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WHEN THE LIGHTS KEEP TURNING YELLOW 2 Samuel 7:18-29

It is no secret that Laurie and I love Hawaii. We were given a wedding present of being able to have our honeymoon there. Neither of us had ever been there so it was a great adventure. We fell in love with it. The place suits us like no place we had ever been. For years after our honeymoon we longed to go back, but in those first years of our marriage we had very little money and lived right on the edge financially. There was no money for things like a vacation to Hawaii.

On our tenth anniversary our church surprised us. Some friends had organized a gift to us that blew us away. It was enough money to take a week long vacation in Hawaii. One couple in the church owned a condo on Maui and told us we could stay there for a very reasonable price to save a little money. So several months later on Valentine's Day we headed to Hawaii. We left on a bitterly cold day here, got off the plane in Maui on a sunny, 80 degree day. It was incredible. But then we went to our friend's condo. It was not at all what we had envisioned. It was smaller than we expected by a good bit, but the view was something else. It looked right out at a wall of another building. We might as well have been in New York for all we could see. But never mind, we were in beautiful Hawaii and the weather was perfect. Our second day we were out on the beach on another gorgeous day when the breeze began to stiffen. It grew stronger and stronger until it got so bad that we could no longer stay on the beach because we were getting sand blasted. It was painful. By that time the wind was howling. Not exactly what we had in mind. We retreated to a pool area next to a windbreak for shelter. The next day it got worse. Clouds rolled in and it began to rain. For the next few days it was cool, cloudy, rainy and windy. We had a little nice weather, but not much.

We had waited more than 10 years, and what we ended up with was a disappointment. That was a minor disappointment. However, the fact is that life is going to hold some disappointment for all of us. Some will be minor like that one, but there will be disappointments that are so big and painful that they are inexplicable. Today we will see how David dealt with a disappointment he encountered as we look at 2 Samuel 7:18-29.

GOD SAID NO TO DAVID

We saw in the first half of this chapter that David had wanted to build a temple for God in Jerusalem. But God said no to him. In verse 13 he informed him that he

would have a son whom God had chosen to build the temple. God promised David that instead of David giving God a house, God was going to give David a house, meaning a dynasty that would rule forever in God's kingdom.

That was definitely a bad news, good news kind of thing. It was great news that God was going to establish David's house on the throne of Israel forever. But for David it was bad news that he would not be allowed to build the temple. You might not think this was something to be disappointed about but David desperately wanted to do it. It was a big deal to him.

We get a sense for how badly David wanted to build the temple from what he did later. He wanted to make sure this thing happened and he wanted to at least have a hand in it. 1 Chronicles 22:2-5 says, "David gave orders to assemble the foreigners residing in Israel and from among them he appointed stonecutters to prepare dressed stone for building the house of God. He provided a large amount of iron to make nails for the doors of the gateways and for the fittings, and more bronze than could be weighed. He also provided more cedar logs than could be counted, for the Sidonians and Tyrians had brought large numbers of them to David. David said, 'My son, Solomon, is young and inexperienced, and the house to be built for the Lord should be of great magnificence and fame and splendor in the sight of all the nations. Therefore I will make preparations for it.'"

Poor Laurie is cursed with a real dilemma. She has an inherent love of variety and she is married to a man with super boring culinary tastes. Recently she came up with an idea. There are a number of companies now that ship pre-packaged meals to your house. You just put them together and cook them. Toby and Anna have been getting food from one called Hello Fresh. So Laurie signed up for a trial. This will provide for varied meals and less boredom for her. The jury is still out on this idea according to her husband. The point here is we got this box with 3 meals all packaged. All the ingredients are there along with instructions. You just follow the instructions to put it together. It's very simple. That's exactly what David did. He created a Hello Fresh temple shipment. He got together all the materials and all the plans and instructions. All his son would have to do is put it together.

David did this because he wanted so badly to build the temple and make sure it was spectacular. He was so committed to it happening that he did everything short of actually building the thing in order to guarantee that it would happen. You can easily imagine his excitement as he ordered materials and created the plans and instructions for the thing.

What we should not miss in this passage is that David had something he really wanted to do, but God said, “No.” It’s a good idea, your son should do it, but I don’t want you to do it. It was disappointing for David. He was not the only person in the Bible that God said no to.

Sometimes God answers prayers by saying “not yet.” “Wait” can feel like “no” but it is eventually a yes. But there are times when God may say “no” like he did to David. The night before Jesus was executed according to Matthew 26:38 he told his disciples, “My soul is overwhelmed with sorrow to the point of death.” The prospect of what he was about to endure was so awful it was overwhelming. He badly wanted to go to plan B. Verse 39 tells us he prayed, “My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me.” In other words, please, Father, isn’t there some other way? The answer was no, there was no other way.

In 2 Corinthians 12:7 Paul said in order to keep him from becoming conceited because of the incredible revelations he had been given “I was given a thorn in my flesh, a messenger of Satan, to torment me.” We don’t know what that thing was, but we know it was bad. Paul said the thing “tormented” him. Torment is a powerful word. I’ve had a lot of things in my life that have annoyed me, bothered me, hurt me and frustrated me. Not very many have tormented me. Whether the torment was physical or emotional, it was really bad. In verse 8 Paul says, “Three times I pleaded with the Lord to take it away from me.” He didn’t just pray. He didn’t just mention it as a prayer request. He *pleaded* with God to take this thing away. God said his grace was sufficient for Paul. To quote the pirate Barbossa in the Pirates of the Caribbean movie, “means no.” There was a crucial truth that Paul needed to live by that this no answer made clear to him.

Paul wrote the book of Romans around 58 AD likely from Corinth just before he headed to Jerusalem to deliver money from Gentile Christians to the impoverished church in Judea. In Romans 15:23-24 he wrote, “Now that there is no more place for me to work in these regions, and since I have been longing for many years to visit you, I plan to do so when I go to Spain. I hope to see you when passing through.” That was Paul’s plan. God said no. Instead Paul was imprisoned in Judea and spent years in chains. He did get to Rome, but as a prisoner, not a missionary on his way to Spain.

Do you know what that is like? It’s not much fun when we get a “no” answer to something we really want. I have this torn tendon in my right elbow that has given me a lot of pain and limited my activities for a couple of years now. In August, on the recommendation of a doctor, I received a platelet rich plasma injection. He said

it would take 6 to 8 weeks to notice the arm getting better. After a month there was zero improvement, but he insisted all was on track. I prayed, and I know some of you did too, that it would work and no surgery would be required. My prayer was answered with a definitive “no.” This is not life-shattering, just like God’s answer to David was not devastating. But in both cases it most certainly was a letdown.

The thing that made David’s disappointment extra hard is that God didn’t say he was not interested in having a temple built. It was that the temple was a fine idea but he didn’t want David to build it. That would feel to me like he was saying there is something wrong with me. It’s like when that girl that you were really interested in says, “You’re a great guy and I really like you as a friend, but nothing more. But I know you’ll be the perfect guy for some girl.”

DAVID RESPONDED WISELY

He “sat” before the Lord

Verse 18 says after David received this news he “sat before the Lord.” That struck me as a little unusual. What does it mean to sit before the Lord? Did he go into church and take a seat? Unlikely since there was no such thing as church in David’s day. What does this mean?

In 2 Samuel 6:11 we are told that “the ark of the Lord remained at the house of Obed Edom for three months.” The Hebrew word translated “remained” is the same word that is translated “sat” In verse 18. So this could be translated David “remained before the Lord.” I think that is the point of how David responded. There is no sense of David being hurt or upset because God said he was not the right guy for the job. He didn’t go away mad. He stayed in the presence of God and continued to seek him.

This is the first thing we need to do when we are disappointed with whatever God allows in our lives. Our tendency is to sort of decide that maybe we can’t really trust God. Maybe he is not really interested in our good. Either he’s not really there at all or if he is there he doesn’t much care about us. Every time we faced disappointment we are in danger of going our own way to get what we want and give up on God. David refused to go there. Instead he remained before the Lord. To remain before the Lord is to stick with him and keep believing in him. It is essentially not giving up on believing that God is good and is with us. It is continuing to trust that he is seeking our best and is worthy of our love and obedience.

Taking care of our granddaughter Ella provides constant pictures of the need to remain before the Lord. Why is it that kids love stairs so much? She has learned how to crawl up stairs. She's not great at it, but we will let her do it as long as one of us is right there with her to catch her in case she starts to fall. But she doesn't know how to go down stairs yet. Unfortunately she doesn't know that she doesn't know how to do that. She wants to just go bombing down the stairs full speed ahead. We don't let her. This seems unreasonable and unkind to her and she protests loudly when we stop her. A day will come when we happily let her navigate up and down stairs freely, but that day is not today. So we have these days when we say "no" to her and she experiences disappointment. She doesn't like it. Fortunately after a squawk of protest she usually remains before her grandparents. She continues to trust us and love us.

That is where we must live as well. We are all going to experience those times when God says "No" to us and we don't like it. We don't understand how God could be so unkind, so unfeeling. It appears to us that he is withholding something that is obviously good from us. That's when we need to remember Ella, throwing a fit because we won't let her do something that could hurt her. We need to see ourselves being like Ella and instead of making the disastrous choice to abandon God we need to do what David did and sit before the Lord.

He acknowledged God's goodness

David prayed and said, "Who am I, Sovereign Lord, and what is my family, that you have brought me this far?" That is a really crucial question. Who was David? He knew very well that he was the baby of the family, the one that no one paid much attention to. For some reason as I was thinking about this I reflected the old classics movie Home Alone. The central character is 8 year old Kevin, the youngest member of the family. He was kind of viewed as a pest by everyone else in the family. He was young, so nobody paid much attention to him except when he annoyed them. It was so bad that when the family left on their family trip to Europe somehow Kevin was overlooked and left behind. David wasn't as much of a pest as Kevin, but he was the youngest and was used to being overlooked. And in the minds of his family he was maybe a bit annoying. Remember the reaction of his brothers when he showed up to visit them in the front lines while the army was facing off against the Philistines. They clearly were irked at his presence and his impertinence. David remembered being the youngest son that no one gave another thought to, just the kid tending sheep.

David's family was not a noble, influential family. They were a fine family, but there was nothing unique or special about them. They had no claim to power or

fame. Yet God had chosen this unimportant shepherd boy from a regular family that wasn't noteworthy in any way, and had selected him to be the king of Israel. As David said in verse 19 as if that weren't enough now God has promised that his descendent will rule on the throne of God's kingdom forever.

David is acknowledging that he did not deserve any of this. It has all been God being exceedingly kind to him. When we haven't gotten what we want it is very easy to fail at this point. Isn't it interesting how somehow one negative can seem to eclipse a lot of good? Image you have to make a presentation at work and afterward 4 people give glowing reviews and 1 person makes one critical comment, which one do you feel the most? It's the critical one.

The same thing happens with negative events in our lives. We can have a veritable parade of blessings, of good things that God has showered on us, but we focus on the one or two negative things that happen and let them become the lens through which we view all of life.

When I step back and look objectively at life I can see how I tend to seize on the negatives. For instance, I have a tendency to be sure that life sort of is out to get me. When the doctor proposed that platelet injection for my arm he said for torn elbow tendons it has a 93% success rate. Look who is in the 7%. After the surgery they gave me a supposedly powerful pain killer to manage the pain. Not only was it utterly ineffective, it also caused me to be wired and unable to sleep. The doctor's assistant told me it doesn't work for a small percentage of people, and causes an even smaller percentage to be unable to sleep. A week after the surgery my arm, which had been improving greatly, suddenly began swelling, got red, developed a rash and started itching. The doctor took one look and said it was an allergic reaction to the iodine based antiseptic they use to prepare your skin for surgery. Stop me if you've heard this before, but it turns out a very small percentage of people are allergic to it. I found myself saying, why do these things always happen to me?

I am known in my family as Mr. Yellow Light. It is as though when I am driving merely my approach to an intersection is all that is required to trigger the traffic signal to turn yellow before I get there. After this happens several times in a row I typically say, "This is my life. It always happens to me. I have the yellow light curse on me." But I objectively have to admit that there have been occasions when I have amazingly watched one traffic signal after another turn green not long before I get there. Oddly on those occasions I don't say, "This is my life. This always happens to me. I have the green light blessing on me."

I could be different than most people, I suppose. But as I listen to what others say I see the same tendency in them. There is something in human nature that tends to seize upon and magnify the negative. Those who do not do this are unusual, perhaps even rare.

As he was remaining in God's presence David wasn't whining about what God wouldn't let him do. Instead he focused on the astounding blessings and grace that God had poured out on him. Here is what I know. Whatever else may happen to me, I have been given innumerable precious blessings. I had parents who loved me and raised me in the knowledge of God. I had a brother who has always been a great friend. I have a wife who I honestly believe is the greatest spouse in the history of the human race. Out of billions of humans who have ever lived, somehow God chose to give her to me, and I absolutely do not deserve her. I have wonderful, delightful children. My children have wonderful delightful spouses. We have a precious, healthy granddaughter. I live in the United States of America. I do not see myself as rich, but I have never known what it means to not have enough food to eat and clothes to wear. More importantly, I am a child of God by his grace. I have the hope of eternal life and I am loved by him. My life has meaning. I have this church, incredible friends who provide immeasurable support and joy. I have a house to live in. I do not have a terrible disease. I could go on endlessly listing blessings that are phenomenal.

How strange it is that let one serious disappointment come along and somehow it eclipses the vast storehouse of blessings that God has given me even though I absolutely do not deserve them. David did the wise thing. He accepted the disappointment, then rather than majoring in it, he put the emphasis in his thinking and his praise on the great good he had received from God.

He trusted in God's sovereignty

There is something that jumps out when we read this section. As David was praying the word "sovereign" appears repeatedly. The expression "Sovereign Lord" is used 4 times in the first 5 verses. It shows up twice more down in verses 28-29. In addition David referred to God as "Lord Almighty" in verses 26-27. In verse 22 David said, "There is no one like you, and there is no God but you." Do you detect a theme? If you don't you're not paying attention. David stressed over and over in his prayer that God is sovereign, he is Lord, there is no one like him, he is the only real God.

This is who the Bible insists our God is. Isaiah 46:9-10 says, “I am God and there is no other. I am God and there is none like me. I make known the end from the beginning, from ancient times, what is still to come. I say my purpose will stand, and I will do all that I please.” Psalm 115:3 says, “Our God is in heaven, he does whatever he pleases.” Ephesians 1:11 says he works “all things according to the counsel of his will.” Proverbs 16:9 says, “The heart of man plans his way, but the Lord establishes his steps.”

God does whatever he pleases. In case you are not aware of it, I will point out that is not true of us. I don’t do whatever I please. I would like to change a few things about what is happening in our country and about whoever is going to be running the show after this election. But I can’t do whatever I please. I was driving home after a worship service a few Sunday's ago and there was stop and go traffic on the freeway. I wanted to move all those cars out of my way. That would have pleased me. Instead I had to slowly crawl my way up the freeway because I don’t have the ability to do whatever I please. There are so many things that would have gone differently in my life if I could do whatever I please.

It is ultimately impossible for us to comprehend a being that can do whatever he pleases. Our whole being, our way of thinking is bound by limits, and we cannot even envision what it must be like to have such unrestrained power that you can do whatever you choose. But that is who God is.

That verse in Ephesians is astounding. It says God works all things after the counsel of his will. It does not say he works some things, or a lot of things or even most things. It says he works everything after the counsel for of his will. Jeanne Guyon, the 17th century writer, said, “You must utterly believe that the circumstances of your life, that is, every minute of your life...anything, yes everything that happens have all come to you by His will and by his permission. You must utterly believe that everything that has happened to you is from God and is exactly what you need.”

That thought raises a lot of questions for me, for at times things happen to people that are so awful and inexplicable that we cannot see how God could have anything to do with it. And yet, we remember the story of Job. His misfortune was devastating beyond my ability to imagine. His family was wiped out. I can’t even consider how grievous that loss was. Job’s response in Job 1:21 was “The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away.” He saw God as ruling and present both in the giving and the taking away of the good things in his life.

How can this be? This is impossible for us to understand. It is literally impossible for us, because we are finite and God is infinite. In his book, *The Doctrine of God*, Herman Bavinck wrote, “The most vital element in the study of theology is a radical commitment to mystery.”

Recently after our 10 month old granddaughter, Ella, had been at our house I was taking her back to her mommy and daddy. She has to sit in a car seat in the back, facing backward. So I try to keep talking to her to let her know she’s not all alone. I had been wrestling with a sermon I was working on, so on this one occasion I talked it over with her. Periodically she would twist around to try to see what I was doing up in the front seat. As I talked her responses were along the lines of “na, na, da, da, da, ba, ba.” Here is the problem. She cannot understand what I am doing when I am driving, nor what I am saying. She certainly cannot comprehend my sermon issues. It is not possible for her. But that would be more possible for her to comprehend than for us to grasp all that God is doing.

Remember Paul’s desire to go to Rome. He got there as a prisoner, unable to continue his ministry and spread the gospel to Spain. There is a significant statement in *Philippians 1:16*. While discussing how God was using him in his situation Paul wrote, “I am put here for the defense of the gospel.” Who put him there for the defense of the gospel? Did he mean the Roman authorities put him there so he could tell more people about Jesus and defend the gospel? No, he meant God put him there. God was sovereign, God was ruling in his seemingly terrible situation!

Trusting in God’s sovereignty is what enables us to be at peace in every circumstance. No matter what happens we can bow and say, “If this is your will for me, Lord, then I accept it and seek to honor you.” Like Paul we can assume that God wants to use us in the situation to do something that will glorify him.

This is a crucial truth as we look forward to Election Day on Tuesday. I have been dismayed as I have seen believers in Jesus going ballistic over one candidate or another, treating this as though it is bigger than life or death, as though all of eternity hangs in the balance. It is fine to have personal political opinions as we all do, but our hope is not in a candidate. Our hope and our peace stem from one truth, God works all things, including this election, after the counsel of his will.

He trusted in God’s promise

Finally observe that David seized on the promise that God had given him about his descendants ruling in his kingdom forever. In verse 28 he said, “You have

promised good things to your servant.” He didn’t get what he wanted or what he proposed, but he focused on the great promise that God had given him.

But think about that promise. It's fulfillment would all happen after David was dead. Solomon would build the temple after David was gone. His descendants would rule long after that. And his ultimate descendant Messiah is yet to establish that everlasting kingdom.

David looked beyond just his years on this earth and saw the much bigger picture. And that is what we must do when we experience disappointment. It is frustrating when God says no to us. But he has given us promises that are far more precious than anything we could have in this life. Like David, we must never forget the immeasurably great value of the eternal promises that God has given to us.

CONCLUSION

Disappointment is a reality for all of us. Before I underwent surgery for my elbow I faced a dismaying reality. The treatment that I already received, the platelet injection, has a 93% success rate. It didn’t work for me. The surgery they performed has an 88% success rate. Uh oh. What if this doesn’t work? At this point I don’t know if it will. It is entirely possible that it will not and there will be no more options for me but to live with a painful and only marginally useful right arm. That would be very disappointing. How should I respond?

ADMIT THE DISAPPOINTMENT

It does no good to pretend everything is great and I don’t feel the pain of a disappointment. We need to start with being honest. If we do not we plant seeds of resentment toward God in our own souls.

REMAIN WITH OUR SOVEREIGN GOD

Continue to trust him. Recognize that he is both sovereign and good. Believe that his grace is indeed sufficient for us. Know that this is no surprise to him, something out of his control. Submit to his sovereign wisdom and goodness.

REMEMBER THE GOOD

Hey, what if my right arm never gets better? God still loves me, I still have hope, I can still do my job, my wife still loves me, my life is full of blessing.

SEE THE ETERNAL PICTURE

The few years that I will have to live with this disappointment to not compare with the eternal weight of glory that is ahead of me. I must never forget this.