

WHAT HAS GOD DONE FOR YOU LATELY?

John 17:1-12 (NASB)

David Bruce Linn

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Perhaps because God is invisible and his ways are inscrutable, we can sometimes take a startle at a particular moment and wonder: Is God really involved in my life here? After all, he does not hug anyone or drop you a note in the mail or on Facebook. He can seem far off. Or perhaps you have prayed a lot for something and you do not yet have the answer. It does not take unbelief to wonder if God is paying attention to you.

Or maybe you are, in fact, dancing with unbelief, either through discouragement, spiritual warfare, or sin. I knew a man, Steve, who was a graduate student in chemistry when I was at Duke who became a professor of chemistry at the University of Wisconsin. He had been a pillar among the faithful students. I had lost touch with him but Steve happened to be with another friend of mine at that university who is a professor of geology. For reasons unknown to either of us, Steve went through a major time of doubt in his faith.

I had recommended that Steve meditate on the wonders of intelligent design as it related to chemistry. You do not have to subscribe to any particular mechanism of creation to see the divine hand in the beauty of the structure of molecules and the forces at work there. Steve came out of it eventually, but I don't know exactly how.

Regardless of the reason, any one of us can have a moment where we wonder whether the God who promises to care for us is really on duty. I recommend meditation as a means to combat that loss of assurance. Genuinely Christian meditation takes the truth of God, whether by general or special revelation, and reposes upon it thoughtfully. And for me, it is most helpful to look at Scripture directly.

This study provides an example of the kind of study you might do to answer the question: "What has God done for me lately?" We will take the first part of the High Priestly Prayer of our Lord Jesus in John 17. If you are a believer in Jesus Christ, God is doing the following things for you all the time.

First, we discover that God is giving life to our dead souls, as we see in :1-2: **"Jesus spoke these things; and lifting up His eyes to heaven, He said, 'Father, the hour has come; glorify Your Son, that the Son may glorify You, even as You gave Him authority over all flesh, that to all whom You have given Him, He may give eternal life'"** (Jn. 17:1-2). We may be breathing in and out, but without the enlivening work of the Holy Spirit we are absolutely dead to God. We may have a Bible open in front of us, but we will understand nothing of the truth. I used to keep a sign on my office door which said: "Ignorant. Naked. Dead." It was my way of reminding myself every day that without Christ I am all of those things. In Christ I have the wisdom of God, I am clothed with the righteousness of Christ, and I have eternal life in him!

Second, God is giving us the personal knowledge of himself: **"This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent"** (Jn. 17:3). This is abnormal in a fallen world. Jesus makes a point about the knowledge of the true God. There are many

other gods. The Devil offers up a smorgasbord of false gods to entice us.

I remember a recent trip to Amish country in Lancaster, Pennsylvania. I had no idea how big the tourism was there until I saw it for myself. Part of that environment are a number of smorgasbords--buffets--which are immense. The one we went to at my insistence looked like it could seat many hundreds of people at a time, and had two gigantic food aisles. And of course, the big challenge is to avoid eating too much because the temptation is so great. This is how the Devil has constructed the buffet of false gods. You can pick any one you like or a group of them. You can even invent your own if you wish --as long as you do not worship the One True God.

People gorging on their false religions are distracted from seeing that they have darkness and morbidity, while the believer in the true God has light and life.

Thirdly, we learn that God is including the believer in his success: **"I glorified You on the earth, having accomplished the work which You have given Me to do. Now, Father, glorify Me together with Yourself, with the glory which I had with You before the world was"** (Jn. 17:4-5). Christ accomplished the work of redemption for which the world waited for thousands of years. 1 Peter 3:18-22 describes something of that victory. One answer to the question of what he proclaimed to the spirits in prison is his victory over sin and death. If you are wondering about the outcome of your life, the believer can know that victory is his as a gift of God. And if God gives it to you, you have it.

Fourthly, God is manifesting his name, nature, and glory to you: **"I have manifested Your name to the men whom You gave Me out of the world..."** (Jn. 17:6). In the natural world you see God where others see an alien beauty, an empty universe, or a deceptive mirage. But the primary manifestation of God's character and attributes he gives through the incarnation in Christ. Jesus said: **"He who has seen Me has seen the Father,"** (Joh 14:9 NAU). God gave you this boon in time and history, and also gave you the ability to understand it by revelation. Until the quickening of your mind, you would have given the wrong answer to Jesus' question: "Who do you say that I am?"

Fifthly, God is giving you as a gift to his Son: **"...They were Yours and You gave them to Me, and they have kept Your word"** (Jn. 17:6). This is a small window into the mystery of love between the persons of the Holy Trinity. Christ is a gift of the Father to you through the incarnation, but you, through calling and redemption, become God's gift to his Son. This is the sort of thought which cracks the human mind in shards, but it tells us that our lives as believers, no matter how humdrum they may seem, are fraught with significance. We only see this "through a glass darkly" at this time, but in glory we shall have a better idea of such a profound reality.

You may wonder if such a profound thought which seems so disconnected to our daily reality could have any value in encouraging our assurance. It has been my experience that sometimes the profound heavenly realities are what bolster me the most.

Sixthly, God is granting you assurance: **"Now they have come to know that everything You have given Me is from You; for the words which You gave Me I have given to them; and they received them and truly understood that I came forth from You, and they believed that You sent Me"** (Jn. 17:7-8). It may sound circular that meditating on God's gift of assurance can help you when you have no assurance. But the Bible says that **"every good gift falls from above,"** so even assurance comes to us as a gift. That confidence in the truth of God and Christ leads to a personal experience of

stability and peace. Those who are apart from God have desperation in life which cauterizes the soul and works death.

Notice that this assurance is connected with the reception and belief in the words of Christ. Christ said that love was the true mark of his disciples, but he did not say that love was the only identifying mark. Trusting and keeping the word of God is also a mark of Christian identity which overrides every denominational distinction. If I meet someone of a very different tribe of Christians than my own, I always look for love for God, love for people, and a strong motivation to keep the word as marks of their authentic belief. Only real Christians do this. Muslims say they embrace the Bible as part of their tradition, as do Mormons. Neither one of these specific groups is willing to trust and follow the word of God in a straightforward way. Neither one, for example, is willing to accept that Jesus Christ is God Incarnate. But God gives this confidence to true children.

Seventh, God is interceding for you: **"I ask on their behalf; I do not ask on behalf of the world, but of those whom You have given Me; for they are Yours; and all things that are Mine are Yours, and Yours are Mine; and I have been glorified in them"** (Jn. 17:9-10). We see Christ here interceding for his disciples. He intercedes for all who have entrusted their eternity to him. Others must stand up for themselves in this "bent" world, as Gerard Manley Hopkins called it. Good luck with that!

This answers the question we all have from time to time: Is anyone on my side? Christ is on the believer's side and is interceding for us all the time. He does this because we belong to him.

Eighth, God is leaving us in this ruined, stained world--for now: **"I am no longer in the world; and yet they themselves are in the world, and I come to You"** (Jn. 17:11). You may think: Why should that be encouraging? In spite of the sorrows and difficulties of a lost world, you can know you are supposed to be here! There is a purpose for your life. God has placed you right where he wants you to be. In times of uncertainty when God seems far away we are in danger of making decisions which deny this truth. Don't make important decisions when the shadow is on your mind and heart. Let the gloom lift and for you to return to your assurance in Christ. Then make your decision.

Ninth, God is binding you irrevocably to every other Christian on earth: **"Holy Father, keep them in Your name, the name which You have given Me, that they may be one even as We are"** (Jn. 17:11). You have human brotherhood, companionship, and social purpose at the deepest of levels. If our connection one to another through the Holy Spirit is like that of the Holy Trinity, as Christ said here, then we are bound 100 percent even to people we do not know very well or at all.

Normal human connections are based on accidents of family, likes and dislikes, and getting to know one another. There is nothing else. By contrast, believers start with a 100 percent connection and then get to know one another. That means that all sorts of positive and helpful actions can be taken on that spiritual basis.

I remember a time when I was taking a van full of youth to an outreach event. I was stopped at the top of a highway off-ramp, and suddenly our van was smacked from behind. We were shaken up but no one was injured. I made my way to a nearby parking lot. A woman got out of the van that hit me, and I noticed that her van was full of teenagers also.

She was extremely upset and apologetic about hitting us even though no one was injured and the bumper appeared to be undamaged. She explained that she was delivering kids to this teen outreach event, and she was late, and what was she going to do? She looked like she was coming unglued. I could tell even by our brief conversation that this woman was a believer just like me. So right as she was crumbling I leaned over and gave her a brotherly hug. I said I could see that no harm was done, and we should just go on with our ministries. She was immensely relieved and we both left. It seemed so natural that it was a few minutes before I realized that I had just hugged a complete stranger. The teens thought that was amusing. Our connection in Christ is through the Holy Spirit and is total. This is a gift of God.

Tenth, God is keeping you in him: **"While I was with them, I was keeping them in Your name which You have given Me"** (Jn. 17:12). Christ said this with respect to the disciples who were with him, but it applies to all who believe. We persevere by faith, as we should, be we could never do so without his keeping. We, by believing and performing the practices which keep us attached to the vine, tap the power to carry on. Quitting is unbelief and a negative proof of identity, as the Apostle John wrote: **"They went out from us, but they were not really of us; for if they had been of us, they would have remained with us; but they went out, so that it would be shown that they all are not of us"** (1Jo 2:19 NAU).

Eleventh, and last for this study, God is guarding you: **"...And I guarded them and not one of them perished but the son of perdition, so that the Scripture would be fulfilled"** (Jn. 17:12). Again I am applying words spoken to Christ's disciples while he was on the earth, but I do so with great confidence. How secure are you if God himself is watching over you? Judas refused it, but believers embrace it.

There has been much talk about guardian angels over the years. I do not dispute that angels have this function for those who believe, but they are merely God's way of getting this work done. Usually people talk about guardian angels because they want there to be spirit-beings who are looking out for them without having to face the authority of God. How much more encouraging to know that the Almighty God is looking out for you!

As a pastor, I want for believers in the church to make sure that we are watching out for one another. But we should never fear that no one is watching out for us, because God is. Every human buddy will fail, but God never will.

These eleven things which God is doing for you all the time are just a sample of the riches of his grace toward us in Christ. These is why we need not fear anything or anyone, why we need never fear that we are alone, and why we should never grumble that God is overlooking us. The feeling that we are being overlooked is evidence of our having forgotten the tsunami of good things God is doing for us all the time.

So when you feel that way, take your Bible and read of the wonderful works of God toward those who believe. Meditate on them and ask God to illuminate them for you. That is a prayer he is eager to answer. If you are a believer, there is only one good answer to the question of what God has done for you lately--everything.