



Random Thoughts, Vol. 1

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This is a new idea for a newsletter article and I have no idea if it is a good one or not. This could be a total disaster in the making, but here goes.

During the course of my studies, reading, interaction with people, or quiet time with God, I will often find myself struck by things that I think I should write down. Jonathan Edwards used to do this, and he called his collection *Miscellanies*. I am certainly no Edwards, but I have decided to do the same and see what profit it might be to either me or others. Perhaps it will be neither.

I will collect my random musings and share them here with you. I expect that sometimes these will be theological in nature, sometimes humorous, sometimes thought provoking, but hopefully, always worth your time. They will be of varying length, and when I collect enough to supply a column, I will publish them.

You will notice that it is titled "Random Thoughts, Volume 1." Obviously I am hoping that I will not run out of thoughts worth sharing in only one volume! Perhaps that is presumptuous. We'll see. Here we go:

Lincoln and Darwin

I found out yesterday that Charles Darwin and Abraham Lincoln were born on the same day in the same year, February 12, 1809. Born on two different continents on the same day were two men who would influence generations to come in profoundly different ways.

Darwin would publish *On The Origin Of Species* in 1859 which would provide a justification for racism. The subtitle of the book is "*The Preservation of Favoured Races In The Struggle For Life.*" Darwin's racist slant would become evident years later in his book *The Descent of Man*, where he would refer to men with dark

skin as "degraded" and stated he would rather descend from a monkey than such a "savage."

Ironically, among intellectuals and educators and even those who hold the levers of power in our Capitol, Darwin is remembered with greater fervency and admiration.

I can't help but wonder, if Darwin's ideas had been as entrenched in the 1860s as they are today, could America ever have abolished slavery? Is it possible that our inability to remove the blight of abortion from our land is due in part to the fact that Darwinism is so entrenched as a worldview?

Ironic that Lincoln and Darwin share a birthday. They certainly don't share the same legacy!

Leading vs. Following Your Heart

We have all heard the saying, "Just follow your heart." I was thinking the other day of how *backwards* that advice is. Following your heart is a horrible idea! The Bible says that the heart is deceitful above all things and desperately wicked (**Jeremiah 17:9-10**) and is so beyond our ability to know or comprehend. Why would I want to follow that?

Instead, we should choose to **lead** our hearts, not **follow** our hearts. If I follow my heart, it will deceive me. Instead, just as we can choose what to think about, we can and must direct and control our hearts with our minds. We must make our heart our slave and not our master.

With my mind, I understand truth. With my mind, I know what is right and what is true. Therefore, we should seek not to be driven by our emotions, our whims, our predilections, but to instead direct our hearts to what is right. Lead, don't follow your heart.

Death and Dying

We are all going to die, so I think often of death and the fact that it is coming **very** quickly. I was thinking the other day that I need to resolve to die well. That's right, die well.

Provided I am not taken quickly in my sleep or a tragic accident, I pray that God will grant me the grace to die well. I am not afraid of death (I am a bit uncertain about the process since I have never done it before). When I die (not if, but when), I want to die well.

John Bunyan once wrote, "*Consider thou must die but once. I mean- but once as to this world; for if thou, when thou goest hence, doest not die well, thou canst not come back again and die better.*"

We don't get any "do-overs." There are no mulligans. If I waste my dying and do not do it to the glory of God in a way that gives testimony to the certainty of my salvation, my hope of Heaven, and the grace of Christ, I will have lost my only opportunity to die in a way that gives Christ glory and points to Him as the One in Whose death, death died. I don't get a second chance. I will never die again.

So, provided the Lord determines to take me over the course of some time and not instantly, then I pray that He would grant me the grace to testify to Him and die well.

Time Passes Quickly

It is a modern-day proverb that the older you get, the faster time flies. As a child, I always wondered why my grandparents would say that so often. I could never imagine that it was true.

As a child, it always seemed that Christmas, birthdays, and summer break or Halloween could never come fast enough. A week seemed like an eternity. Now the weeks fly by so fast, I can hardly keep up. Now I understand what my grandparents were talking about. It does certainly seem true that the older I get, the faster the years seem to pile up.

I heard Alistair Begg (Truth For Life) in a sermon from the book of Ecclesiastes say something that I thought was probably a good explanation for why this seems to be the case.

When you are 4 and you are waiting for your 5th birthday, it seems that the year passes and it takes a long time. When you are 50, the birthdays seem to come one after another with increasing frequency. Why? Consider

this: between your 4th and 5th birthdays, a full 20% of your life has passed. Between your 50th and 51st birthdays, only 2% of your life has passed. When you have only been alive 5 years, a year of your life is a fifth of it. That year, in context of your entire existence, is a long time.

But when you are 50, a year is only 2% of your life. That two percent passes quickly. In the context of your entire existence, 2% is not much at all.

Perhaps there is something in our makeup (by God's design) which assesses time (or at least how we perceive it) in relation to the length of our total life lived.

Why do the years come and go with increasing frequency the longer we live? Perhaps because the longer we live, the less a year of our total life is. It therefore **seems**, from the perspective of our days, to be very little time at all. Just a thought.

God's Call to Preach

I got an email from a gentleman in Hickory, North Carolina, who stumbled across our church website and started reading the articles that we post there. He asked the following:

Hello Brother

I also am a preacher of the Word and former pastor. Although I do not have the heart to pastor now; I have a strong desire to evangelism.

This brings me to my question for you. I have been reading your excerpts concerning "Hearing God's Voice". I am an avid reader of Spurgeon and feel blessed by his writings and sermons. This said; and I agree with both Spurgeon and Edwards; and I agree with both Spurgeon and Edwards; can you help with this question? How can we know if God has truly called us to preach? Please know I am not being sarcastic in any way, but [have] a sincere concern of knowing God's will.

Blessings,

James

Here is my response:

James. . .

That is a very good question and the issue of "the call" is not an easy one. I have never thought of writing on this subject at any length and have not developed my thoughts beyond a brief outline of points which I will offer to you here.

First, I think there has to be a desire for the office (1 Timothy 3:1). If a man has no desire in his spirit to preach, he should not attempt to or think he is called to it. There should be a fire in the belly, a "Woe is me if I preach not" type attitude.

Beyond that, it must also come down to a giftedness. A man, and those around him must be able to discern in his own heart a giftedness to preach and teach. This goes beyond mere articulateness or charisma in the pulpit. The question is, does God speak through that person when he preaches? Is there fruit from his preaching? Does the Spirit of God use him to teach others? Connected to this question, of course, is the assumption that we are talking about biblical preaching and not what passes as sermons in most pulpits. I have written a series on this subject recently; they are linked on the homepage.

That giftedness should be recognized by those who hear the sermon and not just assumed by the one who delivers the sermon. Along these same lines, there should be recognized spiritual men, men of discernment and like giftedness, elders who can see and affirm that giftedness and calling. If qualified men who surround an individual are not able to affirm or see that call upon a man's life, it should be cause for concern.

Third, I would not hesitate to say that one called to preach will **love** the study of God's Word. He must be one who delights in sitting down and studying hard the text and writing the sermon. It is hard work, but rewarding work. A man who has no desire to study is not called to preach. He must be a student of the Word if he is to bear the voice of God. You will meet men who have no hunger or desire to study, but they love to be up in front teaching others. Beware of such men!

Fourth, I think there has to be a sense deep in one's spirit that this and this alone is what a man is called to do. I believe it was Charles Spurgeon who used to tell his students, "If you can do anything else, do it. If you can stay out of the ministry, stay out of the ministry." D. Martyn Lloyd-Jones said, "I would say that the only man who is called to preach is the man who cannot do anything else, in the sense that he is not satisfied with anything else. This call to preach is so put upon him, and such pressure comes to bear upon him that he says, 'I can do nothing else, I must preach.'" (Preachers and Preaching, pg. 105)

I think that Lloyd-Jones's chapter on this subject in his book Preachers and Preaching is worth your consideration.

Having said all that, it should be noted that this type

of call is completely different than the "I heard God speak in my ear" type of thing I speak of in the articles you referenced. I hope you can see the difference. I do believe that God burdens our hearts, gives us desires and pushes or draws us into service. I believe that He so moves as to mold and shape a man for the ministry he has called him to. But that is not to say that God whispers it in his ear, gives him signs or fleeces or confirmations. The "call" to ministry is not audible at all (normatively speaking). I have never met a preacher who heard a voice. I have met lots who felt compelled to ministry. Unfortunately that "compelling" is described with the wrong words: "God told me. . ."

Your question was a very good one and I appreciate the email. I don't recognize your name on the email and I am wondering if we have met, where you live, or how you heard about our website and the Hearing the Voice of God series.

By His Grace -

Jim

Lending vs. Giving

When I was on the Mexico Mission trip in April 2009, we had the privilege of experiencing four different worship services with our Mexican brothers. The entire services were conducted in Spanish and were unintelligible to us, apart from translation. At one point, the man praying spoke in Spanish and Bruce translated what he had prayed, saying, "We thank You for **lending** us life and health." Bruce then commented, "That is how they pray, and I love that! I love the way they say that."

Notice how different that is from what we are used to praying. We are prone to say, "Thank you Lord for **giving** us life and health."

Which, I ask you, is the proper mindset? I have to say that I prefer the Mexican way of praying!

Is it not better to think of life and health as benefits from God which He **loans** to us for a time instead of benefits that He **gives** to us?

If I think of those blessings as things **given** to me, then it tends to create an entitlement mentality. When my health fails or a life is taken, we think that God has robbed us of something we deserve or something that we have a right to. We then will think that God took something from us after giving it to us. When they disappear we might be tempted to ask, "God, why didn't you give these things to me?"

If, however, I think in terms of only being a borrower of

life and health, then I have a right mindset. God does indeed **lend** these things to us for a time. We are beggars who have no claim on such blessings. If we enjoy them, we are only borrowing them from God for a short period. Eventually my health will fail and my life will end.

Thinking of myself as a borrower keeps these blessings in perspective. I have no inalienable right to them. I am not an autonomous, self-sufficient person who is gifted more than others. I am a beggar who borrows life from the Living God. When He no longer lends me these things, how can I cry against Him for not giving me something I have no right to in the first place? Is it not true that every blessing we have received has merely been lent to us?

I admit it is a small distinction in words, but it can make a profound difference in perspective.

Without Wax -

