

Happy the Man Who Feareth God

Martin Luther (1483–1546); tr. Richard Massie (1800–1887)

Happy the man who feareth God,
Whose feet His holy ways have trod;
Thine own good hand shall nourish thee,
And well and happy shalt thou be.

Thy wife shall, like a fruitful vine,
Fill all thy house with clusters fine;
Thy children all be fresh and sound,
Like olive-plants thy table round.

Lo! to the man these blessings cleave
Who in God's holy fear doth live;
From him the ancient curse hath fled
By Adam's race inherited.

Out of Mount Zion God shall send,
And crown with joy thy latter end;
That thou Jerusalem mayst see,
In favor and prosperity.

He shall be with thee in thy ways,
And give thee health and length of days;
Yea, thou shalt children's children see,
And peace on Israel shall be.

ΤΩ ΧΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ

In the Nick of Time

Turning Point

Kevin T. Bauder

One of the most important turning points in my life came fifty years ago this month. I had professed faith as a child. I had tried, off and on, to live for the Lord during young adolescence. During my later teen years, however, I ceased to be interested in His will for my life. My heart drew far from Him, and it was still far away when I enrolled in Bible college at 17.

After a semester of living at home, I moved into the dorms. Odd as it may seem, one can find plenty of worldly influences even in an institution dedicated to teaching the Scriptures. I embraced those influences, making a series of bad choices. Oh, I wasn't doing stuff that would have seemed scandalous, but I was selfish, angry, and proud.

The beginning of my sophomore year was even worse. It was like I'd dropped off a spiritual ledge. I missed required events. My grades plummeted. Life seemed black. I was surly and defiant. A mandatory visit to the dean's office resulted in a threat of suspension, which only increased my resentment.

Then a residence adviser took me aside and pointed to specific instances where my behavior was affecting other people. For the first time, it struck me that my ideas and conduct had consequences for others. This was not a game. It was a spiritual battle.

Once my eyes were opened, I began to see other damage that I was doing. It was the first time I had examined myself from God's point of view, and I didn't much care for what I saw. I knew that something had to change.

By February of 1975, I had come to a point of decision. I understood that living my life selfishly would end badly. I would bring misery upon myself, pain into the lives of others, and reproach upon the name of the Lord. If I did not change, things would only get worse.

The only alternative was to begin living my life for God. In a night of prayer, I told Him that I wanted to do that, but I didn't know how. He was going to have to show me what it meant to live for Him.



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One idea occurred to me immediately. I knew that I had to stop defying those who held authority in my life. Consequently, I told God that I would submit to the institutional rules of my college, even where they seemed inane. After all, who was I to judge what was a worthwhile discipline? I also determined that I would respond instantly and obediently whenever I was rebuked or even counseled by an authority figure. How strange that commitment seemed.

The next day in chapel, an announcement went out that the school's traveling theater troupe needed an actor to pick up a part. I'd done plenty of theater in high school, so it felt like this was a way I could serve the Lord. The opportunity seemed like my first answer to prayer.

I volunteered for the play, and I was given the part immediately. Within a couple of weeks, I found myself touring around the Midwest, and then eventually the Rocky Mountain West. One challenge that I hadn't expected was that our faculty director seemed determined to test my resolve. I was sincerely trying to keep all the rules I knew about, but it seemed like he would make up new rules on the spot, and they would apply only to me. To my own surprise as much as to his, I didn't argue or balk. I just did whatever he said, whether I thought it was necessary or not.

What I discovered was that walking with God was neither helped nor hindered by the number of rules I kept, but it was tremendously influenced by my reasons for keeping them. I didn't believe then, and I don't believe now, that either playing or not playing a game like Rook brings one closer to God. But when the faculty director told me to "put those cards away and don't let me see them again," I obeyed meekly, for the sake of the commitment I'd made. For the first time, I felt like I was making a choice motivated purely by love for God.

There was a young woman traveling with the crew for the play. She would iron costumes and act as a prompter (I thought that having a prompter was insufferably amateurish, but I never told the director). We had met before, but now we saw each other almost daily. I enjoyed our banter, and I began to look forward to our conversations.

Then, after one performance, a fellow actor asked me, "What do you think of Debbie Wright?"

"She's a really nice girl," I said.

Melvin replied, "I think she likes you."

Those five words redefined my life. I realized that I liked her, too. Really, really liked her.

Debbie and I were too busy to do any dating, but we didn't have to. Our work in the play brought us together almost every day. As we traveled and worked and talked, my feelings for her warmed. By late April, I knew that this was the woman I wanted to marry.

I started to ask the Lord to let me marry her. I prayed this prayer every day, multiple times a day. As the season ended and we no longer traveled, I found ways to keep seeing her.

Our first date was to our college's spring banquet. She wore a formal. I wore a tux, cape, and opera hat. The haberdasher forgot to include dress shoes with the tux, so I borrowed a pair from the guy across the hall. I wore size 13. He wore size 10. My feet will never forget that first date.

Debbie graduated that spring. She went home for the summer to her parents' farm. I made that drive nearly every weekend so that I could keep seeing her. Eventually she landed a job at the college and moved back. That August I asked her to marry me, and she agreed. I still can't believe it.

People give her credit for straightening me out. She deserves lots of that credit. But the truth is that God was working in my heart before Debbie and I became serious about each other. The Lord had used chastening to get my attention. Now He was showing me how gracious He could be.

Fifty years have passed since that turning point in February of 1975. Debbie and I wed in December of that year, and we have walked together through life's challenges ever since. She is still really nice. More than that, she is still the principal, human instrument of God's grace in my life.



This essay is by Kevin T. Bauder, Research Professor of Historical and Systematic Theology at Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses.
