



REFLECTIONS

February 23, 2020

But store up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where moth and rust do not destroy, and where thieves do not break in and steal.

Matthew 6:20

Trophies

Eric Liddell won the gold medal in the 400-meter race at the 1924 Olympic Games. He qualified to be there in a different event; but he refused to run in that event because it had been scheduled for Sunday. Even if it meant he could not compete at all, he honored God on Sundays.

Eric's story is told in the 1981 movie, *Chariots of Fire*. Eric Liddell used his giftedness to win a trophy. "God made me fast," he said, "When I run, I feel his pleasure." But neither the subject of the movie nor the accolades for Eric's life focus much on his Olympic treasure. Both are remembered for the strength of his commitment to glorify God.

Trophies. Who will want my trophies when I'm gone? It gave me pause when I saw those words written somewhere. Who would? Trophies recognize personal achievements; some may even be impressive achievements. A few may represent marks made on the world; but mostly they represent personal achievements with no lasting contribution to anyone else's life. Most trophies shine on display shelves for a time while they gather dust, tarnish, and are finally tossed away and forgotten.

Jesus said, "store up for yourselves treasures in heaven..." What do we meaningfully leave to this world through the lives we live? Legacy we call it. Ultimately it seems, meaningful trophies reside in memories made. Not our memories; the memories others have of you and me. What little bit of yourself will others carry on from the life you live?

In some form, most of us carry on family traditions in loving memories of those who travelled before us. And those memories are driven out of respect for those we knew more than for those we only knew about. If we wish *our* memories to continue to honor the ancestors we knew, their qualities and values must be represented in our lives for others to see.

Eric Liddell's Olympic treasure lives on today through a chain of memories of his commitment to glorify God. The root of them traces through a chain of memories linked to the love of Jesus Christ whose love for and obedience to the Father led to the cross. And because the Father's love for you and me is so great that he gave his only Son that we might live.

The source of memories we each leave rests in what we lived.

There can be a treasured trophy waiting there.

You are the light of the world,

Richard +

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REFLECTIONS

February 16, 2020

Each one should use whatever gift he has received to serve others, faithfully administering God's grace in its various forms. If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so that in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ.

1 Peter 4:10-11

Do What You Do Best

And Saul was there, giving approval to his death. (Acts 8:1)

Just doing my job Saul might have thought while watching Stephen die a brutal death. Trained by Gamaliel, the renowned Pharisee, Saul (whom we come to know better as Paul,) became a zealous law enforcer callously [*persecuting*] *the followers of this Way to their death, arresting both men and women and throwing them into prison. (Acts 22:4)*

Saul's misguided aspirations led him to a common human failing—trying to be someone he was not using gifts he did not have. Only when *a bright light from heaven flashed around [him and he] fell to the ground and heard a voice say, 'Saul! Saul! Why do you persecute me?'* (Acts 22:6-7) did he begin to search for his sweet spot—speaking and teaching, not policing.

He later wrote to the Romans, *"We have different gifts, according to the grace given us. If a man's gift is prophesying, let him use it in proportion to his faith. If it is serving, let him serve; if it is teaching, let him teach; if it is encouraging, let him encourage; if it is contributing to the needs of others, let him give generously; if it is leadership, let him govern diligently; if it is showing mercy, let him do it cheerfully."* (Romans 12:6-8)

Peter condensed those gifts down to two: *If anyone speaks, he should do it as one speaking the very words of God. If anyone serves, he should do it with the strength God provides, so in all things God may be praised through Jesus Christ.*

To his own surprise, Paul discovered his role. He described to Timothy: *...For there is one God and one mediator between God and men, the man Christ Jesus, who gave himself as a ransom for all men — the testimony given in its proper time. And for this purpose I was appointed a herald and an apostle — I am telling the truth, I am not lying — and a teacher of the true faith to the Gentiles. (1 Timothy 2:5-7)*

In their writings to you and me, Peter and Paul are sending us a message, the same message Jesus sent to Paul with that *bright light from heaven*—

Be who God made you to be with no pretense and do what you do best for the glory of God.

You are the light of the world,

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REFLECTIONS

February 9, 2020

For we are God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

Ephesians 2:10

Why Am I Here?

I am me...*appointed from eternity, from the beginning, before the world began.* (Proverbs 8:23)

God created my inmost being; [knitted] together in my mother's womb. I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; (Psalms 139:13-14)

And I am God's workmanship, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do. (Ephesians 2:10)

Now I can't help but wonder what good works God prepared in advance for me to do? Why did He bring me into this world? How does God expect my life to make a difference?

Many if not most people go through life wondering about their life's purpose. God created a role for each of us to play in his plan for this world. We may never fully understand our reason for being since God explained that his thoughts are not our thoughts, and his ways are not our ways. Still, in service to him, it seems we should seek to accept to understand how he made us to be, and to try to identify and use the talents and abilities in the manner he intended.

We wrestle with questions like: How did God make me to be; What do I do well; and How can I glorify God with my giftedness in my little part of the world? Then there is this one: What do I do that brings joy to me and to those around me?

For me, joy doesn't mean pleasure or fun. For me pleasure is pleasing, fun is exhilarating, but joy is fulfilling. Pleasure and fun are fleeting. Joy instills passion in the heart.

Remember the adage that calls *parents to give their children roots and wings*. Our Father gives us both—roots grounded in his love for us, and wings of talents and abilities that carry joy into lives around us. Joy is love language that lifts smiles onto saddened faces and streams tears from gladdened eyes. Joy rouses the heart's deep passion and stirs wind beneath the wings. That's what makes you fly.

Joy carries love and light to the world.

Isn't that reason enough for God to bring you here?

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REFLECTIONS

February 2, 2020

**For you created my inmost being;
you knit me together in my mother's womb.
I praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully
made;**

Psalms 139:13-14

Search for Self

Body, soul and spirit, God made each of us special. From our first breaths to the very present, we live our days to sustain the life given us. Daily work provides food and shelter for ourselves and those we find in our care. Along the way, relationships form and grow, and together with incidents around us, knit a veil to hide whatever there is about us that we want no one else to see. We even deceive ourselves; and the search for self begins. Who am I?

In the Broadway musical *Les Misérables*, Jean Valjean faces that very question. He agonizes over the lie he lives by pretending to be someone he is not. He questions, “*Who am I? Can I conceal myself evermore? Pretend I’m not the man I was before? And must my name until I die be no more than an alibi? Must I lie? Who am I?*”

Our world is filled with meetings to attend, appointments to make, and commitments to keep. Our plans and projects move us through life allowing little time to wonder if any of them are worthwhile. What compels us then to present ourselves as something we believe will meet the approval of the world, and to disguise things that fall short of worldly expectations? The questions may lead us to try to uncover who we are. We take personality tests, read self-improvement books, engage in intimate conversations with close friends in the search to know ourselves and to understand reasons that drive our own behavior. But why do we need to know?

Jean Valjean found the freeing power of truth as his crescendo concludes, “*How can I ever face my fellow men? How can I ever face myself again? My soul belongs to God, I know. I made that bargain long ago. He gave me hope when hope was gone. He gave me strength to journey on. Who am I? Who am I? I’m Jean Valjean!*”

*For you created my inmost being; /you knit me together in my mother's womb. / I
praise you because I am fearfully and wonderfully made; (Psalms 139:13-14)*

God made you and me to be just as He intended (nothing more nor less.) Comparing how we have *chosen to be* with how *he made us to be* exposes our sinfulness. Realizing our own sins helps us more readily forgive others for theirs and draws us closer to Jesus—

Because we need a Savior.

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REFLECTIONS

January 26, 2020

**I was appointed from eternity,
from the beginning, before the world began.**

Proverbs 8:23

I Am Me Revisited

“To thine own self be true, and it must follow, as the night the day, thou canst not then be false to any man.” This familiar Shakespeare quote from “Hamlet” expresses a truth as powerful for me as any of Solomon’s proverbs. While it expresses simple logic, further reflection uncovers the difficult challenge to first understand the truth about the self God made me to be. The thought drew me back to my first step toward gaining that understanding. It’s described in a *Reflections* titled “I Am Me,” first published August 7, 2005 and revisited here:

Fear shivered through me. Blood rushed from my head and my face fell flush. I was maybe five years-old then, but I remember how a shocking awareness electrified my being. Whatever prompted the moment, it struck reality—*“I am me! no one else, and no one else is me.”* Then a second jolt, *“when I am gone, I am gone!”*

I tried to shove the whole idea into the darkest cellar of my mind, lock it up and not ever let it out again. But the thought often returned. I could never find a lock secure enough to keep that realization from haunting me now and then.

Peace finally came one day—when I am gone, I am *not* gone. It took years to discover that there is a difference between *I am me* and *I am the body I live in*. It took years for me to understand my body is nothing more than the housing that encases who I really am. It serves me during my time in this world much like a space shuttle serves astronauts. It is a vessel that moves me about, provides the tools that God granted me during my time in this place, and it makes me visible to others. But my body does not define who I am.

God made me before the world began. When my ride is over in this life, I will be born into a new a new world just as God planned. In that new world I will have a new home, more secure, total peace, and life for eternity. It is God’s home and He prepared a room for me there.

I am not gifted enough to imagine much beyond life on this earth, but God’s home will exceed everything experienced in this world. It will be in an incomprehensible form. Joy will be complete. There will be no hurt nor pain, nor hunger nor thirst. There will be no war, no terror, no evil—only peace and love.

And I will still be me.

There’s still more to learn since that first step led me to grasp the truth that I am me. I’m still on a journey to understand the truth about the self God made me to be. The story, though, is not about what I’m learning about me. The story is to encourage the journey.

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REFLECTIONS

January 19, 2020

"Be still, and know that I am God;"

Psalms 46:10

Be Still and Know

Memories of my hometown school years include a couple of our classroom clowns. In elementary school, Richie consistently found ways to interrupt our teachers with an endless array of antics that drew attention from the teacher's lesson. His hilarious conduct even found the teachers unable to conceal their laughter while still frantically trying to regain classroom order.

Eugene added equally clownish antics to our middle school classrooms when he moved to town. He had a knack for disrupting class with untimely requests for restroom breaks followed by some comical exit that left us unable to suppress our laughter. Of course, an orderly environment is important for students to concentrate attention on the teacher's lessons. Much to our teachers' chagrin, both Richie and Eugene masterfully diverted ours.

Jesus faced similar issues with his disciples. Remember when Jesus took Peter, James, and John to pray in Gethsemane only to find them sleeping? He asked Peter, "*Could you men not keep watch with me for one hour?*" (Matthew 26:40)

Scripture tells of Jesus' long nights in prayer; so like most of us, the disciples were challenged to maintain their attention. Perhaps one of his long prayer sessions had once prompted one of his disciples to say, "*Lord, teach us to pray,*" (Luke 11:1) In response, Jesus taught them the beautiful prayer we know as The Lord's Prayer. But to pray all night, or to *pray without ceasing* as Paul encouraged the Thessalonians,¹ even Jesus must have engaged with God in something more than a list of requests. Perhaps most of that time Jesus simply directed his attention on being present with the Father.

"Come to me, all you who are weary and burdened, and I will give you rest. Take my yoke upon you and learn from me, for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy and my burden is light." (Matthew 11:28-30) Note that Jesus placed no requirement to utter a word—only, "*Come to me and [connect] with me.*"

Be still, and know that I am God. Sometimes, I find it helpful to enter prayer like a private tutoring session. With no one with me except the Teacher, I speak about anything I want him to hear. Then in the stillness, listen for his wisdom. Sometimes I hear him speak in the quiet of my mind. Sometimes I hear him through scripture, or what someone wrote or said. And sometimes in stillness, I simply feel his presence.

A classical definition of prayer is "lifting mind and heart to God." Prayer is communion with God. Communion forms a bond. A bond establishes oneness.

And Jesus was one with God.

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¹ 1 Thessalonians 5:17 NKJV

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REFLECTIONS

January 12, 2020

**Train up a child in the way he should go,
And when he is old he will not depart from it.**

Proverbs 22:6

Train Up a Child

There's an adage that says, "It has been said that there are two things parents should give their children. The first is roots; and the other is wings" What a heavy responsibility! Parents hold delicate human lives in their hands; and most parents seem imbued with love for each child to do their very best to prepare them with roots and wings to face the life ahead. But as I think of this familiar adage, I find myself as a beneficiary of those roots and wings my parents worked so tirelessly to provide.

Through the years, *Reflections* have often noted the blessing my parents were in my life. But alongside them during those nurturing years stood my grandparents behind them and close friends encircling them. Collectively they taught principles to live by through the stories they told and set examples by the way they lived them out. Looking back, those lessons shaped my perspective of life and instilled the values for how I have chosen to pattern my life.

At no time during those years did I sense any intentionality or duty from any of them to train up a child. They just did it. All of them gave me their attention willingly and freely. Without their attention, it seems unlikely I would have given much attention to them. From Mema reading me Bible stories, or Millie challenging me to competitive card games, or J.P. teaching me hit, throw, and catch a baseball, I learned about life and how to live it.

I watched Mema live what she taught as a Sunday school teacher until she was 90 years old. Millie's games instilled my competitive spirt; and my hand-eye coordination from J.P.'s training proved to open more doors for me than I can count.

Train up a child in the way he should go, the proverb says. But parents don't have to go it alone. Mom and Dad were blessed with a team to help—my grandparents who had trained them well, and a circle of friends who served the Lord and lived principled lives. Perhaps this child of theirs fell short of everyone's hopes; but today he looks back in thanksgiving for all those whose love and training helped give him grow roots and wings to become me.

And it seems now the proverb ascribes responsibility for more children than our own. We are all God's children. And we should feel blessed when God chooses us to help give roots and wings to some of them not our own. He assigned such a team to Mom and Dad.

And I have been blessed by it.

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REFLECTIONS

January 5, 2020

**The Lord is my shepherd;
I shall not want.**

Psalms 23:1 NKJV

The Shepherd

Through the passenger car window, it's impossible to remove my eyes from the kaleidoscope of color passing by. Restful meadows, serene waters, powerful ocean waves, and mountains' majesty reveal God's inspiring presence in every scene. No person in the world can create such magnificence. Strange, though, that no other passenger sees the world passing by as I see it. Even those seated nearby experience it differently. We ride the train of time together, but everyone aboard travels on a track unique to themselves alone.

The Lord is our shepherd, yours and mine. He is a *lamp to [our] feet and a light for [our] path[s]*² leading each of us down our unique tracks of life. We pause with him from time to time to find comfortable places to rest our minds, relax our bodies, and restore our spirits. But our journeys are never without its trials

Many times our lives pass through desolate places—starkly barren places, blanketed with suffocating sand and lifeless seas. And evil in its many forms rears its ugly head—pride seeking to confuse God's provision *through us* with attainments *we claim*; gluttony's insatiable appetite for more, and greed caressing possessions, position, and power. But we have no fear of them. The Shepherd is always there with his protective shields and comforting presence.

Then one day, toward journey's end, we look back at it all to discover that every place along the way prepared us for the place we were going next. And, standing in awe of God's ineffable love poured upon us, we drop to our knees, overflowing with thanksgiving, to see:

The Lord is my shepherd;
I shall not want.

2 He makes me to lie down in green pastures;

He leads me beside the still waters.

3 He restores my soul;

He leads me in the paths of righteousness
For His name's sake.

4 Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear no evil;

For You are with me;
Your rod and Your staff, they comfort me.

5 You prepare a table before me in the presence of my enemies;

You anoint my head with oil;

My cup runs over.

6 Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me

All the days of my life;

And I will dwell in the house of the Lord

Forever. (Psalms 23 NKJV)

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² Psalms 119:105

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