



Anxiety!

by Mark Brunner

When Not Knowing Is Better! (Psalm 32: 8-11)

When you are trying hard to complete a hard task, do you sometimes close your eyes in an extra effort? Afraid to watch or just trusting it will happen anyway? My friend, life's a story, stayed tuned for more on This Passing Day.

I remember a football game many years ago in Green Bay. The Dallas Cowboys held a lead throughout the game and with only 13 seconds remaining was ahead 17-14. Green Bay had driven the length of the field and was at the Cowboy one yard line. They were down to there last play of the game. It was fourth down and only inches to the goal line. If they failed on that play the game would be over and Dallas would win the right to face the AFL champs, the Oakland Raiders, in the Super Bowl. The stadium was stilled as Bart Starr came up behind center Jim Ringo to call the count. I can still remember him turning his head, first to the right and then to the left as he checked his offensive line. The air was so cold that ice had formed on many of the players' helmets and Starr took a precious second to brush the rim of his helmet. The field was awash in streams of hot breath rising between the two lines only inches apart. Starr barked one last signal, placed his hands in receipt of the precious football and . . . At this point all I can remember is the sound of broadcaster Ted Moore's hysterical play-by-play up in the unheated press box high above the stadium. Moore screamed, "Starr's over the ball. Seconds! A

debater. There's the snap. He's over tackle and into the end zone. TOUCHDOWN! Green Bay is world champion, NFL champion for the third straight year!" I had closed my eyes just before the snap of the ball. I just couldn't watch. I had to close my eyes. When I heard the words "end zone," I opened my eyes, Bart Starr, falling onto the precious frozen tundra inside the Cowboy goal. I shall never forget that sight for the rest of my life. But the split second it took to lunge over tackle will never be mine to own except in replays. I just couldn't bear to watch.

Sometimes in situations like these, where the tension and the stakes are so high, we simply don't want to trust our own eyes. It seems more comforting to know that other peoples' eyes are watching for you. In fact, you would rather trust their gaze than your own. You know that someone needs to watch or you would have to. Somehow it seemed safer to me to be blind at the moment. If it had turned out to be a fumble or a near miss, I would not have had to subject my emotions to the sight. (Remember, forty years ago there was no Instant Replay.) Fortunately for me, there were other eyes to watch that historic play on that exciting moment so many years ago. As a matter of fact, that's exactly how God wants us to approach our relationship with Him when it comes watching where we are going in this life. We know that bad things happen and we are apt to become anxious or disturbed. So, He gently tells us to close our eyes and let Him do the leading. Because His knowledge is superior to our own, we need to close our eyes to the future and simply let Him do the seeing for us. When we do, our "not knowing" becomes our wisdom for only in blindness can we truly learn to trust.

"Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about itself. Each day has enough trouble of its own" (Matt 6:34)

The Window Of Faith! (09-17-15-Anxiety! Psalm 105: 1)

Why is it sometimes that the obvious is so hard to see? It's almost as if what is obvious is too easy and we're looking for something less obvious to challenge us? My friend, life's a story, stayed tuned for more on This Passing Day.

In our house we have three dogs. The dogs are natural alarm mechanisms. If there is anything outside of my ability to hear or see, they will have it spotted well ahead of time and give me an opportunity to react. Yesterday I was working on a project in my office and the dogs began to bark in unison. It wasn't the normal "there's a squirrel outside I would like to meet" or "nature is calling me." Rather, it was the distinct sound of three dogs barking at an intruder. I looked at my watch and noted the time. It was 11:10; just about the time that the mail carrier's route normally takes her over our road. "Ah, the mail!" I thought. I walked into the kitchen and peered out the large window that overlooks our driveway. Although I couldn't hear the vehicle since it was still at the very crest of our driveway, my eyes could see that there was a vehicle about ready to turn into our drive. "Mail man!" My eyes reckoned. It just had to be since this was the time she came every day. Yet, as the vehicle drew nearer, I could see it wasn't the normal little white station wagon that our carrier normally drove. Instead it was a Jeep Cherokee. "Mail man?" My eyes reckoned. "Maybe not!"

Mail man or not, I quieted the dogs and squeezed through the sliding patio doors leading to the deck adjacent to the driveway. I spied a truck filled with sacks and boxes of mail. Yes, it was the mail carrier; a substitute for our regular carrier. The mail had been too bulky to place within our mailbox, so the carrier had decided to deliver it to me personally. Why had I gone outside to pick up the mail even though my senses had told me that, perhaps, it wasn't the mail carrier after all? I had peered through the window and received mixed signals. On the one hand it was a vehicle turning into our driveway about the time the mail should have been delivered. On the other hand, I had little in the way of corroborating sense information to confirm that. Yet, I believed it was the mail and acted on that belief. The window gave me a glimpse of understanding. Walking outside provided the proof.

So it is with suffering in our lives. Suffering stands between us and our Lord. We glimpse Him as through a window. He can be plainly seen but not plainly known. When we suffer, faith gives us the ability to grapple with our misgivings and anxiety. We see our Savior coming to us dimly at a distance; our senses dulled by the barrier of suffering that divides us. Faith compels us to go and look, to find Him and hold Him close to us. Anxiety, however, can trick

our senses into believing He is not really there but that He is hiding Himself from us. Hidden but not hiding, we must reach out through that suffering to secure the hope that waits for us outside the window of faith.

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Your Burdens To The Recycling Center! (Psalm 55: 22)

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Living in the country and allowed to burn some of our recyclables, we're faced with the prospect of hauling the trash barrels from the garage to the burning barrel at the far end of the property. There the trash is deposited into a burning barrel, ignited and burned. In a perfect world the fire would be all-consuming. Burning barrels, however, leave behind something called ash. And, with a little rain added to the mixture, ash soon becomes something we call “black muck.” Over time it needs to be removed by shovel from the barrel lest no room remain for the burnables. We keep a metal garbage can nearby to receive this shoveled residue. It's a fifty gallon bin so it can accommodate quite a bit of ash. Full it probably weighs between one hundred and one hundred and fifty pounds. When the time arrives when no more ash can be packed, pounded and stomped into the cavity, it must be taken to the driveway about one hundred yards away so that it can be loaded into the truck and carted to the recycling center and disposed of. At this point we have one of two options. The can can be loaded into the tractor cart and driven to the driveway or it can be straddled and hauled the distance by hand. One method is quicker, less of a strain and a bit mundane. The other is laborious, slow but, when completed, more personally rewarding. You pick! I have done it both ways and have come to the conclusion that lifting that barrel may be challenging but so is lying flat on your back in bed with a wrenched back.

Carrying a can too heavy to carry may be challenging but it could also be classified as just plain dumb. If it is going to cause pain and suffering, that's one thing. In that case the effort might be worth it. But, if it is inefficient to boot, that is another. The time spent lifting, grunting and grimacing could be better spent getting the rest of the recyclables loaded into the truck. (As my wife has correctly pointed out.) The dumb part comes in when our valorous efforts impact the work that needs to be done.

So it is with anxiousness and carrying our burdens when we ought not to. While being long-suffering and uncomplaining about your burdens is noble, it may not be all too bright. When there is a "tractor cart" to put them into, what's the point of carrying them? We only serve to prove that we know little about the work that needs to be done and a whole lot about inflicting pain upon ourselves. God instructs us to "cast all (our) cares" on Him. He's offering an easy way to cart your heavy personal burdens away and dispose of them. Throw them on Me, He says. I will carry them for you. Ultimately, trying to lift that which should not be lifted makes little sense and can only make your life more tedious.

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Don't Get In The Way! (1 Corinthians 7: 32)

When you cook, do you follow the recipe, or do you get a bit creative? That may work with cooking, but doesn't work well with God's recipe for spiritual growth. My friend, life's a story, stayed tuned for more on This Passing Day.

Here's a story. Years ago I was trenching in a foundation with a big shovel, a concrete mixer, and a little boy named Daniel close at hand. The digging had been accomplished and the concrete mixer was chugging away, mixing the dry concrete mix with water. Suddenly, above the top of the trench peered the face of my little six year old son Daniel. "Daddy! Can I help!" He sincerely meant

his offer. He had his little plastic shovel in hand and wore his bib overalls just like the ones I had on. When I heard the word “help,” visions of troublesome little shovels putting dirt and sand into the mixer as well as “helpful” hands on the nearly hose which supplied water to the site came to mind. I hastily climbed out from the ditch only to see Danny grabbing the end of the hose and walking toward the churning mixer. “No, Dan!” I shouted. “Daddy already put water into the mixer.” I grabbed the hose and put it back in its place. Not to be detoured, he headed for pile of concrete bags. “That’s the concrete that I put into the mixer to make the footings. It’s like sand, Dan. If you put water into the sand it becomes wet and very heavy.” “Okay!” He replied. That okay bothered me a bit but I went back to work. The next thing I knew I could hear a little shovel digging above me and the sound of sand banging against the mixer. Dan was “helping” me again. I climbed back out of my trench and I took his little hand and marched him over to the sand pile. “Here! You take this sand and shovel it into a little pile right over there.” I said. “That will be a big help for Daddy.” With Danny hard at work, I went back to my trenching; confident that he was occupied and I could get my work done.

It’s like that with God too. We are always trying to “help” Him get the work done. You know, supplying us with food, money, and security in this life. And, like Danny, we are only marginally effective at getting the job done. We become anxious when we see the work that needs to be done and try to do it ourselves. Unfortunately, this is our Heavenly Father’s job, not ours. His skills in providing for us are perfect. Our skills in trying to do the work ourselves are not. Our “concern” ought to be in simply accomplishing the tasks He has assigned us to do. Work, whether in the home or not, is moving sand from one pile to the other. It builds character and skills that help us develop fully in this life. But, when we try to “add water to the mix or throw ingredients into what God has already perfected,” we only get in the way of the divine plan set forth by our Heavenly Father for our own care and security. Don’t get in God’s way with your anxiety over whether or not He will provide for your every need today and tomorrow. He has promised to do so. Pick up your shovel and do the work He has assigned you to do. Getting in the way only complicates things.

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A Sparrow's Song! (Matthew 6:25-34)

Did the sun come out for you today or was it overcast? It affect our moods, right? Perhaps if our moods were more focused on the Son, it might be different. My friend, life's a story, stayed tuned for more on This Passing Day.

Yesterday I was listening on my car radio to a debate about the origin of life. This was a Christian radio station so I knew that the creationist view of things would win out. Nonetheless, at least one listener with an opposing viewpoint called in and ruffled a few Christian feathers in the process.

The caller, a young man, contended that the world was billions of years old and that it had its origins in the mists of time when a great explosion occurred and matter, then in a state of unstable energy, began to assemble itself into life as we know it today. The show host, broke in from time to time to put forth a biblical view of how these things got started. Things were going along pretty well with the young man acknowledging the fact that his stance was purely theoretical and even by standards of modern science, a bit difficult to corroborate; that is until the subject of the “purpose” of all order came up. The caller insisted that the earth had but one purpose and that was to sustain evolution and produce an ever more sophisticated and intelligent form of life. Man was but a transient form of that passage and that he was “no greater or worse than the animal life that inhabited this planet.” His purpose was to sustain the evolution and continue on as a part of a natural, slow-moving process. The show host then interjected. “You mean to say that the purpose of creation is simply extinction?” The young man faltered for a moment and then conceded somewhat cynically, “yes!”

The purpose of life, in essence, was death. This rather fatalistic viewpoint, although not shared universally even by non-Christians, is not altogether that rare these days. We live in a world obsessed with thoughts of extermination and hopelessness.

When we experience hardships, events in our lives that cause us to question whether God really cares about us at all, we need merely turn our gaze out upon the fields and hills wherein His “perfect creation” resides. If a bird can sing even when food is scarce and the sun doesn’t shine, how much more should we be capable of such exuberance? The humble sparrow can sing it’s “Our Father in Heaven” in the face of adversity because that is how God created a sparrow. He did not create the sparrow for hopelessness; He created it for hope. In like manner He created us and, to assure us of His help, He has given us much more than the sparrow. He gives us the ability to till the soil and reap the fruit of our harvest. Therefore, we ought never to be anxious about tomorrow. If a sparrow can so chirp an “Our Father”, we ought at least be able to put words to the song.

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