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Preschool

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“Now no chastening seems to be joyful for the present, but painful; nevertheless, afterwards it yields the peace-able fruit of righteousness to those who have been trained by it” (Hebrews 12:11).

It is sometimes through hardship that God gets our attention and prepares us to learn from Him. Not everyone has to experience hardship in order to become receptive to God, but many of us do. Many of us have to be “trained” by God’s chastening. And while this is not “joyful for the present,” it later “yields the peaceable fruit of righteousness,” as the Hebrew writer said.

Often it is our attitudes that need adjusting before God’s word can have much influence on us. If we’re accustomed to thinking in worldly terms, we’re simply not open to God’s perspective. We have to learn the hard way that we’ve not been taking enough of reality into consideration. Our minds have to be pried open by trials and tribulations, and sometimes we’re not receptive even then.

One of our most hindering attitudes is the insistence that we already know what we need to know. We’re not teachable because we see no need to be taught. Rather than be taught, we’d rather be the ones doing the teaching, and we expend the biggest portion of our energy trying to get the world around us to adjust itself to our thinking. We have no time to listen, as busy as we are.

And so, through the Psalmist, God says to us: “Be still, and know that I am God” (Psalm 46:10). We won’t have the proper reverence for God until we’ve gotten still, and stillness in God’s school may not be something we’re willing to accept. We may have to be forced to be still by the “preschool” of pain and suffering.

But if we have trouble being still enough to hear God, we also have trouble being quiet. Rather than shutting our mouths and listening, we talk and talk and talk: informing God what we’d like to have done, explaining to Him the uniqueness of our situation, and sometimes even calling into question His management of the universe. Is it any wonder we can’t hear the truth? Is it any wonder God has to confine us to a corner and clamp His loving hand over our mouths, until we stop squirming and listen?

“When God gets us alone through suffering, heartbreak, temptation, disappointment, sickness, or by thwarted desires, a broken friendship, or a new friendship— when He gets us absolutely alone, and we are totally speechless, unable to ask even one question, then He begins to teach us” (Oswald Chambers).

Big God, Little Me

Russ Bowman

In the book of **Job**, one of the recurring topics of discussion between Job and his friends involves the power and majesty of God. Granted, the grandeur of God is applied to the discussion of suffering in a variety of ways, yet each of these men at some point in their affirmations base their conclusions upon the very being of God. And more often than not, their descriptions of God far transcend the pithy, quasi-devotional songs that we see more and more of in our modern worship. “...to God I would commit my cause – Who does great things and unsearchable, marvelous things without number...” (Eliphaz, **Job 5.8-9**). “God is wise in heart and mighty in strength...He removes the mountains...He shakes the

earth out of its place and its pillars tremble; He commands the sun and it does not rise; He seals off the stars; He alone spreads out the heavens and treads on the waves of the sea...He does great things past finding out, yes wonders without number..." (Job, **Job 9.4-10**). *"Can you search out the deep things of God? Can you find out the limits of the Almighty? They are higher than heaven – what can you do? Deeper than Sheol – what can you know? Their measure is longer than the earth and broader than the sea."* (Zophar, **Job 11.7-9**). *"Dominion and fear belong to Him; He makes peace in His high places. Is there any number to His armies? Upon whom does His light not rise?"* (Bildad, **Job 25.2-3**). But perhaps Job best summarizes this grand perception of God when he concludes, *"Indeed these are the mere edges of His ways, and how small a whisper we hear of Him! But the thunder of His power, who can understand?"* (**Job 26.14**).

These men served a "big God." Perhaps their understanding was due in part to their lifestyle, which was far more connected to the powers and mysteries of the natural world than ours. They did not inhabit grand edifices in massive cities, illuminated unceasingly by artificial light. They watched the sunrise and sunset and gazed upon the brilliance of starry nights. They watched storms traverse the landscape and stood upon the shores of the ocean and saw all of the power and mystery of "nature", understanding that God was controlling it all. Any force greater than the earthquake or the thunderstorm or the ocean waves is a fairly noteworthy force. Such observations prompted David to write these words, *"When I consider Your heavens, the work of Your fingers, the moon and the stars, which You have ordained, what is man that You are mindful of him?"* (**Ps.8.3-4**). While we have tended to insulate ourselves from the natural world due to our technology, we nonetheless are reminded occasionally of the power of the world around us, and we are made to feel small. I watched and listened as hurricane Ike devastated the Texas coast a few years ago, and I felt completely helpless in the face of such power. We've seen thousands of people shivering in the wake of ice storms, or stacking sandbags in the face of flood waters and we are repeatedly rendered impotent to alter the forces of nature. Yet God stopped storms, prompted earthquakes, halted the sun, and created the universe with the mere utterance of His voice. That makes Him pretty big, and reminds me that I'm pretty little.

Faith (trust in God) and faithfulness (consistent devotion to His service) are absolutely impossible in the absence of a "big God." Until we appreciate Him with His power and His wisdom and His sovereignty and His majesty, we will not truly trust Him nor consistently honor Him with our lives. However, when we begin to acknowledge Him in all of His glory, and thus realize how feeble we are and thus how dependent we are, then and only then will the seed of real faith be planted. His power and wisdom and majesty not only arrest us with some measure of awe, but they attract us because we are made in His image and offered fellowship with Him.

What a truly humbling consideration, that a Being of such grandeur and knowledge and honor would condescend to live as a man and die on a cross simply so that He could offer association to weak and powerless men! *"Behold what manner of love...!"* (**1 Jn.3.1**).

And yet, how pitiful that we are so consumed with inferior pursuits. I live in a small town. I see people every day trying so hard to be so important in such an unimportant place. People are sacrificing their souls to be numbered among the movers and shakers in a town that most of the world couldn't find on a map if their life depended on it. And all of the while, there behind the infinite universe, a God reigns Who is the most awe-inspiring and impressive Being in existence. And He has not only created me and the world around me, but He sustains me and has sacrificed for me and continues to provide for me all with the hope in His heart that I would aim to be associated with Him. Who cares if anyone in Lumberton, Texas knows me when I can be known by and associated with God Almighty! What honor or ambition can surpass the honor bestowed by God upon His people when He claims them as His own? What can any man offer me that is greater than eternal life in a glorious realm where I am privileged to reign with the King Himself?

"From where then does wisdom come?...God understands its way, and He knows its place. For He looks to the ends of the earth, and sees under the whole heavens, to establish a weight for the wind, and apportion the waters by measure. When He made a law for the rain, and a path for the thunderbolt, then He saw wisdom and declared it; He prepared it, indeed He searched it out. And to man He said, Behold the fear of the Lord, that is wisdom" (**Job 28.20f**).

He is truly a big God. And I am so very little.