

~Other Speakers M-R: Revival Email List:**"Perfecting Strength in Weakness"**

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"God does not offer us a way out of the testings of life. He offers us a way through, and that makes all the difference." -W.T. Purkizer

Often God's way up is down: from the "downer" of 40 days in the wilderness, to the beginning of a ministry of signs and wonders; from the downside of a Roman prison, to letters that are still cherished two millennia later; from declaring with a curse, "I know not the Man," to "in the name of Jesus Christ the Nazarene -- walk!"

PLUMBING THE DEPTHS BEFORE DOING "GREATER THINGS"

Be open to this possibility: not even the depths can thwart the purposes of God; in fact, the road to the heights normally runs right through them! As a famous artist once commented to a friend of mine, "My greatest pictures are painted against a dark background." No matter how "negative" the process looks to our eyes and others (think of Job and his so-called counselors), God faithfully, and without tiring, draws us through the "depths" of our soulish lives and impulses toward the heights of the life of the Spirit. At the end of his troubles, Job finally understood, "I know You can do all things," and "No purpose of Yours can be thwarted."

I have many times faced the death of my dreams, visions, ideas, goals and initiatives. Yet, more and more, I am seeing God's hand, offering to transform all these "negative-appearing results of my weakness and failure," to use them as my teachers, showing me what abiding in Him actually looks like. Even our worst mess-ups can be seen as gifts in the purposes of God - what Michael Wells calls "warning lights," which serve to keep us better on course.

There is truly a child-like simplicity in all this: When I am abiding in Him, I cannot and will not ask of Him anything that wouldn't bring glory and honor to Him. I become like the child in a drought-stricken land, whose prayers were answered when she was the only person to show up at the "Pray-for-Rain Meeting" carrying an umbrella!

Jesus likened our relationship to Him as to a branch abiding in the vine - concluding His teaching with the words, "If you abide in Me, and My words abide in you, ask whatever you wish, and it shall be done for you." Looks like "greater things" are on the way for all branches abiding in the vine! But, first, let's look at another aspect of the necessary downside.

MY POINT OF EXTREMITY - GOD'S STARTING POINT

George Washington Carver is known for his work in finding so many uses for the peanut. Yet, few are aware that Carver also revitalized the entire paint industry in the South via his work with pigments drawn from the clays in the soil around Tuskegee Institute (where Carver spent most of his productive years as a researcher/teacher). In one case, year after year, he doggedly

sought to recreate the "royal Egyptian blue," a mixture of pigments that had last been seen in the Pharaohs' tombs. After twenty-five years of unsuccessful experimentation - he finally, desperately, declared to the Lord that he was giving up.

That's when the abiding presence of the Holy Spirit within him asked, "Have you tried this formulation?" He ran into his lab and tried it. Then, for the first time in 3,000 years out came the royal Egyptian blue!

A lifetime of education and research was not enough. Carver's point of extremity became God's starting point. Many, if not all, "greater-than" moments come via divine revelation at the point of man's extremity.

"THANK GOD FOR THE COMMUNISTS!"

A "spiritual grandpa" of mine, Norman Grubb, who went to be with the Lord at age 98 some years back, once exclaimed to me, "I thank God for the communists!" Having identified with the anti-communist movement of that era (along with several other "anti- movements"), I gasped in response, "Just how can you say that, Norman?!"

Grubb responded with, "The communists are creating the vacuum that can only be filled by Jesus Christ!" It wasn't much longer after that that the Berlin Wall fell. Thousands of missionaries flooded into formerly communist countries, bringing the good news of Jesus Christ to fill the communist-created vacuum within hungry hearts.

Do you have a problem, a crisis, a perplexity, a relational breakdown, a pain or a sorrow?... Such problems can be used by the Holy Spirit to create the vacuum that only Jesus Christ can fill.

In the upside-down irony of God, His Holy Spirit typically transforms our greatest areas of weakness into His most powerful areas of ministry through us. Many an unwed mother, transformed by the power of the cross, has eventually started a ministry to unwed mothers and their babies. The Christian parents who lose their children in an accident, perhaps end up starting an orphanage or clinic. The redeemed, former prostitute or drug pusher, develops a rescue ministry for street kids. Coincidence?

We started this transformation process as children, are still in it, and always will be while on this earth.

Speaking for myself, I can say that my days of wanting to do great things for Jesus are, hopefully, behind me. For I now see how too often I took the vision, figured out how to do it, and clothed it in the robes of my own soulish devices (with Biblical prooftexts, of course), rather than in the robes of Jesus Christ's authority. As a result, I have produced a lot of lemons. Now, to my great joy, I am discovering how God makes His lemonade out of my life's lemons.

Instead of "doing great things for Jesus," my increasing desire is that I would travel His "downward" path to the place where He does His "greater things" through me.

DOWN" MUST COME BEFORE 'UP'

As George MacDonald wrote, "No words can express how much the world owes to sorrow. Most of the Psalms were born in the wilderness. Most of the Epistles were written in a prison. Take comfort, afflicted Christian: when God is about to make a preeminent use of a man, He puts him in the fire."

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER IN YOUR OWN PROCESS:

For what do you find it most difficult to give thanks to God?

What are you learning about yourself through this situation?

How is God revealing Himself in the midst of the pain?

How might God take your "lemons," and be working to create lemonade?