

“Thank You Sir May I Do Another?”

(09-24-16 Angels Attending! - --Matthew 4:1-11)

Our lives seem like that sometimes. Often it seems that God is laying out a harsher regime than we think is necessary. My friend, life's a story, stayed tuned for more on This Passing Day.

Here's a story. “Thank you sir, may I do another?” Crouching on the ground, the recruit seemed barely touched by the sergeant's rough treatment. He was doing push-ups; and a lot of them. Each time he pushed his struggling frame up, the sergeant would rest his boot on the small of the private's back and down he would go again. Then his overseer would bark, “What do you like, soldier?” The recruit, prone and struggling to complete just one more cycle of lift, would shout out, “Thank you sir, may I do another?” He had been drilled to believe that the pain and the effort would be worth it in the end. The sergeant had guaranteed him that when he was through with his “style” of training, the recruit would be fit for duty and able to deal with anything the enemy might hand out.

Our lives seem like that sometimes. Often it seems that God is laying out a harsher regime than we think is necessary. We blink and wince and then ask. “Is this what grace is all about? How can a loving God expect us to go through all of this?” Author James Packer writes: “Grace is God drawing sinners closer and closer to him. How does God in grace prosecute this purpose? Not by shielding us from assault by the work, the flesh, and the devil, nor by protecting us from burdensome and frustrating circumstance, not yet by shielding us from troubles created by our own temperament and psychology, but rather by exposing us to all these things, so as to overwhelm us with a sense of our own inadequacy, and to drive us to cling to him more closely. . . . When we walk along a clear road feeling fine, and someone takes our arm to help us, likely we would impatiently shake him off; but when we are caught in rough country in the dark, with a storm brewing and our strength spent, and someone takes our arm to help us, we would thankfully lean on him. And God wants us to feel that our way through life is rough and perplexing, so that we may learn to lean on him thankfully. Therefore he takes steps to drive us out of self-confidence to trust in himself, to -- in the classic scriptural phrase for the secret of the godly man's life -- ‘wait on the Lord’.” (James Packer, *Your Father Loves You*, Harold Shaw Publishers, 1986.)

When our Savior was tested in the desert, it wasn't merely a battle of wills or spirits. It involved physical pain and suffering. God did not spare His Son these griefs. Jesus must be broken in body to demonstrate that His faith and willingness to do His Father's will was the ultimate factor that defeated Satan. It was not Jesus's body that could not be broken; it was his spirit. This must be demonstrated to both Satan and the world. And so it is with you and I. The world may look on and shake its collective head at those suffering Christians that are willing to take such punishment. There may be better ways in their minds to motivate a believer. Yet, when all is said and done, the Christian always comes back for more. Our hearts faint within us as God has willed it so and yet, as we “drop for another”, the spirit within us cries out for more and each time it does, God's “grace-training” grows stronger within us. There is nothing the world can dish out that we aren't “conditioned” to handle. In so doing, we glorify our God who has trained us so to cope and so to triumph.

“Tiger Breath!”

(09-27-16 Angels Attending! - --Matthew 6:9-13)

God places a veil of innocence around our souls meant to protect us from evil in this world. It's as fragile as is strong. It is the sheerest of defenses for its simplicity. My friend, life's a story, stayed tuned for more on This Passing Day.

Refining? On the surface that doesn't sound like much of an improvement. There's all that heat, grinding, discomfort and pouring out. If that's our lot in this life, perhaps we'd rather not? Perhaps we are just as well off contending with the evil around us by our own skills and ploys. Do we really need to feel the breath of evil panting down our necks in order to avoid it? Keeping it at arms length by some other means might seem more attractive.

I once read a story about a man and a tiger that bears repeating here. It seems that one night in a country in the far east a



man was overcome by the heat and vowed that he would sleep that night even if he had to move his bed outside into the open air where tigers prowled and cobras crawled. He dragged his bed outside into the courtyard of his home. A pleasant cool breeze descended upon him immediately from the nearby jungle canopy. He spread his mosquito netting above his bed, resting it upon the frame of the bedstead and fell fast asleep. It was not an hour or so later that he was awakened by a feeling of dread and apprehension. He sensed that he was not alone and that danger lurked nearby. He was transfixed by the silence of the night and felt that he dare not move lest he make a noise that would attract the danger that he was sure rested in the nearby jungle. As he stared, straining into the darkness beyond he suddenly saw a shadow. He knew immediately that a tiger was prowling the edge of the jungle in search of prey. Frozen in fear, he could barely afford a breath. The shadow moved nearer and nearer to the place where he reclined in the middle of that courtyard. There was no escape nor weapon to be grasped. He simply closed his eyes and waited. Though he could not see the beast for he was afraid to open his eyes lest they reflect his presence, he knew that it was upon him. Closer and closer it came until he could feel it pressing its nose against the fragile netting. Yet, each time it pressed against the netting it retreated only to return again. Finally, after feeling its breath rushing across his frozen face, he could stand it no longer. He arose in bed and screamed with all his life and breath. The tiger retreated to the jungle and he was saved. He never again found himself so pressed by the heat to take the risk of sleeping in that courtyard again.

God places a “veil of innocence” around our souls that is meant to protect us from the evil in this world. It is as fragile as it is strong. It is the sheerest of defenses for its simplicity. Yet, when we are within it, we need fear no harm. The devil and the world will press against it, even breath down our necks sometimes. However, when we call upon the name of the Lord, crying out for His protection and mercy, we will be saved and the temptation will be vanquished. In so doing, the breath of the “tiger” will give us pause to reflect on where we ought to be spending our time; in harms way or out of it.

“Don’t Hit The Ball To Me!”

(09-28-16 Angels Attending! - --Psalms 116:1-6)

Sometimes God, for His divine purpose and reason, asks us to “play second base.” He withdraws His grace from us and the door is open to temptations pouring in. My friend, life’s a story, stayed tuned for more on This Passing Day.

Growing up, I played softball for years, but was mediocre at best. If no one hit the ball out to me, I would be satisfied to simply make it through the game without an embarrassing drop of a fly ball or tripping over my cleats. Over time, however, I got more and more confidence in my ability to play the outfield and even developed a sense of pride in my limited abilities. I even developed an “urge for ball” that every player longs for. You begin to want the ball. The challenge of going after a line drive, leaving your feet to stab the ball and make the incredible play, became my driving force in the outfield. Then, suddenly, that all changed when my team manager asked me to play the infield at second base. Graduating from the outfield to the infield was a very big transition. The balls come to you a whole lot quicker. A quick move in the outfield can look rather sluggish when someone smashes a line drive between you and the first baseman. Second base is a hotspot and the chances of making a mistake was high.

I knew this as I walked out onto the field and took my place near the second bag. Nonetheless, I had gained a certain level of confidence in the outfield and I figured that this would carry over no matter where I played. I knew how to field a ground ball and had a pretty good throwing arm. Second base? No problem. I could play second base. As the game warm-up began and we threw the ball around the bases, I even developed a bit of swagger. I was playing second base! Hey--I can do this! As the pitcher finished his last warm-up toss he turned around his infielders and checked their positions. “Brunner! Move closer to the bag!” He yelled. A bit startled and then embarrassed that I hadn’t positioned myself well, I obediently moved over. That’s when it hit. “I don’t know how to play second base.” Suddenly, I was separated from my confidence and the swagger was gone. “Oh please don’t hit the ball to me!”

Sometimes God, for His divine purpose and reason, asks us to “play second base.” He withdraws His grace from us and the door is open to temptations pouring in. Triggered by some trauma or great change in life, we become ripe for the ultimate test, life without knowledge that we are God’s and that He will always be there to protect us from every evil. It’s as if, as Martin Luther wrote, “He no longer wills to be our God.” Then, with the Son of God, we cry out, “Where are you Father?” We are “overcome by trouble and sorrow.” In such a vulnerable state we can only hope that “no one hits the ball to us” at that moment in our life. Rest assured, however, even this temptation is under God’s protection. He has heard your cry. He will be your God again once this test has passed. Be strong and keep your eye on the ball.



“How Dare You!”

(09-29-16 Angels Attending! - -1 Corinthians 15:55-58)

As much as we hate it, blame-shifting is a game that we often engage ourselves in with the master of perpetration him- self, the devil. My friend, life's a story, stayed tuned for more on This Passing Day.

HOW DARE YOU? Indignation. Though I have few hairs left on this bald pate, the few that I have will come to attention pretty quick should my dignity be assaulted. Especially disturbing are those moments in life when someone, the very perpetrator of the act of which you are being accused, has the audacity to shift the blame on you. “How dare you, indeed!”

As much as we hate it, blame-shifting is a game that we often engage ourselves in with the master of perpetration himself, the devil. We sin and fall short of God's goals for our lives. Enter the devil: “Hey! You know what? What you did was pretty awful, wasn't it? And you know what else? The Bible tells us that God demands perfection. Unless you are perfect you won't get to heaven. You're the one, not me, who is responsible for all these bad things happening to you. It's your sin that did it!” The blame-shifting is so subtle that we sometimes just don't recognize what he is doing. His slander is always well-timed for those moments when we are the weakest and most confused by our sins. The very perpetrator of sin, in his most audacious and cunning manner, serves up the blame to us. And, in a weak moment, we are often willing to accept it. Pile those accusations upon other accusations, and it isn't long before fear turns to despair and despair leads to submission; submission to the sin and the Servant of Sin, the devil.

“How dare you, Satan? Indeed! You of all beings have the audacity to accuse us of sin? You of all God's creation have the temerity to heap the blame on us? You have no right to accuse or blame, for you yourself are the guilty one, the one who must suffer the inevitable punishment for rebellion and lawlessness. No, Satan. It is you, not I. I am made perfect through Christ Jesus and you cannot mar that perfection. How dare you accuse me!” When the devil accuses us of sin, we ought to properly cloak ourselves in indignation. We will confront temptation for the rest of our lives but there is no need to bear Satan's taunts or accusations because of them. He has no right. Turn away in indignation from the one who whips blame and raise your repentant heart to the One who offers only forgiveness, Christ Jesus, our Lord.

“Deeply Hidden Yes!”

(09-29-16 Angels Attending! - -Matthew 15:21-28)

When in temptation we are faced with a divine “no” day-in and day-out, it is easy to become discouraged unless we grasp the true meaning of that “No!” My friend, life's a story, stayed tuned for more on This Passing Day.

My father was the master of that little two letter word. He would use it often and never really with any temper or negativity. Simply, it seemed that he liked the word “no”.

“CanI...?” “No!” “Isittimet to ...” “No!” “WhatifI... ?” “No!” “But...!” “No!”

While I was growing up I never really grasped the depth of enjoyment that my dad had in issuing that simple little refrain. Not until, of course, I began using it myself. Then and only then did I discover the reason behind the “no”. The fact is that most of the time “no” really meant “yes” to my dad. As my brothers and sisters would attest, there was always a sense of an inevitable “yes” behind the perpetual “no”. That hard exterior that my dad put forth was purposefully put there. It was a kind of test. It was a mask that hid a masterful understanding of what goes on in a kid's mind. My dad knew that anything worth getting, having or achieving was something that you were willing to ask for more than once. It was something that you truly believed in, so you didn't put down your sword and shield at the first sign of resistance. In many ways, it was a way of building character. When he said “No!” it really was a question, not a statement. “How important or necessary is this thing you are asking? Are you willing to fight for it? Are you asking from your heart or from your stomach?”

When in temptation we are faced with a divine “no” day-in and day-out, it is easy to become discouraged unless we grasp the true meaning of that “No!” The Syrian Phoenician woman that confronts Jesus with her great need presents us with the clue to why God often responds with “No!” when it seems so apparent that “Yes!” would be more proper. Her needs were great. Her daughter was dying and she knew that Jesus could prevent that. Yet, he said no. Was it because He was momentarily caught off-guard or distracted that He made such a statement? No, that would mean that our Savior doesn't hear our pleas properly when we send them heavenward; that there is somehow imperfection in our relationship with Him that must be overcome from time to time. No. Jesus knows that, in order for us to be able to stand firm in the



midst of temptation, our hearts needs to be constantly strengthened. That strengthening is better achieved sometimes when we, in the midst of temptation and perhaps even failing in it, dig deep down within our faith and put forth the question again. "Lord, perhaps you didn't hear me?" Only a firm heart can bear this test. Only a strong faith can prompt such persistence. When temptation grips you as it often will, don't let go of Jesus even when it seems He might be walking away from you. Ask again and again. You will find that within the "No!" is a hidden "Yes!" You simply have to be persistent enough to find it. Pursue your answer until He blesses you with the "Yes!" that was always there in the first place.

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

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