

The Joy of Impermanence

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A few weeks ago, I attended a play at the local Junior College. The play had a lot of set changes. One of the sets was a tall, red cabin with a high porch and steps. The lights went out and the stagehands rolled the cabin off the stage to the left. I felt as though God had said to me, "This will be how the world will end. The set will be rolled off the stage, leaving it empty for the next act." I felt a rush of emotion, almost to the point of tears, because I felt I had been given a glimpse of something profound.

It was as though God had pulled back the veil and I saw things as they truly are—impermanent. We forget that everything we see will one day be gone. The Bible tells us that nothing lasts forever, not even this world. Revelation 21:1 says that the first earth and first heaven will pass away. God will make a new heaven and earth. That will be the second act of His play.

We hate change. What we hate is the discomfort that accompanies change. But change is inevitable, because nothing is permanent. But we can find encouragement in this knowledge.

No Dark Night Lasts Forever

For those who have endured suffering, they have learned that all suffering comes to an end. Ultimately, even a lifetime of suffering has an end in the liberating release of death. I suffered terribly after my back injury, being in constant pain for a year. Most of that time I spent lying in bed because I could not stand or sit. I comforted myself in the knowledge that my pain would not last forever. Eventually, my body did start to heal and I began to experience hours, then days, when I was not in pain. I did make a full recovery, even though some told me that I would always be disabled.

No hardship lasts forever. The law of impermanence makes it so. This knowledge helps us to endure and have patience when we are beset with overwhelming circumstances. One thing that does last forever is God's love. It is constant. We can rely on God's love to keep us afloat during times of crisis. God doesn't often rescue us from crisis but He gives us the strength to endure it, the peace to accept it, and the grace to be transformed by it.

No Good Fortune Lasts Forever

When finances, health and possessions are abundant, we think we are secure, but these things are not designed to last. They fade. Sometimes, they are lost in an instant. Instead of living in fear of loss, a better attitude is to be thankful for their presence in our lives and to enjoy them while we are able. Let us appreciate these blessings all the more because they are temporary.

Our investments or health can fail. We can lose our jobs or homes. Some might respond by saving more, living healthier, or taking fewer risks, but none of these guarantee security. The only real source of security is God, who is unchanging across eternity. The impermanence of things causes us to place our trust in God rather than in the false security of our possessions.

A Vanishing Act

The Bible says that we are just a vapor that appears for a little while and then vanishes away (James 4:14). Our lives are like the temporary props on a stage. We are rolled on and then rolled off, never to appear again. We judge our life spans in terms of decades, but relative to the aging of the Earth, our lives are very brief.

In spite of their brevity, we are desperately attached to our lives. We cling to our lives with a fierce grip. Why is that? I think we fool ourselves into thinking that the severity of our grip will prevent our lives from being taken from us. Whether we have a tight grip or loose grip, we have no power to force our stay on Earth.

I'm a proponent of the loose grip approach to life. Since everything is impermanent, why cling to things? Why accumulate to excess? Why fear what I cannot control? We are exhorted to accumulate treasure in heaven (Matthew 6:20) and to set our minds on things above and not on earthly things (Colossians 3:2).

The Best Attitude is Gratitude

If everything is impermanent, then we can find encouragement in knowing that nothing bad lasts forever and that everything good should be enjoyed

while it lasts. Even when we experience hardship, we can look for the good in our lives and be thankful for it, no matter how small the portion. In my darkest hour, I took comfort in knowing that God had surrounded me with love. The love of God and others can sustain us through difficult times.

During those times when the good seems far away, we can enjoy the present moment experiences of our senses: warmth on our skin, favorite smells, the marvels of nature. We can enjoy our interactions with friends and family. Creativity. Movement. Engaging our minds. All these things are freely accessible to most of us. Let us enjoy them as they are experienced, since they are fleeting and never captured again after the moment has passed. And let us have gratitude for each of these moments because God can be found in them if we look.

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Rick Hocker

Author of *Four in the Garden*

An Allegory about One's Relationship with God

Readers' Favorite International Book Award Winner

Available in print and e-book at all online stores

Email: rick@rickhocker.com

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