

Adventuring with God

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Youthful Presumptions

In 1964 Bob Dylan wrote a song called “My Back Pages.” His humorous look at the presumptions of those who haven’t lived long enough to know that life is more often gray than black and white is brilliantly insightful. He ends each stanza of the song with the statement: *“Ah, but I was so much older then; I’m younger than that now.”*

At some point in our lives, the hard and fast assumptions begin to blur as we are forced to acknowledge life’s unexplained mysteries, apparent contradictions, and curve-ball experiences. As much as we’d like to keep our beliefs categorized into neat little packages that help us understand the past and predict the future, at some point they begin to break down under the strain of *real life*. What’s easy to affirm when you’re at the prime of life isn’t so easy to defend when things begin to go south.

Job is the prime biblical example of this. How could such awful things happen to such a faithful follower of God? As his friends came and tried to offer their observations and possible reasons for the calamities, it soon became clear that they were, in Job’s words, “miserable comforters.” None could accurately say why events unfolded as they did.

This should serve as a warning to us. Even Christians—who have all the wisdom of the Bible at their fingertips and the inspiration of the Holy Spirit to help illumine it for them—can encounter situations where things just don’t line up with our theological frameworks and spiritual assumptions. Our precious children can suddenly develop a life-threatening illness or face a lifelong disability, and we wonder why a good God would subject them to such difficulty. Good friends

who know and love the Lord suddenly announce they have decided to go their separate ways, and we have to rethink divorce. Financial setbacks, betrayals, premature deaths, extended periods of pain and suffering ... all test our understanding of how things should work in a Christian’s life.

Sometimes we have to respond as Ezekiel did: *“O Sovereign Lord, you alone know”* (37:3). In other words, *I can’t figure it out, but what has happened is not a mystery to You*. At such times, we’re brought to a place where we have no choice but to put our trust in *Him*, not in what we’ve zealously believed about Him and His ways up to that point.

I believe God our Father has designed life to be this way for a simple reason: to keep us humble and dependent upon Him. He doesn’t want us to become like the Pharisees, who spent their time dissecting His word in order to construct elaborate theological frameworks that dogmatically affirmed certain truths about God and His ways. They used their “black and white” knowledge to judge others and to reassure themselves how well they were doing spiritually.

Yes, there are truths we can know about God from His word, and there are prescribed patterns of behavior for those who follow Jesus Christ. These universal truths should be tenaciously held and taught to succeeding generations of believers. But these truths that are held in self-righteous presumption in our youth become so much more attractive when they’re expressed out of the maturity of life experience, when we have allowed the Holy Spirit to soften our hearts and temper our beliefs with a good dose of humility.

Although I know many things about God and His kingdom with certainty, I also know that my knowledge isn't complete yet. As Paul said, *"We see but a poor reflection as in a mirror. ... Now I know in part"* (1 Corinthians 13:12). One day I will "know fully, even as I am fully known," but that glorious day won't come until I see Him face to face.

"But until then" as the old hymn goes, "my heart will go on singing, until then with joy I'll carry on." There may be many seemingly unanswered prayers to ponder over and many inexplicable circumstances that I can't figure out, but my faith has found a resting place—not in what I know *about* Him, but in the Lord himself. I must learn how to enjoy the journey ... of going from older to younger, from being boldly certain of everything to only holding a few simple facts as unchanging truth from the mouth of God.

When I was a young Christian, I was confident that I would continue to grow in my knowledge of Him to the

point where I would be able to "fathom all mysteries and all knowledge"—but I know better now. I guess it's in our nature to want to build our elaborate house of cards, to see if we can stack our pet ideas into an impressive framework to be admired by others. The problem is (as Mark Rutland pointed out), just about the time we get all our cards in place and we stand back to admire what we've constructed, the Spirit of God comes along and blows on it, and down it comes.

He doesn't do it to be mean; He does it to teach us how futile it is to trust in anything other than himself—the unchanging and all-powerful God of all. More than once I've had my theological "house of cards" blown down. At first I found it perplexing and disturbing, but now I can see my Father's hand behind it all, beckoning me to himself and inviting me to let Him be God and leave life's greatest mysteries where they belong: in His hands.

Farther Along (old folk song)

Tempted and tried, we're oft made to wonder why it should be thus all the day long;
While there are others living about us, never molested, though in the wrong.

*Farther along we'll know more about it; farther along we'll understand why.
Cheer up, my brother, live in the sunshine. We'll understand it all by and by.*

Often when death has taken our loved ones, leaving our home so lone and so drear,
Then do we wonder why others prosper, living so wicked year after year.

"Faithful till death," said our loving Master. Short is our time to labor and wait;
Then will our toiling seem to be nothing, when we sweep through the heavenly gate.

Soon we will see our dear, loving Savior, hear the last trumpet sound through the sky;
Then we will meet those gone on before us; then we shall know and understand why.

(Author of lyrics unknown, arranged by Barney Warren, 1911)