

Noble Subjects

Redeeming Scheming

I have a friend who grew up playing the trumpet with skill and uncommon flair. By the time she was an adult, she was winning first and second place trophies in statewide competitions.

It wasn't just about competition. She loved her trumpet and expressed herself through her music.

When she got saved, someone told her that if she really loved God she would give up her trumpet playing and offer it as a sacrifice to God.

So . . . she did. She got a doctorate in music and became the director of a church choir - until she got tired of the lack of fulfillment.

I have another friend who is the son of two artists. All of his growing up days, he planned to go to the finest school for his particular niche of art and spend his life doing what he loved doing.

When he got saved, someone told him that if he really loved God he would lay down his art and offer it as a sacrifice to God.

So . . . he did. He got a job as a youth leader at the church and went to Bible school to prepare for being in full time Christian ministry - until he got tired of the lack of fulfillment and left the ministry to go to art school.

Is this the God of the Bible? God the Kill Joy? God who designs us then won't let us be us? God whose greatest gratification comes from our greatest pain? God who only accepts church work from us?

I fully understand that there are many things that we can love more than God, and this can become a problem.

I know that God at times, out of His infinite love, will break our toys if we won't give them up, in order to draw our hearts to Him.

But all of that overlooks the end of the story. As soon as God has our hearts, it is His delight to give us back the things we were designed (by Him) to do and be.



I love the story of Naomi. She appears to have been a wheeler dealer. A schemer. She had an angle on everything. The evidence is that her controlling ways were an obstacle to her relationship with God.

Because her scheming was a problem, God allowed her to crash and burn in Moab. When she made it back to Bethlehem, she was pretty contrite. She had come to the wrong conclusion.

She thought God was mad at her and that is why He bankrupted her, stripping her of capital leaving her powerless to leverage much of anything.

I take a very different view of things. I see a God who designed her to be a deal maker, to see the available options when others don't see them and to weave together a stream of variables into a finished product.

I believe God thoroughly enjoyed watching her be herself - because that is what he made her to do.

He set her up in her home town with Ruth as a player in the scenario. Naomi appears to be too broken in health to glean in the fields, but Ruth was willing and able. However, Ruth did not know the Mosaic Law which said such gleaning was permissible to widows and the poor.

Guess who did? Yup. Naomi. So with no financial capital, Naomi leveraged the three things she had: the time of year (harvest time), a willing daughter-in-law and her knowledge of the culture and the Law.

God stepped in and breathed on Naomi's fragile venture by placing Ruth in the right field to be seen by Boaz. That little bit of help from God was all Naomi needed. She was off and running and worked the deal all the way to the wedding and the grandkids.

God smiled as he watched Naomi being herself.

Can you see that He did not just redeem her? He redeemed her scheming. She was made to see opportunities others didn't. Granted her pursuit of deals did lead her away from God for awhile.

The redemption of her heart began when she went back home where God had placed her. But her redemption was not complete until her design was validated.

Let me press this point. God did not need her involvement. Allow me to rewrite the story of Ruth.

Naomi and Ruth arrive in town. Ruth goes to the store at the same time Boaz does (due to God's control of timing). He sees Ruth, it is love at first sight, and off they go to make history. So easy for God.



I am convinced God took the long route so he could redeem Naomi's scheming.

Did my two friends need to give up their trumpet and art? Possibly, if those things were defiantly held as obstacles to obeying God. But that is not the way I heard the story. The advice they got was preventative crushing, just to be sure that nothing they loved could possibly diminish their spiritual walk. I don't get it. God made a happy place for Adam and Eve. He is going to make a happy place for his people in the millennial Kingdom. He is looking forward to some real happy people in heaven.

Who started this goofy theology that experiencing fulfillment by doing what God designed us to do was a sure fire way to ruin our relationship with him? That is just plain weird, twisted, bizarre . . .

Arthur Burk
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