

Adventuring with God

with Jeanne Hedrick

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Surprises and Rewards

Last month we talked about Abraham, and God's promise to him in Genesis 15—that He would be his shield and his very great reward. This month I want to continue reflecting on this promise to see how it impacts our everyday lives as Abraham's descendants.

A.W. Tozer, in his book *The Pursuit of God*, described our reward this way: "The man who has God for his treasure has all things in One. Many ordinary treasures may be denied him, or if he is allowed to have them, the enjoyment of them will be so tempered that they will never be necessary to his happiness. Or if he must see them go, one after one, he will scarcely feel a sense of loss, for having the Source of all things he has in One all satisfaction, all pleasure, all delight."

The world has its own kind of pleasures and delights, and they are enjoyable. They tickle our senses and invite us to seek more and more of them. But the truth is, they promise far more than they can really deliver. Anyone who has been able to sample them extensively comes to a place, like Solomon did, of disillusionment and dissatisfaction.

"I denied myself nothing my eyes desired; I refused my heart no pleasure.

My heart took delight in all my work, and this was the reward for all my labor. Yet when I surveyed all that my hands had done and what I had toiled to achieve, everything was meaningless, a chasing after the wind; nothing was gained under the sun."

(Ecclesiastes 2:10-11)

The opposite is true with God. The longer we interact with Him and the better we know Him, the more He captivates us. While the world's attractions grow tiresome and lose their appeal over time, in God's presence "*is fullness of joy; at [His] right hand there are pleasures for evermore*" (Psalm 16:11).

Such pleasures aren't automatic, however. Sometimes we only come to know them and appreciate them after a long time of spiritual drought accompanied by discouragement and doubt. Then unexpectedly He comes ... and reassures us that He has been with us all the time. One moment in His presence makes up for all the time we struggled.

At other times, His rewards are brought into sharp focus by something sudden and dramatic. This month, for instance, I've faced a most unwelcome surprise. I couldn't believe what the radiologist was saying: "We need to do a biopsy, Mrs. Hedrick, to determine what that suspicious place on the ultrasound is." Nothing in my family history or medical record prepared me for this. When I walked in for my "routine" mammogram, I expected the same good news I always get. (Forty some years of good news can lull you into a false sense of security!) I was so sure I'd never face the prospect of cancer that I let almost three years go by without even bothering to be checked.

But suddenly I am assaulted with the unthinkable and the unimaginable. And in a flash I realize that my human resources aren't sufficient for this challenge. I need the Rock that is higher than I. What had seemed very important a few weeks ago—the stock market, the best grills to buy, and whether to book my vacation in June or July this year—now pale beside my health concerns. And I am brought to a fresh revelation of the incredible wealth I enjoy in having God as my "shield and very great reward."

"I am always with you; you hold me by my right hand. You guide me with your counsel and afterward you will take me into glory.

Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you.

My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever."

(Psalm 73:23-26)

The day-to-day impact of this knowledge is huge, if I am astute enough to take note of it as the psalmist did. Not only is God with me at all times—He holds my hand. This kind of close intimacy is something we see between parents and their children. Holding a child's hand shows him how safe he is with us. By taking his hand, we tell him that we'll take responsibility for his welfare. He doesn't have to worry about defending himself against all the bullies of the world. Anyone or anything that tries to harm him will have to contend with us, someone stronger and wiser than he is.

Facing the biggest trial of my life so far, I am suddenly reminded of the verse I learned as a child: *"Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid"* (John 14:27). And I realize that I *do* have His peace ... in spite of all my questions and concerns. It's a peace that truly transcends all human understanding (Philippians 4:7).

Paul wrote to the Corinthian believers that he had been through incredible hardships and experienced great suffering in the

province of Asia: *"We were under great pressure, far beyond our ability to endure."* Yet Paul knew something that made his hardships a little more bearable—God had allowed them for His good purpose: *"This happened that we might not rely on ourselves but on God"* (2 Corinthians 1:8-9).

When life's unwelcome surprises assault us, it's normal to feel threatened and rattled for a time. But eventually we must remember that *God is greater* than anything in the world we face. Another well-known psalm reassures: *"God is our refuge and strength, an ever-present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam and the mountains quake with their surging"* (Psalm 46:1-3).

Our circumstances may look threatening. And because of that, we may feel very small and helpless indeed. But because of our very great reward, God's presence, we have the assurance we'll not be overwhelmed. After all, He holds our hand! Don't wait for an unwelcome surprise or dry time to turn your attention to your faithful Father. Let His steadfast love be your shield and reward today. Whatever pleasures the world may have to offer, I can guarantee ... they can't compare with Him!

Like a river glorious is God's perfect peace,
Over all victorious in its bright increase;
Perfect, yet it floweth fuller every day,
Perfect, yet it groweth deeper all the way.

*Stayed upon Jehovah, hearts are fully blest;
Finding as He promised perfect peace and rest.*

Hidden in the hollow of His blessed hand,
Never foe can follow, never traitor stand;
Not a surge of worry, not a shade of care,
Not a blast of hurry touch the spirit there.

Ev'ry joy or trial falleth from above,
Traced upon our dial by the sun of love;
We may trust Him fully, all for us to do.
They who trust Him wholly find Him wholly true.

(Frances Ridley Havergal, 1836-1879)