

The Grace that Goes Before

“O Lord, you have examined me, and you know me. You alone know when I sit down and when I get up. You read my thoughts from far away. You watch me when I travel and when I rest. You are familiar with all my ways. Even before there is a single word on my tongue, you know all about it, LORD. You are all around me—in front of me and in back of me. You lay your hand on me. Such knowledge is beyond my grasp. It is so high I cannot reach it.” Psalm 139:1-6 (GW)

I confess—I could be an unconstrained worrier. I come by this trait honestly—it’s a behavior learned from my family. However, I know I’m not alone—we humans naturally worry, and as we look around, we know there plenty of things we could worry about. Despite working toward discipline, I often find myself wondering and getting anxious, sometimes about small things: *Have I gotten enough done today? Did I remember to post that letter? Have I responded to my sister’s Snapchat?* Sometimes, if I’m honest, I meta-worry: *Do I worry too much?* But mostly, I worry about larger, more important things: *Did I represent the Library well? Am I doing work God wants me to do? Am I caring for people like I should? Am I becoming who God wants me to be?* I know I’m not alone in wanting to live well.

However, when we get stuck in this pattern of thinking/feeling/behaving, we need refocusing. In other words, to disengage from the culture and rhetoric of fear, we *must* have some activity or discipline that draws us toward God and away from ourselves. These disciplines can be as different as those who practice them. For example, one of the ways I refocus is through hiking—I experience

the natural world with few distractions, contemplate who God is and what He asks of us, rest in the silence, and wait on God to speak if God so chooses.

Recently, I went hiking with my husband at Roman Nose State Park, and it was on this hike I came to understand grace in a new way. Previously, I understood prevenient grace to only be defined as the grace that goes before salvation—the work enacted by God so that people’s hearts are prepared to receive and accept the Good News of Jesus Christ. But I wonder if prevenient grace is bigger than just one moment—if this grace also goes before any decision we have to make, situation we encounter, crucial conversation we need to have, or any other thing we worry about. If I read the above verses in this light, I understand them to mean so much more than God’s knowing who we are—God both knows who we are and lays His hand on us, enacting grace before we even know we need it. Praise be!

This kind of preceding grace is an immense and immediate relief to worry and fear. God goes before us, God knows what we need, and God surrounds us with His presence, working grace into our lives and preparing us to face both today and the future. As we move into the unknown of 2016, let us refocus on the goodness and grace of God, trusting God to go before us and resting in God’s faithfulness.



—Katie King

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