

God's Assignments

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Scripture quotations taken from the NASB

Saul's conversion on the Damascus Road is a clear example of how God intervenes in the lives of His elect to bring them to faith in His Son, Jesus Christ, regardless of their hostility toward Him and regardless of their own will and decision in the matter. However, there is another lesson for us in the biblical accounts of Saul's conversion, and that lesson is this: ***God has particular assignments and places of service that He has ordained for each of His people individually.***

Beginning in Acts 9:1, we read that Saul was "still breathing threats and murder against the disciples of the Lord". He was traveling to Damascus to arrest and bring back in chains any Christians that he might find there, to stand trial before the Sanhedrin, and:

"As he was traveling, it happened that he was approaching Damascus, and suddenly a light from heaven flashed around him; and he fell to the ground and heard a voice saying to him, "Saul, Saul, why are you persecuting Me?" And he said, "Who are You, Lord?" And He said, "I am Jesus whom you are persecuting, but get up and enter the city, ***and it will be told you what you must do.***" (Acts 9:3-6, emphasis added)

As we know, God's assignment for Saul was that he was to be one of only twelve apostles, and he was to carry the Gospel message to the Gentiles, to reveal to them that they too were included in God's plan of salvation through faith in Jesus Christ (Acts 9:15, others). Even though Saul was hostile toward the Gospel message (Acts 9:1), in God's time, he was called to faith in Christ, and the place of service that God had ordained for him was revealed to him. Also in God's time, every one of His elect will be called to faith in Christ, and it will be revealed to us the places of service that He has ordained for us.

Paul taught that as believers, we are God's "workmanship, created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand so that we would walk in them." (Ephesians 2:10). And in Psalm 139 we read:

And in Your book were all written
The days that were ordained for me,
When as yet there was not one of them. (Psalm 139:16)

These verses reveal to us that all the days and events of our lives were ordained by God long ago, before we were even born. God ordained when we would be born into this world, and again He ordained when we would be called to faith in His Son. And He has also ordained the path that we will take in life and the ways in which we will serve Him (Jeremiah 10:23, Proverbs 16:9, 19:21, 20:24).

Again in Psalm 139, we read of the sovereignty of God in the lives of His people as He guides us to the places of service that He has assigned for each of us:

***"You have enclosed me behind and before,
And laid Your hand upon me.***

Such knowledge is too wonderful for me;
It is too high, I cannot attain to it. (Psalm 139:5-6, emphasis added)

These verses speak of God's sovereign hand in the things that happen in our lives and in the paths that we ultimately follow during the course of our lives. God has particular assignments and places of service for each of us, which He will make known to us in His time. Many times, these places of service will be revealed to us as the circumstances, conditions, and limitations of our lives unfold.

And as these events happen, we may find that we have indeed been "enclosed", "behind and before" (Psalm 139:5). We may find that our path to getting what we want for ourselves has been blocked, or limited, by the circumstances and conditions that our sovereign God has brought about in our lives. We may find that many of the things we had wanted for ourselves are out of reach for us. We have prayed and asked God for them, yet we do not have them, and so we can conclude that it may not be God's will that we should have them. (Consider 1 John 5:14-15).

There may be no sin at all in the things that we have asked of God in our prayers, but the having and the keeping of these things, and the temporal gratifications that they can bring, may not be God's will for us individually. Instead, He may well have chosen to lead us in other paths.

There may also be things in our lives that we have, but do not want, maybe some physical affliction or infirmity, or some other troubles. And again, we have prayed to God that these things would be removed from our lives, but for reasons of His own, God does not grant our request, and our burden remains. When these things happen to us, we can take comfort in knowing that God's grace will be given to us in a measure sufficient for our weakness and need, as Paul learned through his own affliction, which God would not remove (2 Corinthians 12:7-11).

When we find that our path to getting what we want for ourselves is blocked by some circumstance, condition, or limitation in our lives, let us not lose sight of Jesus' teaching in John 12:24-26. In these verses Jesus used the metaphor of a "grain of wheat" to symbolize His life and the lives of all of us who follow Him. Jesus began His teaching in this passage by saying: "Truly, truly, I say to you, unless a grain of wheat falls into the earth and dies, it remains alone; but if it dies, it bears much fruit." (John 12:24).

Notice Jesus taught that *unless* the "death" of the grain of wheat occurs, no fruit will be born, but through this "death", much fruit will be born to the glory of God. The "death" of the grain of wheat in John 12:24 is symbolic of the "death" of the things that we want for ourselves in this life, as our sovereign God may choose to take or withhold them from us, as part of His will for each of our lives individually.

The "death" of the things that we want for ourselves in this life can make us "hate" our lives in this world (John 12:25), but we know from God's word that the sufferings of our present lives are not worthy to be compared with the glory that will one day be revealed in us (Romans 8:18, 2 Corinthians 4:16-18). All of us who serve Jesus must follow Him in His death (John 12:26, Luke 9:23), sharing in His sufferings, as God has ordained them for each of His people, and as He will bring them to pass in our lives, according to His plan and purpose for each of us. (Also consider John 16:20-22, Luke 6:20-26, Luke 16:19-25.)

If we consider the place and position that God has assigned for us in this life to be menial, insignificant, burdensome, undercompensated, and underappreciated, the work of a servant or slave, then let us take comfort in Jesus' words in Mark 10, where He said:

"You know that those who are recognized as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them; and their great men exercise authority over them. ***But it is not this way among you, but whoever wishes to become great among you shall be your***

servant; and whoever wishes to be first among you shall be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life a ransom for many.” (Mark 10:42-45, emphasis added).

And elsewhere, Jesus said again: “But the greatest among you will be your servant.” (Matthew 23:11).

When we find ourselves assigned in this life to doing the work of a servant or slave and doing without many of the “good things” (Luke 16:25) that we hoped to have and enjoy, then let us understand that it has been granted to every believer to share in Jesus’ sufferings, becoming in some measure as He was, one who endured sorrows and was acquainted with grief (Isaiah 53:3). But as a result of having shared in His sufferings, as God our Father has ordained and assigned them for each of us individually, we will bear fruit and one day share in Christ’s eternal glory (John 12:24, Romans 8:17-18). And when that day comes for each of us, we will rejoice, and no one will ever take away our joy again (John 16:22).