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Your View of God

Romans 8:31-32

What then shall we say to these things? If God is for us, who can be against us? He who did not spare his own Son but gave him up for us all, how will he not also with him graciously give us all things?

Psalm 46:1-3

God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble. Therefore we will not fear though the earth give way, though the mountains be moved into the heart of the sea, though its waters roar and foam, though the mountains tremble at its swelling.

Galatians 6:7

Do not be deceived: God is not mocked, for whatever one sows, that will he also reap.

I want to talk to the graduates today. By the way, the graduates that are in the room, would you just hold up your hand here just for a second? Yes. Thank you.

I want to talk to you today specifically about two things. The first one is how we or how you view God, our picture of God, and then our response to the revelation that God has given us about himself.

It was the great A.W. Tozer, a theologian, who said, "What comes into our mind when we think about God is the most important thing about us." I don't know if that's true or not, but it certainly shapes a lot of our lives, how we view God, what we think of him. It affects us in our being, in our conscious and even in our subconscious, and it affects our behavior.

So I want to begin sharing with the graduates three sort of reminders of things that God has told us about himself in His Word. To have these fixed deeply in your own mind and heart as you prepare to launch out on your own, in a new way, into the world.

You've likely heard that God loves you, and he does love you. God is love. The Bible says in him there is no darkness at all. But there's more to it than just his love. That is the beginning of unpacking a lot of things about God.

Actually, it could be said he's nuts about you. He's very excited about you. He knit you together in your mother's womb. All the days he had planned for you, he visioned in his eyes before one of them came to be. He breathed into your body the breath of life and sent you out into this world.

He's more than nuts about you. He knows your name. He placed you at this point in history. He knows the hairs on your head. He knows you're coming and you're going. He knows everything about you. And he, in my words, I would say, is your greatest fan. He's your greatest fan.

When I was in high school, I ran the shuttle hurdle relay. That was a nice short race. At that time, it was about 50 yards long. It had five short hurdles on it, and you could sprint it pretty easily. Sometimes I had to run the 100 meter hurdles. That's a little longer, and those hurdles are bigger.

One particular spring, the track coach came to me and said, "Tim, all of our 400 meter hurdlers are injured. I'm going to put your name down for the 400 meter hurdles." It's hard to say no to a track coach. And so I swallowed hard and said, "Okay."

Now, 400m is for real athletes. That's a long ways all the way around the track with ten high hurdles on it. And I went to my dad and I said, "Dad, I'm running the 400 hurdles tonight. I don't know if I'm going to make it. After about a hundred yards for me, everything starts to slow down and my lungs start to suck for air. I'm just not a long distance type runner. But," I said, "Dad, he signed me up for it. I know I'm not going to do that well, but I'm going to try to finish."

Well, the gun went off, and in my good hundred meter form I came out fast over the first few hurdles, and it felt pretty good. And then I started to sense the pack separating from me, and I was drifting to the back by myself down the back stretch of the 400m, sucking air the whole way.

Coming around the last turn, when I began to hear my father waiting down there for me, just screaming at me as I belabored over those hurdles, I could hear his voice saying, "Go, Tim, go! Go, Tim, go!" And I crossed the finish line knowing that my dad was still a fan even though I was last place.

Doesn't matter where you're at, graduates, in the race of life against other people. God is for you.

The Apostle Paul said it this way in a rhetorical type question. Assuming we know based on the context of when he asked this question, he says this talking about God's goodness to us, his kindness to us. And then he says this: "If God is for us, for us, who can be against?"

"He who did not spare his own son, but gave him up for us all, will he not graciously give us everything we need for a life of godliness?"

You graduates, as you're out there in the world and you're jumping over the hurdles of life and the obstacles come your way, never forget God is for you. He's for you.

And even deeper than that, he wants to help you. He is an ever present help in our time of need. Psalm 46: "God is a refuge and a strength and an ever present help in time of trouble."

Your view of God matters deeply because it will affect your psyche and your soul. And if you have a sense deep within you, look, the creator is for me. And no matter what I face or whatever hurdles come

my way, he's going to be my helper. He's going to come and support me and encourage me. I'll never be alone.

After I graduated from high school, my parents took me to college. My mom tried to help me identify which college to go to, so she took me to literally almost every college we could think of in Iowa except one. And because I hadn't resonated with any of the others, I decided to go to the one I hadn't visited yet.

I didn't know anybody there. I didn't know professors. I didn't know any other students. And they took me there, dropped me off, moved me into the dorm room. We went down to the parking lot, said goodbye, and they pulled out. And there I stood in a new town, knowing no one, feeling an emotion, a feeling that I'd never really sensed that deeply before in my life, a kind of aloneness.

But I knew I wasn't alone. I had no idea what would lie ahead. There were many obstacles I would face in the next 3 to 4 years. But God was a helper and he carried me through. I leaned into him and I felt his strength, his encouragement, his help, and he will give that to you.

The Bible says, "The eyes of the Lord look to and fro across the earth, looking for those whose hearts are inclined towards him, that he may strongly support them."

He's a helper, an ever present help. But I also want to remind you today that he is, just sort of in pragmatic terms, he is God. God is God. He cannot be tricked. You can't outmaneuver him. You can't deceive him. You can't sneak around him. He is God.

Paul gave this encouragement about the nature of God. Galatians chapter six, verse seven: "Don't be confused. Don't be deceived. Don't let your heart lead you astray. God cannot be tricked. God cannot be mocked. He cannot be deceived."

He has certain ways, laws that he's wired into the universe. And one of the laws is the laws of sowing and reaping. We must remember that God has said, as every person sows, so shall they reap.

And the laws of sowing and reaping are this: you reap what you sow. You reap after you sow, and you reap more than you sow.

I'm 58 years old. I am reaping still from many of the decisions I made when I left high school, when I went through college, when I started a family. My life is the sum total of all the seeds that I've sown over the course of my life. And so it will be true of yours. Your life will become a harvest of all that you sow.

God has wired it this way. This is actually really good because if you decide to keep sowing a lot of good seeds, who knows what the harvest will be in your life 20, 30, 40, 50 years from now?

We are talking about a God who doesn't change, but he's also, as God, the God of the impossible, the God of abundance, the God for whom nothing is too difficult for him. He is for you. He loves you. He's an ever present help. But he is God, and he cannot be tricked. He cannot be worked around.

But if we sow good seed, he promises to multiply our lives. So here's my encouragement in response. Why not say yes to him every day? Why not just say, "God, here I am. What do you want? I'll do it."

And in encouraging you in that, I want to encourage you to say yes to yielding to him every day. Yield your lives to him.

When I was in that dorm room in college, we lofted our bed so we had more room in the dorm room, and we put them about 18in from the ceiling. And then we had one ladder up the middle, and we would part ways at the top of the ladder. My head went this way, my roommate's head went that way. And you tried to crawl into your bed there. You could hardly roll over because your shoulders would hit the ceiling.

And I used to lay up there in that lofted bed as if it were an altar, and I would offer my life to God. From the tips of my toes to the top of my head, I would pray, "God, it's all yours. Whatever you want from me, however you'll lead me, I yield it all to you. Show me what you want."

Over the course of four years of college, I just kept yielding myself to him until he showed me the next step after college. If you yield to him, you have no idea what he might do with your life.

So say yes to yielding to him every day. Romans 12 says, in view of his kindness, his mercy, his love for us, this is our proper act of worship.

Then say yes to enjoy him, enjoying all the opportunities he gives you, all the things he brings your way. Paul wrote to young Timothy and said, "God richly provides us with everything for our enjoyment," to enjoy the beauty and wonder of life, the opportunity of education, or a new profession. These are all gifts from God.

Even the trials that will come our way are gifts that he has to shape us and mold us and transform us. It's hard to enjoy trials when you're in the moment. But the psalmist said, looking back, "It was good that I was afflicted, otherwise I would not have sought the Lord."

As a matter of fact, the psalmist said, "Many are the challenges that even righteous people face, but the Lord will deliver them out of them all."

So when trials come your way, welcome them into your life and say, "God, I don't necessarily like it, but whatever you're going to do through me, in me, through this trial, I want to receive it from you in a joyful spirit."

James wrote to all of us, "Consider it joy when you encounter various trials, for the testing of your faith produces perseverance."

And then, of course, the blessings and the trials. Yield to him. Say, "Yes, God, I yield to you. I want to enjoy my life."

King Solomon searched all around. He didn't find life in a profession. He didn't find life in riches. He didn't find life in sensuality. Here's what he said: "A person can do nothing better than eat, drink, find satisfaction in their toil, in their service. This too I see, is from the hand of God. For without him who can eat and find enjoyment?"

As you walk closer with God, may he give you more joy in everything you face.

And then finally, say yes to serving you, serving you with your life, to living for an audience of one, Jesus.

Young disciples were passionate to use their lives well. They were arguing over who was going to be the greatest, who was going to leave the best mark in the world. Jesus asked them what they were arguing about, and they they knew it was a little off base, so they didn't answer him.

And so he called them all together and said, "Anyone who wants to be the first must be the very last, a servant of all."

But they didn't get it. And so a little later, James and John were arguing themselves, and they decided to go to Jesus and went up to Jesus and said, "Hey, when you set up your kingdom, could one of us be at your right or one of the left?" They wanted worldly status. They wanted worldly influence.

In this way, their perception was wrong. The other followers of Jesus were irritated with James and John, and so they called them all together, Jesus did, and he said, "You know those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles in their positions, that they have their abusive to others, not so with you."

Instead, he said, "Whoever wants to become great," he didn't squelch their passion. He knew they all wanted to be great. He said, "Whoever wants to be great must become the servant of others. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve others."

What can you give to this world? How did God wire you? How do you sharpen your skills, hone yourself to become the best servant of Christ and others in the world?

When I was in high school, I had a quote that I taped on my desk. It's from Francis Xavier. It said, "Tell the students to give up their small ambitions, come eastward and serve Christ."

I don't know what each of you will become: accountant, teacher, lawyer, homemaker, farmer. Who knows? But far more significant than any worldly role you'll fulfill, I hope you choose to serve Christ in whatever you do.

Jesus said to his disciples, "When the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, those who have followed him, the 12 will sit on the thrones, judging the 12 tribes of Israel. But everyone, everyone who makes sacrifices in this life to serve Christ will receive a hundred times as much on top of eternal life through faith in Jesus."

It's only one life. It'll soon be past. It's only what's done for Jesus Christ that will last.

Say yes to yielding to him, enjoying him, and serving him with all your might.

Father, we thank you for your Word which teaches us how to live. It teaches us about the purpose of life. It teaches us about you, teaches us about the nature of eternity. We thank you for it.

And as we are gathered here today, I think of each one of these seniors. Thank you for drawing them to yourself. Thank you for the chance to serve them in this church body. And as they prepare to launch into their next phase, we do pray that you prepare their hearts and encourage them and stir them, and give

them greater and greater revelation of who you are and how you made them, the giftedness they have to contribute well to this world for your eternal kingdom sake.

We pray this in Jesus name. Amen.