



God is spirit, and those who
worship him must worship in spirit and truth.

John 4:24

On Worship
with Pastor Steve

Designed by God for God

I recently underwent open heart surgery to replace an aortic valve which had been defective since birth. The entire ordeal took our family quite by surprise as I was showing no symptoms of heart problems. Here is how the events unfolded.

On May 21 I visited the doctor for what they thought was a sinus infection. I did indeed have a virus, but it was totally unrelated to my heart. While visiting the doctor he heard the heart murmur I have had since birth and suggested that I have an echocardiogram performed; which I had never had. I did that on May 27 and my doctor's office called me on May 30 to inform me that the results showed that I had some hardening of the aortic valve. They made me an appointment to see a cardiologist on the June 19. Since our family was supposed to take a trip to Washington D.C. on June 8 I decided to go back to my doctor on June 2 to see if I could get some more information. While there he reviewed the results of the echocardiogram and was spooked. He personally spoke with the cardiologist and had my appointment changed to June 3; which was the next day.

When the cardiologist came into the exam room he asked me where I was going on vacation. I told him Washington D.C. and he said, "You're not going anywhere. You need open heart surgery. There is an 80 to 90 percent chance that you could drop dead any minute. I am having you admitted to the hospital today. Don't even go home. I have a surgeon who can operate on you tomorrow." A few hours later I was being prepared for a heart catheterization. The results of that test showed that there were no blockages in my arteries. So, my only problem was my aortic valve which was not letting blood back into my body properly. They told me the valve was supposed to have had three gates, but I was born with only two. The gates had hardened over the years and reduced blood flow. According to the doctors I was basically a walking dead man. They did the surgery on Wednesday, June 4 and I came home Monday, June 9.

God is faithful. Had I not had the virus I would have not gone to the doctor and may have dropped dead in Washington D.C. while on vacation. To add to this amazing puzzle is that fact that originally we had planned to leave on vacation June 1. However, one of my daughters decided to take a May-mester class at college which would not end until June 3. Because of that we pushed back our vacation departure date. She ended up dropping the class before I underwent surgery, but had she not taken the class to begin with we most likely would have continued with our vacation plans.

As I lay in the hospital bed the night before the surgery I, as well as my wife and kids, was sort of in shock. I just wanted to wake up from the bad dream and go home. We would just look at each other and say, "I can't believe this is happening." I felt fine. Even the doctors and nurses could not believe that I wasn't showing any symptoms of my condition.

The entire night was a nightmare. Every hour someone was coming into my room to perform some sort of procedure to prepare me for surgery. I got little sleep but did manage to get in quite a bit of prayer time. God was very sweet during those moments as he quieted my fears with promises that he was in control and all would be well. Even so, there were anxious moments when I would need to turn it all over to him again and worship him for his sovereignty and steadfast love. God was faithful to give me the grace to endure each procedure (I now know how a pen cushion feels) and I sensed his presence each time.

Many times while lying in the hospital bed the Holy Spirit brought this scripture to my mind; *Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed. And in Your book they all were written, The days fashioned for me, When as yet there were none of them.* (Psalms 139:16)

The Hebrew word for fashioned used by David in this Psalm is yatsar. According to Strong's Concordance of the Bible yatsar means to press (intransitive), i.e. be narrow; figuratively, be in distress: be distressed, be narrow, be straitened (in straits), be vexed; (through the squeezing into shape); to mould into a form; especially as a potter; figuratively, to determine (i.e. form a resolution): earthen, fashion, form, frame, make (-r), potter, purpose.

The first time we see this word used in scripture is in Exodus 32 which begins with Moses on Mount Sinai receiving the tables of testimony from God. The children of Israel grew impatient waiting for Moses to return and summoned Aaron to make them a god. Aaron gave in to their demands and had them bring their golden earrings to him. Verse four reads, *And he received the gold from their hand, and he fashioned it with an engraving tool, and made a molded calf. Then they said, This is your god, O Israel, that brought you out of the land of Egypt!*

When Moses returned to the camp he was so furious with Israel that he broke the tablets of testimony on the foot of the mountain. When he confronted Aaron about the golden calf, Aaron replied, *And I said to them, Whoever has any gold, let them break it off. So they gave it to me, and I cast it into the fire, and this calf came out.* (Exodus 32:24) Well, we know from the meaning of the Hebrew word for fashioned that Aaron sought to justify his actions. In fact, he had hammered out that golden calf. He had molded it into shape and formed it for a specific purpose.

So it was with my surgery. The Father was not caught off guard; he was not totally surprised as we were. He not only knew about it, he planned it. He didn't just merely allow it to happen; he squeezed it into shape; he formed, framed and molded it like a potter does a vessel. And he did it for a specific purpose.

I don't yet know all the specifics as to why God planned this in my life, however I believe I do see part of the big picture. One reason God planned it was to conform me into the image of Jesus. In Romans 8:29 the Apostle Paul wrote, *For whom He foreknew, He also predestined to be conformed to the image of His Son, that He might be the firstborn among many brethren.* God desires to use this incident in my life as a tool to hammer out the mirror image of his son in me. He desires that when others look at me they only see Christ. When they see Christ they will see God because Christ is the exact image of the Father. The Father is the one who is the most glorious to look upon. That is why he created us as well as the rest of creation; so we would behold it and stand in awe of such a glorious God. This brings me to another reason I believe God planned my surgery; for his great name's sake and the praise of the glory of his grace.

God takes great pleasure in the exaltation of his name. In fact, God is jealous for the exaltation of his name. That is why he chose Israel as his people. Jeremiah records, *For as the sash clings to the waist of a man, so I have caused the whole house of Israel and the whole house of Judah to cling to Me, says the LORD, that they may become My people, for renown, for praise, and for glory; but they would not hear.* (Jeremiah 13:11) God didn't choose Israel because they deserved it or so that Israel would be great for Israel's sake or that people would praise or give glory to Israel. God does not give his glory to another (Isaiah 48:11). He chose Israel so that he could show his greatness and glory through them and receive the praise and glory due his name. God has now chosen a people not from one nation but from many nations for this very same purpose.

Paul wrote, *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ, just as He chose us in Him before the foundation of the world, that we should be holy and without blame before Him in love, having predestined us to adoption as sons by Jesus Christ to Himself, according to the good pleasure of His will, to the praise of the glory of His grace, by which He made us accepted in the Beloved.* (Ephesians 1:3-6) The Greek work for predestined in verse five means predetermined, determined before or ordained. In other words he fashioned our adoption and chose us in him before the foundation of the world for a specific purpose.

God didn't predestine us to adoption as sons because we deserved it or because we some how earned it. We have no righteousness of our own but have been made the righteousness of God in Christ (2 Corinthians 5:21). He predestined us as sons to the praise of the glory of his grace. He predestined us and fashioned our days to show us and the entire world his great love and mercy, to make a great name for himself; that he would receive a praise and glory. That is the essence of all worship; for God's name to be exalted above all else.

My surgery has much more to do with God than it does me. My prayer is that in the coming days God will reveal more of his plan to me and that he will use my experience and life (and even in death) for renown, for praise and for the sake of the glory of his great name.

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