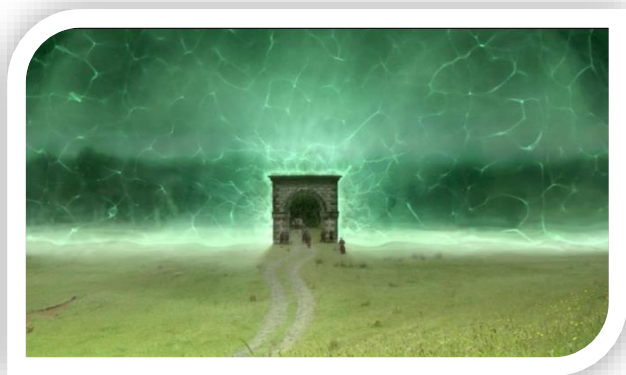


One thing I say a lot (I'll bet you've noticed) is that only two things cross the boundary between this life and the next: our own **character** and **other people** whom we've led to Jesus. And the reason God uses our present experiences to shape our character is so we'll be willing, ready, and eager to spend eternity with Him. God wants us to be able to fully enjoy and appreciate the Gift that has been prepared for us since before the creation of the world!



While a great deal of our earthly journey is joy-full and glorious, some of the shaping experiences we undergo as we walk with God are not a great deal of fun. While the numbers may not be exact, I think F. B. Meyer was onto something when he explained that “A bar of iron worth \$2.50, when wrought into horseshoes

is worth \$5. If made into needles it is worth \$175. If made into penknife blades it is worth \$1,625. If made into springs for watches it is worth \$125,000. What a ‘trial by fire’ that bar must undergo to be worth this! But the more it is manipulated, and the more it is hammered and passed through the heat, beaten, pounded, and polished, the greater its value.”



is worth \$5. If made into needles it is worth \$175. If made into penknife blades it is worth \$1,625. If made into springs for watches it is worth \$125,000. What appear to be flaws are really strategically-designed shapes that minimize the air resistance the ball experiences in its flight.

A similar example could be made with a golf ball. Even if you don't play golf, I imagine that you've seen the pock-marks or dimples that cover



If we apply these two metaphors to our lives, we begin to be able to see God's action in our lives, both in what God *causes* and in what God *allows*, in a different light. Another metaphor that helps me is this one from C. S. Lewis:

“Imagine yourself as a living house. At your invitation, God comes in to rebuild that house. At first, perhaps, you can understand what He is doing. He is getting the drains right and stopping the leaks in the roof and so on. . . . But presently He starts knocking the house about in a way that hurts abominably and does not seem to make sense. What on earth is He up to?

“The explanation is that He is building quite a different house from the one you thought of—throwing out a new wing here, putting on an extra floor there, running up towers, making

courtyards. You thought you were going to be made into a decent little cottage, but He is building a palace. He intends to come and live in it Himself.”¹

While you and I don’t know nearly all we’d like to know about the journey ahead, we do know this: **the journey begins in LOVE and it ends at HOME**. The Bible tells us that “*We need have no fear of someone who loves us perfectly; his perfect love for us eliminates all dread of what he might do to us. If we are afraid, it is for fear of what he might do to us, and shows that we are not fully convinced that he really loves us*” (1 John 4:18, LB).

And once all of these things begin to operate in our lives, we begin to be able to “*be thankful in all circumstances, for this is God’s will for you who belong to Christ Jesus*” (1 Thessalonians 5:18). Another word for “be thankful,” of course, is “gratitude,” and I want to share with you some questions from Angeles Arrien’s *Living in Gratitude*,² kindly shared with me by Kathaleen Klotz.

Arrien suggests four major areas of our lives in which we can give attention to gratitude: **Blessings, Mercies, Learnings, and Protections**. She offers eight questions for regular reflection, four “external” and four “internal.” I find these questions worthy of frequent consideration:

External Questions:

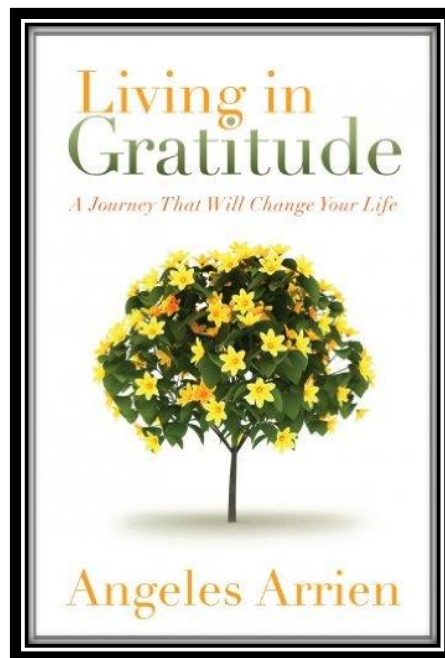
1. Who or what has *inspired* you?
2. Who or what is *challenging* you?
3. Who or what is *surprising* you?
4. Who or what is *touching* or *moving* you?

Internal Questions

1. What is *strengthening* within my nature?
2. What is *softening* within my nature?
3. What is *opening* within my nature?
4. What is *deepening* within my nature?

And finally, one of the most frequent and trustworthy means by which God shapes us is through the written Word. Regular reading, study, and meditation on the Word is one of our primary sources of spiritual nourishment and transformation. And memorizing the Word helps us resist temptation, make wise decisions, reduce stress, build confidence, offer good advice, and share our faith with others.”³ Using your mind to memorize Scripture may even help to stave off dementia!

You might start with the benediction we’re using in worship during our 40-Day journey. It has become quite a blessing to me:



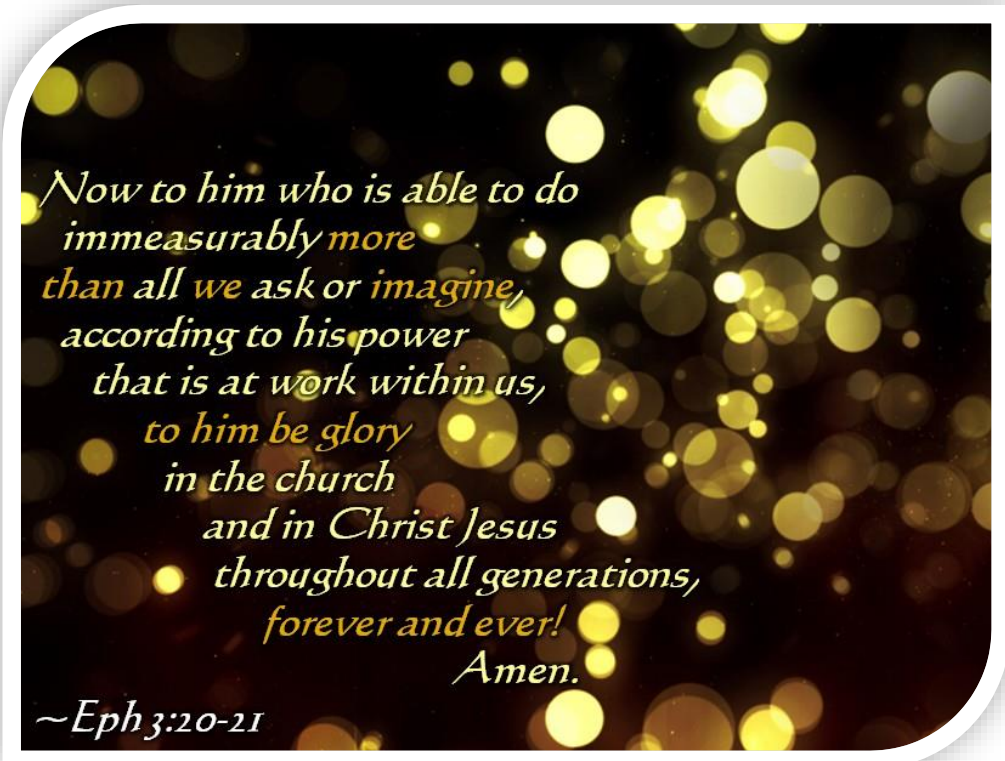
¹ C. S. Lewis, *Mere Christianity* (1943), pp. 174-175.

² Angeles Arrien, *Living in Gratitude: Mastering the Art of Giving Thanks Every Day* (Boulder, CO: Sounds True, 2011).

³ Rick Warren, *What On Earth Am I Here For? The Purpose Driven Life*, expanded edition (Zondervan, 2012), p. 189.

*Now to him who is able to do immeasurably more than all we ask or imagine,
according to his power that is at work within us,
to him be glory in the church and in Christ Jesus throughout all generations,
for ever and ever! Amen (Ephesians 3:20-21).*

Dave



*Now to him who is able to do
immeasurably more
than all we ask or imagine,
according to his power
that is at work within us,
to him be glory
in the church
and in Christ Jesus
throughout all generations,
forever and ever!
Amen.*

~Eph 3:20-21