the power to do what pleases him.”

Php 2:13 (NLT)

Our choices and decisions and actions are real and have consequences. We do not deny that. But we also understand God is working in the lives of His children to influence your desires, inmost thoughts and inclinations. Your desire for one thing can diminish and desire for another increase. Sometimes we cannot explain why and can even feel guilty. But if God is in it, we should not resist God. And we should not lean on our own understanding but trust in the Lord with all our hearts. Once you recognise your heart turning, you need to learn to recognise what God is doing inside of you, listen to His voice, follow Him and deny self. It is good to discuss it and pray it through with trusted advisors and get counsel. Your choices and decisions and actions are really important here to cooperate with God and what He is doing inside of you. You must walk in love and keep a guard on your mouths to ensure you are not quenching the Holy Spirit or grieving the Holy Spirit who is your teacher, helper, counsellor and guide.

¹ **Ezr 6:22 (ESV)**

“...for the LORD ...had turned the heart of the king of Assyria to them, so that he aided them in the work of the house of God, the God of Israel.”

² **Ezr 1:1 (ESV)**

“In the first year of Cyrus king of Persia, that the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah might be fulfilled, the LORD stirred up the spirit of Cyrus king of Persia, so that he made a proclamation throughout all his kingdom and also put it in writing”

God has given you His holy Spirit to be your *parakletos*, one called alongside you to guide you and help you follow in His steps.

Jer 10:23 (NirV)

“LORD, I know that a man doesn't control his own life. He doesn't direct his own steps.”

You don't control your own life. That's very profound and counter-cultural. Our world says you are in control of your destiny. But think about it. You did not create you in your mother's womb. God did. God decided the shape you would take. He decided what strengths and talents and abilities and personality and passions you would have. He decided what grace gifts he would give you. He decided what weaknesses and limitations you would have also to keep you humble and dependent on Him. Your weaknesses are even grace gifts and the apostle Paul came to understand that God's power is made perfect in weakness and His grace was sufficient for him. Paul could even say

“Therefore I will boast all the more gladly of my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may rest upon me. For the sake of Christ, then, I am content with weaknesses, insults, hardships, persecutions, and calamities. For when I am weak, then I am strong.”

(2Co 12:9-10, ESV)

Even in your miraculous formation in your mother's womb He has already directed your steps by deciding the shape you and your heart will take. He has fashioned the heart of all inhabitants of earth and directs their steps this way. But He continues throughout your life to direct your steps because of His love and grace. He is actively involved in your life directing your steps even when he seems silent and distant. Joseph maybe thought when he was betrayed, when he was in the pit without water, when being sold, when being thrown in prison, when he was forgotten, when he was grieving and hurting that God was no longer directing his steps but nothing could be further from the truth.

Yes, you have freedom and choices and decisions and actions that are real. But God is working in you behind the scenes and you cannot fight that and try to go in your own direction as God is directing your steps. We must learn to trust God and not try to control our own lives but cooperate with the God working in us seeking to direct our steps. We must recognise and learn to hear His voice and direction and guidance.

Pro 20:24 (ESV)

“A man's steps are from the LORD; how then can man understand his way?”

Pro 20:24 (TPT)

“It is the Lord who directs your life, for each step you take is ordained by God to bring you closer to your destiny. So much of your life, then, remains a mystery!”

A classic example here is the life of Joseph who went on a very long and painful journey. He came to understand that a man's steps are from the Lord and he was able to say to his brothers: “I am your brother Joseph WHOM YOU SOLD into slavery in Egypt.... IT WAS GOD

WHO SENT ME HERE...”³ This is incredible depth and power in these words. Joseph was saying to His brothers – you meant me harm but my steps are from the Lord and he turned it around for good and used your pain for my gain. You tried to send me away from my destiny but His goodness and love followed me and used your rejection to be the catapult towards His plans and purpose for blessing. What the enemy intended for evil God turned it around for good.

The Lord directs your life even over and above the freewill choices of others. Joseph’s brothers could do Him great harm and evil but God would use that to fulfil His purposes to get Joseph to the palace. And Joseph is a foreshadow of Jesus. His life points to a greater redeemer and Saviour. Jesus was also sold into slavery by a “brother” for pieces of silver. Jesus also faces betrayal and suffering from the evil actions of others. Yet Jesus like Joseph, understood God directed his steps. God had sent him to the Cross. Yes it was Judas and the religious leaders and the crowd and the Romans who were responsible yet God used even the evil actions of others to bring Jesus to the Cross and salvation to the world.

You and I must remember we do not direct our own steps. Our steps are influenced by God as God is directing our lives. And as we go in His direction, His goodness and love follow us all the days of our lives. This is why so much of our lives are a mystery and we struggle to understand the direction our lives can take at times. But we need to surrender understanding to trust. We must move from leaning on our own understanding to trusting God with all our hearts. This is what it means to walk by faith, leaning on Him and trusting him when you do not understand and life is a mystery. ***Let’s learn to enjoy the mystery because through you He is making history!*** We may not understand but we can trust the goodness and faithfulness of our God.

Pro 16:9 (ESV)

“The heart of man plans his way, but the LORD establishes his steps.”

Pro 16:9 (TPT)

“Within your heart you can make plans for your future, but the Lord chooses the steps you take to get there.”

Our individual steps are directed by God. We may plan our way in our hearts, but ultimately God chooses the steps we take to get there. And sometimes God chooses the longer journey to get there because he has a work to accomplish in the journey. When God was preparing His people to inherit the promised land he did not drive out the inhabitants immediately or even in a single year. God decided to move little by little and He had very good reasons for doing this. It was because he did not want the wild animals to multiply and threaten them. **Exo 23:28-30 (NLT)**⁴

³ ““Please, come closer,” he said to them. So they came closer. And he said again, “I am Joseph, your brother, whom you sold into slavery in Egypt. But don’t be upset, and don’t be angry with yourselves for selling me to this place. It was God who sent me here ahead of you to preserve your lives. So it was God who sent me here, not you! And he is the one who made me an adviser to Pharaoh—the manager of his entire palace and the governor of all Egypt.” Genesis 45:4-5, 8 NLT

⁴ **Exo 23:28-30 (NLT)**

Sometimes God will direct your steps little by little, a little at a time. And sometimes he does it not in one year but over a number of years. He has good reasons for this. He is preparing the promised land for you and ensuring you have time enough to grow so that wild animals, so that opposition and hardship and difficulty will not multiply and threaten you and destroy you. God needs time to develop your character and spiritual muscles so you can experience the victory through Him. The long journey then is a gift and grace from God so you can experience the abundant life of blessing He desires for you. Again, God directs your steps and we must trust Him with His direction and timing.

Sometimes God deliberately will direct your steps along the long route and again He has great purpose in doing so. We read in Exodus 13:17-18⁵ that God deliberately did not lead his people along the shorter route because He knew the opposition would cause them to change their minds and return to Egypt. God often does not let you go on the shorter route either because similarly God does not want the opposition you will face to cause you to change your mind and return to Egypt, the place of slavery.

God's grace was going to lead His people in circles in order that they did not face war. He knew the shorter route would lead to war with the Philistines. And God knew they were not ready for war and they would change their minds and return to Egypt. God's grace will sometimes lead you in circles because the shortest route is not always the best route. And sometimes the best route involves what feels like a desert route. Yet God knew the desert route, the desert experience was the perfect place to shape them and prepare them.

God was going to lead his people by the longer route also because He knew it would produce in them humility. If they got there too quickly, they may have thought their own strength and genius made them succeed. God needed them to be humble in order that they may depend on Him and not themselves. The longer route would do the job nicely making them desperately dependent on the grace and mercy of God. And the longer route would also test their hearts. The long road tests your heart to see if you are following Him for His name or your name. The long road tests your hearts and those who persevere faithfully on the long road show that their faith and love for God is genuine and real:

28 *"I will send terror ahead of you to drive out the Hivites, Canaanites, and Hittites.*

29 *But I will not drive them out in a single year, because the land would become desolate and the wild animals would multiply and threaten you.*

30 *I will drive them out a little at a time until your population has increased enough to take possession of the land."*

⁵ **Exo 13:17-18 (NIV)**

"When Pharaoh let the people go, God did not lead them on the road through the Philistine country, though that was shorter. For God said, "If they face war, they might change their minds and return to Egypt."

So God led the people around by the desert road toward the Red Sea. The Israelites went up out of Egypt ready for battle."

'Remember the long way that the Lord your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, in order to humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commandments. '

Deuteronomy 8:2 (NRSV)

God does not always lead you through the shortest route to your destination. Sometimes He takes you in circles on the long route. He has a number of reasons for doing this including to teach us humility and dependence on Him. To teach us that we cannot win our own battles with our own wisdom and strength but the battle belongs to the Lord. He sometimes takes us on the long route to test us and see what is in our hearts. The long route and long journey require perseverance and true faith perseveres to the end.

"And because lawlessness will be increased, the love of many will grow cold. But the one who endures to the end will be saved."

(Mat 24:12-13, ESV)

We can see clearly here that endurance is a heart issue and an issue of love. The one who's love does not grow cold on the long, hard journey will endure to the end and be saved. True and genuine love for God endures all things and will remain faithful on the long road: "Love bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things. Love never ends." **(1Co 13:7-8, ESV)** God allows us to go on the long road to test our faith and love for Him.

When you serve Father with the wrong motive, in order for what he will give you and do for you, like the brother in the parable of the Prodigal son, you will get angry when others are blessed and you seem to get nothing. When you serve God from duty and not love, the long road will make you angry and bitter and cynical:

"But he was angry and refused to go in. His father came out and entreated him, but he answered his father, 'Look, these many years I have served you, and I never disobeyed your command, yet you never gave me a young goat, that I might celebrate with my friends."

(Luk 15:28-29, ESV)

When we are taken on the long route and our love for Him is true and genuine, even the long route does not seem long when it's walked in love:

"So Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and they seemed to him but a few days because of the love he had for her."

(Gen 29:20, ESV)

When you serve your Father with a deep love in your heart, even the long journey can seem but a few days.

See a Victory song. <https://youtu.be/LuGSm6D3CKM>