

Another New Year 2008

I really enjoy Ravi Zaccarias. We all have our favorites, but my wife and I like to get his weekly podcasts and listen to them together. www.rzim.org There was one recently that really stirred me deep in my spirit. I think it may be because of this time in my life, with my aunt not having long to live, and counseling others who have just lost loved ones. His message was the Constancy of God in a Changing World. Life is so short and constantly changing but our God never changes. (Malachi 3:6)

Commented [notes1]: 6 "I the LORD do not change. So you, O descendants of Jacob, are not destroyed.

Birth is such a miracle! If you've ever seen one, you would have to put it in your Seven Wonders of the World category. The Psalmist said we are fearfully and wonderfully made. (Psalm 139:14) We always look to see that all the toes and fingers are there. We marvel as they take their first breath and the oxygen turns the blue skin to pink. We watch their little eyes trying to focus on the bright world around them. And if you are a thoughtful person, your eyes will see beyond the present physical miracle to the miracle of your own life.

Commented [notes2]: 14 I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; your works are wonderful, I know that full well.

I think of the years of our youth. Everything is a discovery. Life is all fun, learning, exploring and meeting new friends. My wife and I witnessed a group of girls giggling on a street corner and she was reminded how, as an eleven-year-old girl, just about anything could give you those uncontrollable giggles. Before you know it, you are in High School and the rebellious years begin. Things get serious so quickly. You want to do things your way and find your own boundaries. Then you are graduating, finding a career and marrying.

Then the cycle begins again with your own children. That's when you start to realize that your mom and dad weren't so stupid after all. Many parents start to look at church again. Having stepped away in high school or college, they begin to realize the positive impact it had on them, and that they want that for their children. (Ecclesiastes 12:1)

Commented [notes3]: 1 Remember your Creator in the days of your youth, before the days of trouble come and the years approach when you will say, "I find no pleasure in them"--

Those children grow so fast. I don't know of anyone who doesn't wish they had spent more time with their children. Before you know it, they have families of their own, and you discover the joy of being a grandparent. But now the body is starting to ache here and there. You notice you are slowing down. Your parents' generation is passing on and your generation is next. The numbers at your High School reunions are getting smaller and smaller. This is all provided that you are blessed with a normal life span. How many do you know that went before you? This brevity of life reminds us of James' words, ¹⁴ *Why, you do not even know what will happen tomorrow. What is your life? You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.* (James 4:14 (NIV))

If it was just the joy of watching the next generations arrive and grow it would be a good enough life, but there are also the heartaches, sorrows and losses that we endure along the journey. Relationships are torn apart through misunderstandings or differences. Those closest to us bring us the most joy and the most pain. It

seems like we are ever transitioning from sorrow to joy and back again. (Psalm 90:10)

Someone sent me an email recently that was full of beautiful pictures. It was about a man that tried to talk to his barber about God. The barber said he didn't believe in God because of all the pain and suffering in the world. The customer didn't want to start an argument so he stayed quiet. As he left the shop, he ran into a homeless man with long hair and a beard. (No comments please!) He ran back into the shop and told the barber that barbers don't exist. The barber said, "But here I am standing in front of you." "That doesn't matter," the customer replied. "I saw a man without a shave and a haircut." The barber immediately answered, "Yes, but if he came to me he would have one." The wise customer answered, "And if people would just come to God, there would be no suffering and pain."

I immediately wrote him back and thanked him for the sermon material, that is, as an incorrect theological example. You see, God never promises freedom from suffering. (Acts 14:22) We live in a fallen world that is under a curse. That is the reason there is pain and suffering. (Genesis 3:17) The Christian is not exempt, but he or she has the wonderful grace of God's presence to help them through the inevitable suffering we all face. (2Corinthians 12:9) In addition, God turns suffering into invaluable lessons for those who are willing to receive them. (Romans 5:3-5)

Listen to the words of Job, a man God declared to be His righteous servant. If anyone could address suffering, it was Job. ¹ *"Man born of woman is of few days and full of trouble. ² He springs up like a flower and withers away; like a fleeting shadow, he does not endure. ³ Do you fix your eye on such a one? Will you bring him before you for judgment? ⁴ Who can bring what is pure from the impure? No one! ⁵ Man's days are determined; you have decreed the number of his months and have set limits he cannot exceed.* (Job 14 (NIV))

At this juncture with the New Year, we are challenged to take inventory and ask ourselves if we have done with this life what God created us to do. Job asked what we are to do when we face our Creator. There is not a man or woman on earth that can stand the scrutiny of His justice. No matter how long your life, it will soon be over and we, the impure, will stand before the Pure One.

The psalmist addresses this same issue of the brevity of life. He writes, ⁴ *"Show me, O LORD, my life's end and the number of my days; let me know how fleeting is my life. ⁵ You have made my days a mere handbreadth; the span of my years is as nothing before you. Each man's life is but a breath. Selah ⁶ Man is a mere phantom as he goes to and fro: He bustles about, but only in vain; he heaps up wealth, not knowing who will get it. ⁷ "But now, Lord, what do I look for? My hope is in you. ⁸ Save me from all my transgressions;* (Psalm 39:4 (NIV))

The psalmist wanted a revelation of how little time he had left so that he would get serious about living for God, about things that are eternal.

Commented [notes4]: 10 The length of our days is seventy years-- or eighty, if we have the strength; yet their span is but trouble and sorrow, for they quickly pass, and we fly away.

Commented [notes5]: 22 strengthening the disciples and encouraging them to remain true to the faith. "We must go through many hardships to enter the kingdom of God," they said.

Commented [notes6]: 17 To Adam he said, "Because you listened to your wife and ate from the tree about which I commanded you, 'You must not eat of it,' "Cursed is the ground because of you; through painful toil you will eat of it all the days of your life.

Commented [notes7]: 9 But he said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness." Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me.
2 Cor 12:9 (NIV)

Commented [notes8]: 3 Not only so, but we also rejoice in our sufferings, because we know that suffering produces perseverance; ⁴ perseverance, character; and character, hope. ⁵ And hope does not disappoint us, because God has poured out his love into our hearts by the Holy Spirit, whom he has given us.
Romans 5:3-5 (NIV)

God marvelously gifted us with life and all its experiences, but we are born in a condition of depravity in a fallen world. (Psalm 51:5) That is our own fault as man freely chose to rebel against God and is now facing the consequences. We go about this short life as if we would never have to give an account for our selfishness. And what is God doing about it? He is transforming those who will turn their lives over to Him. That is why Jesus came, to make that transformation possible. He gives all who will confess and repent of their sin His own righteousness and takes their sin in exchange. He paid the penalty we owed. Once we accept that, we can receive the Holy Spirit and begin the process of transformation. (Romans 12:2)

Commented [notes9]: Psalms 51:5 (NIV)
5 Surely I was sinful at birth, sinful from the time my mother conceived me.

This is so vividly depicted in the story of the prodigal son. The young prodigal came to his senses and returned to his father. When we return we always find those wonderful open arms as he runs to meet us. (Luke 15:20) In those arms we find forgiveness and peace. But that is just the beginning. Then he puts a ring on our finger and clothes us in the best robe, the robe of His own righteousness. (Romans 13:14) That is transformation. Just because you aren't walking fully in step with the righteousness He has clothed you with, don't let the marvel of that gift lose its impact on your soul. We must continually let the wonder of those open arms fill our hearts with awe.

Commented [notes10]: 2 Do not conform any longer to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind. Then you will be able to test and approve what God's will is--his good, pleasing and perfect will.

Commented [notes11]: Luke 15:20 (NIV)
20 So he got up and went to his father. "But while he was still a long way off, his father saw him and was filled with compassion for him; he ran to his son, threw his arms around him and kissed him.

Commented [notes12]: Romans 13:14 (NIV)
14 Rather, clothe yourselves with the Lord Jesus Christ, and do not think about how to gratify the desires of the sinful nature.

When we yield to the Holy Spirit, when we lay aside our old ways and "me first" attitudes, we can begin to bring God glory right now. When we let the wonder of His love for us and the greatness of His gift fill our hearts (1 Corinthians 10:31) we cannot help but glorify Him. That is what He created us for. In our old life, we used our talents and abilities to bring glory to our self. We wanted all our achievements and successes to bring us praise. The transformation of the Holy Spirit turns us away from that self-focus and helps us live focused upon our gracious God. (Matthew 6:33)

Commented [notes13]: 1 Corinthians 10:31 (NIV)
31 So whether you eat or drink or whatever you do, do it all for the glory of God.

Commented [notes14]: Matthew 6:33 (NIV)
33 But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.

Life becomes an opportunity to bring God glory, and part of that is conveying to the next generation the joy and freedom of transformation. We are marvelously created and then we are marvelously recreated through transformation. (2 Corinthians 5:17) This transformation is a lifelong experience. It is an experience that is at work in our times of joy and suffering. It is an experience to make us more like Jesus, the Son of God.

Commented [notes15]: 2 Corinthians 5:17 (NIV)
17 Therefore, if anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!

The real thrill of it all is that this whole journey of formation and transformation is headed to translation. John the Beloved said our transformation will be complete when we see Jesus. (1John 3:2) He said we will be like Him when we see Him as He is. That is translation. The Apostle Paul said that it will happen in the twinkling of an eye at the last trumpet. We will be changed. (1Corinthians 15:51-52)

Commented [notes16]: 1 John 3:2 (NIV)
2 Dear friends, now we are children of God, and what we will be has not yet been made known. But we know that when he appears, we shall be like him, for we shall see him as he is.

C.S. Lewis wrote in Mere Christianity that, "Most of man's psychological makeup is probably due to his body. When his body dies, all that will fall off him. And the real central man, the part of him that made the best or the worst of this material world will stand naked. All sorts of nice things that we thought were our own, but which were really a product of a good digestion, will fall off some of us. All sorts of things

Commented [notes17]: 1 Corinthians 15:51-52 (NIV)
51 Listen, I tell you a mystery: We will not all sleep, but we will all be changed--
52 in a flash, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet. For the trumpet will sound, the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed.

we thought were due to complexes or bad health will fall off others. We shall then for the first time see everyone as he really is. There will be surprises!"

The new creation of Christ in us will be expressed without any hindrances. How I long for that day! In Paul's letter to the Philippians he wrote, ²⁰ *But our citizenship is in heaven. And we eagerly await a Savior from there, the Lord Jesus Christ,* ²¹ *who, by the power that enables him to bring everything under his control, will transform our lowly bodies so that they will be like his glorious body.* (Philippians 3:20-21) That's translation, from the language that is muted by our marred souls to one that is our newly created spirit that will be totally expressive for the glory of God. (Jude 1:24) 1 Corinthians 2:9 (NIV) ⁹ ... "No eye has seen, no ear has heard, no mind has conceived what God has prepared for those who love him"--

Commented [notes18]: Jude 1:24 (NIV)
24 To him who is able to keep you from falling and to present you before his glorious presence without fault and with great joy--

And so we as we begin a new year, we find ourselves in the midst of this journey. I hope you have found the freedom of being in Christ and the wonder of being in the process of transformation. If you are in the midst of your transformation, be encouraged. God will finish the marvelous work He has begun. (Philippians 1:6) My step-father would always chastise me if I didn't clean up after I started something. He would say that a job isn't finished until the clean up is done. Well, God isn't going to leave the job half done. He cleans up what He begins working on. He will clean up you and me and fit us for eternity with Him.

Commented [notes19]: Philippians 1:6 (NIV)
6 being confident of this, that he who began a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus.

Psalms 90 sums up what I have been sharing with you. ¹² *Teach us to number our days aright, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.* ¹³ *Relent, O LORD! How long will it be? Have compassion on your servants.* ¹⁴ *Satisfy us in the morning with your unfailing love, that we may sing for joy and be glad all our days.* ¹⁵ *Make us glad for as many days as you have afflicted us, for as many years as we have seen trouble.* ¹⁶ *May your deeds be shown to your servants, your splendor to their children.* ¹⁷ *May the favor of the Lord our God rest upon us; establish the work of our hands for us--yes, establish the work of our hands.* (Psalm 90 (NIV))

We need to number our days. We have a tendency to think death is a long way off. Every day is a precious gift from God. (Psalm 118:24) When we realize the brevity of life we will desire to apply our hearts to wisdom. (John 9:4)

Commented [notes20]: Psalms 118:24 (NIV)
24 This is the day the LORD has made; let us rejoice and be glad in it.

In verse 13 the Psalmist is asking God to shorten the days of suffering and trials. We all have them. We all pray with the Psalmist that they are shortened. Even if they are used for our good, we want to get the good out of them and move on. Even Jesus asked if it was possible to have the cup pass from Him. (Matthew 26:42) You aren't alone in that feeling.

Commented [notes21]: John 9:4 (NIV)
4 As long as it is day, we must do the work of him who sent me. Night is coming, when no one can work.

But then in verse 14, he looks forward to the same thing we look forward to, morning. The morning is often figuratively used as the time we awaken from this life into the next. (Psalm 17:15) In the morning, we will be satisfied with God's unfailing love. There will be no more reason for suffering to continue. Its purpose will have ended and its origin dealt with. In heaven, we will sing for joy and be glad ALL our days. Transformation will be completed in translation and sorrow will no longer be a part of life. He will wipe away every tear from our eyes. (Isaiah 25:8)

Commented [notes22]: Matthew 26:42 (NIV)
42 He went away a second time and prayed, "My Father, if it is not possible for this cup to be taken away unless I drink it, may your will be done."

Commented [notes23]: Psalms 17:15 (NIV)
15 And I--in righteousness I will see your face; when I awake, I will be satisfied with seeing your likeness.

Commented [notes24]: Isaiah 25:8 (NIV)
8 he will swallow up death forever. The Sovereign LORD will wipe away the tears from all faces; he will remove the disgrace of his people from all the earth. The LORD has spoken.

In verse 15 the Psalmist is shortsighted. He asks for as many days of gladness as he has seen of affliction and trouble. Eternity will engulf these few days of trouble here like an ocean engulfs a grain of sand. (Romans 8:18) He must be speaking of his hope in this present life, before morning dawns.

Commented [notes25]: Romans 8:18 (NIV)
18 I consider that our present sufferings are not worth comparing with the glory that will be revealed in us.

Verse 16 asks that we see the deeds of God. In the midst of this journey, we often wonder if God is at work. We become so overwhelmed with the trial that we just want to know that God is indeed working through it something of lasting value. We want to see something that we know is the work of God to reassure our heart that it will be OK. (Romans 8:28) It is not a lack of faith to ask with the psalmist to see some sign of God at work. It is human. We all need encouragement at times.

Commented [notes26]: Romans 8:28 (NIV)
28 And we know that in all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

We want the splendor of God to be seen by our children. The world captures their attention with all its glitter, but nothing compares to the splendor of God. (Psalm 29:9) We know that if they see, they too can endure the difficulties of life. "May Your splendor be shown to our children O Lord!" I think every generation that walks with God wants more than anything else to know that their children have seen the splendor of God. Then we have hope for the following generations to see it as well. (Deuteronomy 5:10)

Commented [notes27]: Psalms 29:9 (NIV)
9 The voice of the LORD twists the oaks and strips the forests bare. And in his temple all cry, "Glory!"

We ask for the favor of God to be upon us. We know we need His blessing to endure. We need the favor of God to live a life that glorifies God. If what we do is ever going to last, we need God to establish the work of our hands. That is for God Himself to work through us to do things that bring Him glory.

Commented [notes28]: Deuteronomy 5:10 (NIV)
10 but showing love to a thousand [generations] of those who love me and keep my commandments.

If God does not establish the work of our hands, what good can we claim from these 70 or 80 years? I don't think there is a person alive that wants to go into eternity knowing they have done nothing of lasting value. Jesus told the disciples that He had appointed them to bear fruit that will last. (John 15:16) That is what the Psalmist was praying for, and that is what we should desire as well.

Commented [notes29]: John 15:16 (NIV)
16 You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit--fruit that will last. Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my name.

As we take stock of our life and look at our direction in the new year, we should keep in mind how quickly life passes. We should be excited about the fact that we are in the transformation process and on our way to translation. We should pray that God will make our lives instruments to glorify Him, that the things we do are meaningful and lasting. Then without hesitation we can pray, "Lord, come quickly." (Revelation 22:17) Our focus will shift from the transitory to the eternal. Our life will be filled with what is significant and lasting. (2 Corinthians 4:18) The more complete our transformation, the less shocking our translation.

Commented [notes30]: Revelation 22:17 (NIV)
17 The Spirit and the bride say, "Come!" And let him who hears say, "Come!" Whoever is thirsty, let him come; and whoever wishes, let him take the free gift of the water of life.

If you've never entered into the transformation that your Creator has for you, you can enter into those arms this morning. If you realize you've strayed away and turned back to a self-fixated life, you can return this morning. Come to your senses, and come home. Get back on the path of transformation that leads to translation. Mankind has no greater hope!

Commented [notes31]: 2 Corinthians 4:18 (NIV)
18 So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal.