

# EYES WIDE OPEN

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Circumstances in my life have not always been according to plan—MY plan, that is.

I have failed. Others have failed me. I have been misjudged and mistreated while doing the right thing. The thing I asked God for has not always come to pass in the timeframe I had in mind. I have suffered setbacks, while those who do not worship God at all have prospered.

Life has not always been what I hoped or expected. How about you?

Last Week, the Philippine Islands were hit by a massive storm. They reported sustained winds of 147 miles per hour! That's enough force to rip the roof off of houses built to California building standards. Thousands are dead, and tens of thousands more are injured or displaced. Communications have been cut off. Roads are blocked by wreckage. Many people who have survived have no food and no water available.

Life is not always neat and tidy. Often, life is messy and beyond our control.

Yet we seek controllability. We don't need necessarily to be the Big Boss, but in our own little world, in some small way, we want to retain control. It makes life more comfortable, predictable, manageable.

Consider our culture's fascination with foretelling the future—from horoscopes to Ouija boards and Tarot card readings. Even our fascination with Bible prophecy often has less to do with knowing God than with knowing about events, so that we might retain a sense of certainty and predictability for our lives.

Yet, even when we know with a statistical certainty that calamity is coming, what will we actually do to prepare ourselves? History has shown that most people will do as little as they can; many will do absolutely nothing.

We are deluded by the sense that knowledge IS control. I know, therefore I am prepared.

Many people read the Bible in the same way—collecting mere information to give them a false sense of peace. Yet, we have been warned:

*James 1:22 Don't just listen to God's word. You must do what it says. Otherwise, you are only fooling yourselves. <sup>23</sup> For if you listen to the word and don't obey, it is like glancing at your face in a mirror. <sup>24</sup> You see yourself, walk away, and forget what you look like.*

<sup>25</sup> *But if you look carefully into the perfect law that sets you free, and if you do what it says and don't forget what you heard, then God will bless you for doing it.*

It has been said that there are two things that we can always count on for certain—death and taxes. That maxim was originally a sarcastic dig at the burden of taxation. The supposed certainty of taxation is underscored by comparing it to death. In reality, the only future event that living humans can be absolutely certain of is death.

*Hebrews 9:27 Each person is destined to die once and after that comes judgment.*

So, why do we avoid thinking about it or talking about it? We behave like the three monkeys: hear no evil, see no evil, speak no evil.

Everything dies.

Everything does die. But is it pointless? Is death the end of meaning? Or is life bigger than death?

If I can't see the reason for trouble or death, does that make it pointless?

Do I really have the highest point of view? The clearest insight? The most thorough understanding? Do you?

Sometimes I get it. Some things *need* to die. (Poison oak, for one thing. And mosquitoes, definitely.) I can see that. I'll even vote for that.

But could there be reasons *beyond* my understanding? Could there be a reason even when I don't get it?

How often are what I call my "reasons" just my speculations? No more than wishful thinking?

Perhaps in many such things, I *cannot* understand, but only *observe*.

That throttles my desire to control my world, but just maybe it's true anyway.

If I can only observe, *will* I? Will I see it with eyes wide open? Like Abraham, who, at a hundred years of age, considered his own body unable to reproduce life, yet believed that God would give him a son just as He had promised.

Maybe Someone *is* in control of all things (it's just not me or you). Here's what God has said of Himself:

*Deuteronomy 32:39* 'Now see that I, even I, am He, And there is no God besides Me; I kill and I make alive; I wound and I heal; Nor is there any who can deliver from My hand.

*Isaiah 45:6* I am the Lord, and there is no other. <sup>7</sup> I create the light and make the darkness. I send good times and bad times. I, the Lord, am the one who does these things.

It is difficult to read these things, for we would all prefer a god who is simple and predictable. A god who is always does what is good and never does what is bad for us. A god who never destroys, but only gives life.

Yet, I have observed that after destruction life emerges again.

Consider the recent Rim Fire that scorched hundreds of thousands of acres of Sierra woodlands—from some locations, as far as the eye can see, there is only gray ash. Yet the Forest Service predicts an amazing array of wildflowers next spring, many of which only appear after a fire. God knows how to turn a desert into a garden!

*Isaiah 44:3* I will pour out water to quench your thirst and to irrigate your parched fields. And I will pour out my Spirit on your descendants, and my blessing on your children. <sup>4</sup> They will thrive like watered grass, like willows on a riverbank.

After tragedy, there is a future; it's just different (in some ways). If we can let go, and let the past be the past, there emerges a new normal.

Isn't this part of the wonder of God's grace and power? That He can (and will) turn even the sad and painful things in our lives into a fresh (or new) beauty!

*Romans 8:28* We know that God causes everything to work together for the good of those who love God and are called according to his purpose for them.

The New International Version offers this rendition:

*NIV* In all things God works for the good of those who love him, who have been called according to his purpose.

"In all things God works." That means there is nothing—no circumstance—in which God does not work! He is at work in all things, perhaps visibly, but always invisibly.

Will we wait for it, with eyes wide open, expectantly? Will we walk through the darkness, the tragedy, the heartache, the uncertainty with the expectation of grace, of God's goodness?

Can we overcome our blinding self-protection?

Can we conquer our insidious cynicism?

Can we truly trust the Lord? Can we trust Him as more than the genie of our wishfulness? Have you ever prayed for your wishes to come true, like rubbing a magic lamp (“In the name of Jesus! In the name of Jesus! In the name of Jesus!”)?

“Genie” comes from the Arabic word *jinn* which is a demon. If you want your wishes fulfilled, demons will assist. Or, will you pray, “*Your* will be done”?

Do you truly trust the Lord?

Do you trust Him to actually know what He is doing? Do you believe that He actually has a plan? A *good* plan? For *you*?

You may yet ask, “How can His plan be good if I am so miserable?” That’s a reasonable question.

I cannot answer you. That is part of the mystery of the Cross and the Resurrection. God is able to bring life out of death.

I cannot explain it. That is part of the mystery of God’s sovereignty. But I urge you to trust Him.

Will you surrender yourself to His sovereign and unfailing love?

Paul has clearly instructed us:

*1 Thessalonians 5:18* *Be thankful in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you who belong to Christ Jesus.*

“In all circumstances.” There are many circumstances over which I have no control, but *this* I can control: I can give God thanks.

I can thank Him that He is the Sovereign Lord.

I can thank Him that all things—all circumstances, and even the devil himself—are under His control.

I can thank Him that He always has a plan.

And I can thank Him that His plan—even if I cannot see it, or see how He could possibly arrange or produce it—is *good*. Good for me.

Today, will you commit to give God praise? To thank Him for the lesson of the cross and the empty tomb?

He is the Lamb and the Lion. He is the Suffering Servant and the Conquering King.

He is now, and always will be, all that you need Him to be. Will *you* be all that He asks you to be?