

THE DAYS PASS BY SO QUICKLY

In his last years, I would even say, in his last decade, Dad repeated an observation, over and over again. It became a sort of signature to his emails, phone calls, visits, and comments at family gatherings. He repeated the sentiment, “The days go by so quickly. Where does time go? The hours just seem to slip away. The years go by so quickly.” And so forth.

He wasn’t wrong.

The Bible assures us that life is short, that man’s days are as an evening shadow, that all flesh is like grass ... the grass withers, the flower fades and that it passes like a dream, renewed in the morning, briefly flourishing, and in the evening fades and withers, a fleeting moment, a single breath, a morning mist, a vapor, a vanity, and grasping of wind.

But honestly, I would have thought that, in his last days, the opposite would have been true for Dad. I would have supposed that time slowed down. Because when he was younger, he was a busy guy. I remember my father, in the years that I was in his household, to be a man under a relentless newspaper deadline, constantly under pressure, easily putting in fifty-five-to-sixty-hour work weeks in the newspaper office, then his evenings spent writing sermons for his radio show, at the typewriter every night before bed, staying up late, rising early, chasing around town to cover the news and photograph Boy Scout spaghetti dinners and Lyon’s Club meetings, juggling ministries on the side, gardening in the summer and canning in the autumn, Saturdays cutting wood, cutting the grass, or building a shed or whatever project he had going, Sundays preaching and leading a congregation, hosting missionaries, connecting with church-goers, then back to work early Monday morning—an absolutely non-stop person who never had enough time to do everything he was trying to do. So I would imagine that, in those days, time would seem to speed away quickly and then, subsequently, slow down as his life slowed down.

But that’s not the case. In those days, he didn’t complain about the days rushing past. Not that I remember.

Contrast that with his latter years, after Mom’s death, when he had very little to fill his days other than the basic routines of getting up, getting dressed, making coffee, breakfast, etc. – the basic routines of the day. He conceded that sometimes life felt rather boring. It was during these latter days, when he was accustomed to spend long hours simply sitting and being, watching the birds at the feeder or the ducks on the river, that he became increasingly alarmed about how quickly time escaped him. He used to tell me, “Every job expands to fill all the available time.” But that doesn’t account for the change in perception. As he declined and could do less, it seemed to him, that time went even faster, until in these last years, when he had almost nothing to occupy his time, it became his constant refrain, “The days just speed by.”

Why is that? There are scientific theories about why the elderly have that shift in perception, but I have a spiritual theory.

I believe that, as Dad drew closer to leaving, and as he drew closer to the spiritual world, he became less and less connected with the world of illusion and concealment in which we ordinarily conduct our affairs. And in so doing, he drew closer to God’s perspective, of which the Psalmist says, “For a thousand years in thy sight *are but* as yesterday when it is past, and *as* a watch in the night” (Psalm 90:4).

In my theological circles, this world is called “the world of concealment” because God has concealed his presence from this world. He has concealed himself so that we can exist as a finite world and all that a real world of cause-and-effect entails. But when we die, we leave the world of concealment. Our eyes are opened, and we behold the truth. We refer to the afterlife as “the world of truth” because the illusion of God’s concealment is lifted.

Part of the illusion in the world of concealment is time itself. The idea that there is a past in which things happened and a future in which things will happen is all part of the illusion that can exist only from a finite perspective of one caught up inside of time. The infinite perspective (Dad used to say this) is “an eternal now.” And in truth, there is only *now*. That should be obvious to us, even in this world. We can never do anything in the future, nor can we do anything in the past, but only in the *now*. And it’s eternal because it’s always now. The rest is all illusion.

Isaiah tells us that God transcends time. “I, the LORD, the first, and with the last; I am he. Declaring the end from the beginning and from ancient times.” The angels declare that he is “Holy, holy, holy: who is, who was, and who is to come.” Likewise, Jesus is “the Alpha and the Omega,” “the same yesterday, today, and forever.” And when Moses asked God to tell him his name, or the meaning of his name, he replied, “I am that I am.”

The hope of eternity does not diminish the significance and importance of the present moment. On the contrary, it is the hope of eternity, and the revelation of the World of Truth, that invests the present moment with meaning and significance.

We believe that the dead in Christ enjoy the radiance of the presence of God, and in that radiance we will possess *all* things. Is there anything lacking in heaven? Yes actually. There is one valuable thing that belongs to us in this world that we will not have in the afterlife or in the resurrection. What is it that you can’t get in heaven? The opportunity to serve God by faith, now at this moment, when he is concealed from view. That’s a precious thing and in short supply, and it’s slipping quickly away from each one of us. In heaven, the obedience of faith is a forgone conclusion, but in this world, it certainly isn’t. It’s still powerful and meaningful. In the world of truth, there’s no opportunity to store up treasure in heaven, so to speak, because you’re already in heaven. It’s only in this world that we have the opportunity to do so. In heaven, there is no repentance from sin or opportunities to surrender to God’s will because there is no sin and God’s will is done as a matter of course. Those things are only possible in this world. Only in this world do we have the opportunity to love others when they seem unlovable, or to show kindness to those who are unkind to us, or to seek God and pray to him when he seems remote, invisible, and unreal. Only in this world do we have the opportunity to bring the light of God’s glory and revelation, because in the next world, there is no concealment of God’s glory and revelation, there is no darkness to dispel. From this perspective, every moment in this world is precious, and that is why the “Bible tells us to choose life,” though we might prefer to be with the Master. The Psalmist tells us to acquire a heart of wisdom by numbering our days.

Within the world of concealment, time often seems inconsequential or unimportant, and we wish it away while impatiently waiting for the red light to change or cursing our luck for choosing the slow line at the cashier or waiting for the next exciting thing to happen. Dad used to talk about waiting for Christmas to come when he was a kid. Our minds are distracted with the future or consumed with what happened in the past, but uninterested in the present moment, which is to

say, uninterested in real life. That's all part of the concealment. The only *real time* is the present moment. If the dead could tell us anything, they would surely tell us to cherish the present moment, that every moment of life is precious, a commodity not to be wasted. This is the sense of what the apostle says, quoting Psalm 95, "Today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts as your fathers did in the wilderness" but exhort one another as long as it is called "today." When is it called "today?" Right now.

In his last days, Dad's eyes took on an otherworldly glassiness, a strange distant stare, which seemed to peer beyond the illusion of concealment, as if this world had become transparent to him. His eyes seemed to fix upon something on the other side. You sometimes see the same look in the eyes of newborn children, just arrived. And it was utterly remarkable to be in his presence. No words were necessary.

Dad never gave up on life. For nearly a century, he chose life to the very end. In his last days, he spent many hours simply being still in the present moment, in the presence of quiet majesty, in the presence of the great "I Am," practicing the meaning of the words, "Be Still, and Know that I am God," practicing the presence of God. I don't think Dad ever read that famous title by Brother Lawrence, but in one of his last emails (October 4, 2019), Dad said wrote, "One time at Oak Hills Bible Institute a man preached to the students about 'Practicing the presence of God.'" He recommended, "Try that! It's Good!"

Taste and see that the LORD is Good.

He was grateful for the years God gave him, grateful for God's goodness to him, nostalgic over days gone by, and optimistic about the future hope of glory—but ultimately, he was content to remain in the present moment; reluctant to step into eternity because he knew that he had all eternity to do eternity. And from that perspective, from the eternal perspective of the eternal *now*, and union with the "Great I Am," I believe, the illusion of time seemed to pass quickly, to become insubstantial, fleeing away from him, slipping through his fingers, fleeting and fading, faster and faster, less solid and less real, and he would say, "The days pass by so quickly."