

American Decency Association

PO Box 202, Fremont, MI 49412 231-924-4050 www.americandecency.org

Encouraging Christians to guard their hearts

November 2017

In Praise of Heavy Providences

By: Mike Pohlman



Today, I'm struck anew with how contrary to the world is the Christian life. I'm thinking specifically about how the world will almost without fail define the best way forward in life as the way of ease. That is, the path of least resistance is, by definition, the right path to choose.

This is not so in God's economy. The Bible is full of reminders about how, in the call of God, things will be difficult rather than easy, complex rather than simple, strenuous rather than leisurely. Indeed, it's for good reasons that the Bible often calls us to endure and persevere—conditions irrelevant for times of ease.

We get a powerful picture of why God orchestrates things this way when we remember Moses' words of merciful warning to Israel in Deuteronomy 8:11–19:

Take care lest you forget the LORD your God by not keeping his commandments and his rules and his statutes, which I command you today, lest, when you have eaten and are full and have built good houses and live in them, and when your herds and flocks multiply and your silver and gold is multiplied and all that you have is multiplied, then your heart be lifted up, and you forget the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, out of the house of slavery, who led you through the great and terrifying wilderness, with its fiery serpents and scorpions and thirsty ground where there was no water; who brought you water out of the flinty rock, who fed you in the wilderness with manna that your fathers did not know, that he might humble you and test you, to do you good in the end. Beware lest

you say in your heart, "My power and the might of my hand have gotten me this wealth." You shall remember the LORD your God, for it is he who gives you power to get wealth, that he may confirm his covenant that he swore to your fathers, as it is this day. And if you forget the LORD your God and go after other gods and serve them and worship them, I solemnly warn you today that you shall surely perish.

Beware times of ease, Moses warns, for it is uniquely then that we are tempted to forget God (notice how Moses says nothing of the Israelites forgetting God in the "great and terrifying wilderness"). And the result of forgetting God is to "surely perish." Indeed, the stakes could not be higher.

So it is that God brings into our lives "heavy providences" as a means of nurturing in us "God remembrance." I call these circumstances "providences" because it's God who brings them. I call them "heavy" because,

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well, that's what they are—circumstances that are not easy and call for a deep dependence on God for His strength to endure. It is fitting that God would operate this way. Knowing that this most exalts His holy character and results in our eternal good, God will have His people glory (that is, depend) only on Him.

Calling All Pilgrims

One such heavy providence came into my life approximately two years ago when my four school-age children and I said goodbye to their mother and my wife of sixteen years as her nearly five-year battle with breast cancer came to an end. Just after 7 p.m. on February 2, 2014, Julia Pohlman received the “outcome of [her] faith, the salvation of [her soul]” (1 Peter 1:9).

Not only in the final moments of Julia's earthly life but throughout her cancer fight, we were reminded of how fleeting is our life on earth. Through surgeries, CT scans, PET scans, MRIs, blood draws, and near-weekly chemotherapy treatments, we were reminded that this world is not our home. And when I

stood at the graveside of my beloved, pleading with the Father of mercies and the God of all comfort to help our grieving family, never has heaven felt so real.

Cancer, perhaps unlike anything else, has a way of focusing your attention on eternal realities. And this, of course, is good. We need to be mercifully weaned from this world so that we can see something of the glory to be revealed.

At Ease In America

I share this story because I believe the American church desperately needs this perspective on life—the perspective captured in the profoundly simple hymn that sings, “This world is not my home, I'm just a passing through.” But by and large, the evangelical church in America sings, “This world is my home and here I'm putting down roots!” The words of the prophet Amos are a solemn warning to us today:

Woe to those who are at ease in Zion. . . . Woe to those who lie on beds of ivory and stretch themselves out on their couch-

es, and eat lambs from the flock and calves from the midst of the stall, who sing idle songs to the sound of the harp . . . who drink wine in bowls and anoint themselves with the finest oils, but are not grieved over the ruin of Joseph! (Amos 6:1, 4–6)

What the church needs and, therefore, what the world needs are Christians who identify as pilgrims, feel like sojourners, and exist as exiles. When people look at us, do they see a people gloriously uneasy in this world because we're longing for another?

The Pursuit Of God

Of course, we long for the city of God because we long for God. He is our great pursuit. Knowing this helps this sojourner rejoice in heavy providences, for God is using them to nurture in me a worshipful remembrance of Him—the One in whose presence is fullness of joy and pleasures forevermore (Ps. 16:11).

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