



Random Thoughts, Vol. 5

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If this “Random Thoughts” column is new to you, then here is a quick introduction. Below is a collection of my own observations, thoughts, and insights which may or may not prove to be a blessing to others. Each of these is not long enough to warrant an entire article on its own, but begged to be written down nonetheless.

Modern Preaching Described

3/21/2011

I heard the following quote read on a radio program¹ I regularly listen to: “**The average ministry expounds on life and illustrates with Scripture rather than expounding on the Scriptures and illustrating with life.**”²

That one sentence captures all that is wrong with the modern approach to preaching. To see men stand in a pulpit and teach moralistic life lessons using video clips, stories, song lyrics, and poems while incorporating the occasional Bible verse is vexing to those who understand the true place that Scripture should have in the life of the church and believer. Most preaching in most churches, from most pulpits, by most pastors is nothing more than talks about life and living which rely upon Scripture to illustrate truths which are mined from life experiences and extra-biblical sources. Biblical preaching is expounding on Scripture while illustrating with life. What a great quote!

The Importance of Bible Reading

If you wonder about the value of daily meditation and reading of the Word of God, you should ask someone who has done it daily for forty years. Here is George Mueller’s testimony on the benefit of starting each day with thoughtful Bible reading (emphasis added):

While I was staying at Nailsworth, it pleased the Lord to teach me a truth, irrespective of human

¹ Wretched Radio (www.wretchedradio.com) hosted by Todd Friel.

² Stephen Davey, *In Pursuit of Prodigals* (Kress Biblical Resources).

*instrumentality, as far as I know, **the benefit of which I have not lost**, though, now. . . **more than forty years** have since passed away.*

The point is this: I saw more clearly than ever, that the first great and primary business to which I ought to attend every day was, to have my soul happy in the Lord. The first thing to be concerned about was not how much I might serve the Lord, how I might glorify the Lord; but how I might get my soul into a happy state, and how my inner man might be nourished. For I might seek to set the truth before the unconverted, I might seek to benefit believers, I might seek to relieve the distressed, I might in other ways seek to behave myself as it becomes a child of God in this world; and yet, not being happy in the Lord, and not being nourished and strengthened in my inner man day by day, all this might not be attended to in a right spirit.

*Before this time my practice had been, at least for ten years previously, as an habitual thing, to give myself to prayer, after having dressed in the morning. Now, I saw, that **the most important thing I had to do was to give myself to the reading of the Word of God and to meditation on it**, that thus my heart might be comforted, encouraged, warned, reprov'd, instructed; and that thus, whilst meditating, my heart might be brought into experimental communion with the Lord. I began therefore, to meditate on the New Testament, from the beginning, early in the morning.*

The first thing I did, after having asked in a few words the Lord’s blessing upon His precious Word, was to begin to meditate on the Word of God; searching, as it were, into every verse, to get blessing of it; not for the sake of the public ministry of the Word; not for the sake of preaching on what I had meditated upon; but for the sake of obtaining food for my own soul. The result I have found to be almost invariably this, that after a very few

minutes my soul has been led to confession, or to thanksgiving, or to intercession, or to supplication; so that though I did not, as it were, give myself to prayer, but to meditation, yet it turned almost immediately more or less into prayer.

When thus I have been for awhile making confession, or intercession, or supplication, or have given thanks, I go on to the next words or verse, turning all, as I go on, into prayer for myself or others, as the Word may lead to it; but still continually keeping before me that food for my own soul is the object of my meditation. The result of this is that there is always a good deal of confession, thanksgiving, supplication, or intercession mingled with my meditation, and that my inner man almost invariably is even sensibly nourished and strengthened and that by breakfast time, with rare exceptions, I am in a peaceful if not happy state of heart. Thus also the Lord is pleased to communicate unto me that which, very soon after, I have found to become food for other believers, though it was **not for the sake of the public ministry of the Word that I gave myself to meditation, but for the profit of my own inner man.**

The difference between my former practice and my present one is this. Formerly, when I rose, I began to pray as soon as possible, and generally spent all my time till breakfast in prayer, or almost all the time. At all events I almost invariably began with prayer. . . . But what was the result? I often spent a quarter of an hour, or half an hour, or even an hour on my knees, before being conscious to myself of having derived comfort, encouragement, humbling of soul, etc.; and often after having suffered much from wandering of mind for the first ten minutes, or a quarter of an hour, or even half an hour, I only then began really to pray.

I scarcely ever suffer now in this way. For my heart being nourished by the truth, being brought into experimental fellowship with God, I speak to my Father, and to my Friend (vile though I am, and unworthy of it!) about the things that He has brought before me in His precious Word.

It often now astonished me that I did not sooner see this. In no book did I ever read about it. No public ministry ever brought the matter before me. No private intercourse with a brother stirred me up to this matter. And yet now, since God has taught me this point, it is as plain to me as anything, **that the first thing the child of God has to do morning by morning is to obtain food for his inner man.**

As the outward man is not fit for work for any length of time, except we take food, and as this is one of the

first things we do in the morning, so it should be the inner man. We should take food for that, as every one must allow. Now what is the food for the inner man: **not prayer, but the Word of God:** and here again not the simple reading of the Word of God, so that it only passes through our minds, just as water runs through a pipe, but considering what we read, pondering over it, and applying it to our hearts. . . .

I dwell so particularly on this point because of the **immense spiritual profit and refreshment I am conscious of having derived from it myself,** and I affectionately and solemnly beseech all my fellow-believers to ponder this matter. By the blessing of God I ascribe to this mode the help and strength which I have had from God to pass in peace through deeper trials in various ways than I had ever had before; and after having now above forty years tried this way, I can most fully, in the fear of God, commend it. How different when the soul is refreshed and made happy early in the morning, from what is when, without spiritual preparation, the service, the trials and the temptations of the day come upon one!³

Bin Laden and Justice

5/23/2011

It was over three weeks ago that Osama bin Laden was located and killed by U.S. Special Forces. I didn't hear the news until late on that Sunday night, just before going to bed. The next day, the Internet was astir with reaction to his killing.⁴

For my purposes here, I am going to set aside the foreign policy issue of U.S. forces operating on foreign soil, supposedly without authorization from the foreign government. I am interested in the theological considerations and in answering the question: "What should be the Christian response to this news?"

I believe there are two *inappropriate* responses which end up being polar opposites of one another.

First, the "**It is Not Christian to Rejoice**" response. I have seen Christians respond with outrage that anyone would actually condone the killing of any human being, **even Osama**. Every life is precious, and everyone deserves our unconditional love, admiration, and protection, the argument

3 *Autobiography of George Mueller*, comp. Fred Bergen (London: J. Nisbet, 1906), 152-4, found quoted in John Piper, *Desiring God: Meditations of A Christian Hedonist* (Colorado Springs: Multnomah Books, 2011), 155-157.

4 Please notice I did not use the term 'murder.' Murder is the *unjustified taking of innocent human life*. Not all killing is murder, since some is the justified taking of human life. In this case, Bin Laden was not murdered, but killed by a duly ordained government authority as an act of justice.

goes. They assert that this is sad, and any Christian who might rejoice over this is patently unloving, un-Christian and un-Christlike.

Second, the "***I'm Soooo Thrilled That That Immoral Monster Is Burning In Hell***" response. This response says, "Because Osama attacked us on 9/11, he deserves an eternal Hell, and I hope his flames are the hottest reserved for any miserable sinner."

I don't believe that either of these responses demonstrate the attitude that a believer, who takes the Bible seriously, should have to the news that Osama was killed.

In response to the first reaction, I have written three other articles on the subject of capital punishment and pacifism. I would refer you to those articles for a greater treatment of what is to follow.⁵

Loving my neighbor does not require that I seek to absolve him of all responsibility for his wrongdoing. Nor does it mean that I am obligated to allow him to harm, hurt, and kill others. It is not loving to my neighbor to allow another neighbor to kill him. Loving my neighbor does not mean that I oppose the enforcement of law upon him, or the execution of justice upon him.

I have an obligation to love my neighbor and my enemy. My government has an obligation to execute justice upon evildoers --with the sword (the instrument of war and death, **Romans 13**).

Osama bin Laden got justice from a government. Nothing unbiblical or unchristian about it. It was the government doing what a government is ordained to do. In the same way, there is nothing unbiblical about capital punishment or the government's use of it.

Second, the fact that Osama bin Laden is suffering the eternal torments for his sin in Hell should not in itself be a cause of rejoicing. We should not take delight in a person's suffering. I believe that we should have wished that Osama had repented and trusted Christ for salvation a long time ago. If he had, he would have been forgiven by God and would have passed from spiritual death into spiritual life (**John 5:24-29**). He didn't. So Hell is his eternal abode. That is just. That is right. God will punish Osama for his crimes. God's justice will be just and it will be thorough. The suffering of Hell should not cause us delight or rejoicing, but rather sorrow.

There is a third option -- that is, to delight in the execution of God's justice and the vindication of His righteousness. Christians should long to see justice done on the earth. God loves righteousness and justice (**Psalms 33:5; 37:28**) and is the One who executes justice (**Psalms 146:7**). Righteousness and justice are the foundation of His throne (**Psalms 89:14**;

97:2). The scepter of His Kingdom is a righteous scepter (**Heb. 1:8**). In fact, God delights in doing justice (**Jeremiah 9:24; Malachi 2:17**).

When God moves in the earth to silence evil men, destroy evil, and render justice to evil doers, the righteous **should** rejoice. We **should** love justice and righteousness. The extent to which we cannot delight in righteousness and justice is the extent to which we are not righteous or just in our thinking.

The Psalms are *replete*, filled with cries to God to destroy His enemies and those who rise up against His people, His name, and His cause. The cry of the righteous should be for the coming of that completely just and righteous Kingdom. We long for the return of Christ and should look forward to it with joyful expectation. Don't forget that when He comes, it is not for salvation, but judgment. And if you think that what happened to Osama Bin Laden was horrible, you will be appalled when you see what Jesus is going to do to those who oppose Him!

The appropriate Christian response is **rejoicing mixed with sorrow**. We are sorrowful that Osama did not repent and embrace God's gracious offer of salvation and so has to suffer the torments of eternal Hell. We rejoice that God has put an end to one very wicked man, who destroyed the innocent, tortured people, promoted idolatry and a satanic religion, and wrought destruction upon people. God has vindicated Himself. I rejoice in that. I want to love righteousness and justice the way God does. Do you?

Design By Accident

10/19/2011

This is not a Rorschach test! But what do you see in the picture below?



You might see, on the right side of that black box, a stick figure--perhaps it is in an action pose. Then, on the left edge you see what looks like a ball in motion. In fact, it almost looks like the stick figure is in the action of either throwing or catching the ball. Can you see it?

⁵ Available at www.kootenaichurch.org.

My wife took the picture and here is the story behind it. While in the shower one day, she went to get some conditioner from the pump bottle in the corner. Some conditioner had dried in the spout, and when she pressed the handle, the conditioner squirted past her hand onto the wall behind her. She turned around and looked at it and this is what she saw. Fortunately, she had her cell phone nearby (she was waiting for a call) and she was able to capture the image before it washed off the wall.

When she first told me the story and showed me the picture, I incredulously responded with, "That's amazing! Something like that formed by a freak occurrence! That is so cool!"

We all recognize that that is an **extra-ordinary** occurrence. We don't see things like that every day! It was **so** out of the ordinary that Diedre took a picture of it.

What makes it amazing? What makes it "photo-worthy?" It has all the marks of design but was produced entirely by chance and random processes.

What are the odds that that could happen -- that a pump conditioner dispenser could jam, and then squirt that pattern, that for all intents and purposes, looks intentional and designed? Not only that, but did you notice that the whole image is on a dark tile?

Just think about the odds for a second. It didn't hit the floor, where the conditioner would have quickly been washed away before it could be noticed, let alone photographed. It just so happened to strike the wall with the most dark tiles on it. Further, it hit a dark tile which, according to my calculations, only had a 1 in 18 chance of doing. Further still, the whole image is on a dark tile, so that it can be seen.

What are the chances?!

On top of all of that, the image is recognizable and looks intentional. It resembles a figure we are all familiar with, performing an action we are all familiar with. It looks drawn. It looks as if an intelligent being had a purpose behind the image. The image has shape, form, design, and if you didn't know the history behind it, you would quickly and easily assume that such an image was the product of an intelligent designer.

It is the fact that such apparent design was actually the product of complete accident that makes the image so noteworthy. It has all the marks of design, but was formed by accident.

Isn't it interesting that we are able to recognize the characteristics of an intelligent design in something? And when we see something that looks intentional and designed but is in fact a random accident, we marvel and recognize that something like that happening by chance is **extremely rare and unlikely**.

But why would an atheist or evolutionist think that the picture above is unique? By their worldview, that is not rare, unlikely or notable at all. Random accidents producing the appearance of design is not just possible, it is so commonplace, ordinary, and expected that the "conditioner painting" on my bathroom tile shouldn't be amazing to them at all. They believe that all the design around us is the product of random chances and natural processes--complete accidents. Our world is not just one big accident, but it is billions upon billions upon billions of miraculous tiny accidents. To the evolutionist, this amazingly complex world with all of its design, intricacy, beauty, wonder, and intelligence is just the product of one big explosion--one large cosmic conditioner squirt.

Not only should the "conditioner painting" not surprise them, it should be completely un-noteworthy. The consistent evolutionist, when confronted with the picture, would have to say, "So? What's the point? What's so special about that? That type of design by accident happens all the time." Yet they know that that is not true.

In every area of life, every day, when they see something with the marks of design and purpose, they **assume** that it is the product of a designer and purposer--except for Creation. In an irrational leap of unbelief, they attribute the design of creation to an accident. They are without excuse (**Rom. 1:18ff**). Yet I bet that any evolutionist alive would have snapped the same picture, if the same thing had happened in their shower. They would have thought it was extraordinary. They would never wager that the same thing would happen again the following day--for they know that design requires a Designer.

An Untimely Death

11/18/2011

I spend little or no time watching TV news, but while a guest at someone's house one evening, I heard a newscaster say something to this effect: "Coming up next--groundbreaking research in medicine holds out promise for curing heart disease and strokes, which together kill thousands of people before their time."

That immediately caught my attention, and I thought out-loud, "How can something, even a disease, kill someone 'before their time?'"

Has anyone ever died "before their time?" Doesn't the fact that they died prove that **that was** their time? On the flip side, is it possible for someone to live beyond "their time?" How can you tell if someone was killed before their time? Worse yet, how do you know if someone has lived past their time? Do you suggest to them that they should have died a while ago? How come people are always taken "before their

time” and never after?

I couldn't help but notice what is assumed in that statement and how patently unbiblical such language is.

First, the statement assumes that we are each due a certain length of life, as if we are all entitled to 90 years or better. Those who view life from a biblical perspective realize that we are not entitled to a long life, nor does God guarantee it. Not even our next breath is guaranteed, and every heartbeat is a gift from a gracious God whom we have offended with our sin. We should never assume that God **owes** us even a day more than He has given to us. Truly, tomorrow, your life might be required of you (**Luke 12:20**).

The statement also assumes that we can, through some mechanism, research, technology or discipline, control or alter the day of our death. Yet Scripture says, “**No man has authority to restrain the wind with the wind, or authority over the day of death; . . .**” (**Ecc. 8:8**). In fact, all the days that God has appointed for us were written down in His book before there was even one (**Psalms 139:16**). No man can control the day of his death, prolong it, or hasten it.

Medical technology, pharmaceuticals, exercise, and diet can do nothing to change the day God has appointed for our death. We may think that by applying these means we are altering the end, but the application of these means, whatever they are, however they are pursued, will only ensure that we die right on time, not one minute before, and not one moment too late. Not only is our death unavoidable (**Ecc. 7:2**), but so is the timing of it.

Further, the statement assumes that we are better able than God to determine how long we should live. It is assumed that the person who “died before his time” **should** have lived longer. As if it would have been better for him, for us, and for others if he had lived longer. Yet if God is sovereign, good, and wise, and if He controls our length of days, then the day appointed for my death is the best possible day for everyone involved.

Lastly, the statement assumes that something other than God determines the day and manner of our death. Really, I think this is the rub. Men do not like to admit that they are not the captains of their fate and the masters of their soul. They like to believe that they, through some means, by some technology, or by some action that they take, can delay the inevitable.

If there does come a day when heart disease and strokes are cured, it will not mean that we (through technology) have changed the length of anyone's life. It will just mean that God has determined, in His sovereign plan, that He will no longer take people's lives through those means. But guess what? People will still die through other means, and that, right on time!

Without Wax -

