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The Washington Institute

Vocation Is Mission:

HINTS OF HOPE

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Spring Series

Dr. Steven Garber

"Having hope is hard; harder when you get older."

-- Wendell Berry

The following is transcribed from Part 2 of the spring "Vocation Is Mission" lecture series delivered by Steve Garber in the Restoration Anglican Church, Arlington, Virginia, on Wednesday, May 16, 2012.

INTRODUCTION

Walker Percy is one of my intellectual heroes. I have read all of his works. He is a novelist and essayist. He was born into a family that could be called one of the "old families of the south." His father and grandfather and great grandfathers were senators and colonels and plantation owners, and he was born into a country club home in Birmingham, Alabama. At age 10, Percy came home from school and his father had committed suicide that afternoon. It traumatically changed his life for the rest of his life. Probably 55 years later he was teaching at a university as a distinguished author for a writer-in-residence program when a graduate student knocked on the door and Percy wheeled around in his chair and out of the blue said to the student, "I have one unanswered question in my life and that is, 'Why did my father kill himself?'" For 50 years or more he had been wrangling over this trauma and horror in his life, which is not surprising. In his fiction, you know that in every story he wrestles, one more time in one more way, with someone killing himself or herself. It is a theme from which he cannot walk away.

Percy was the eldest of three sons. When he was 15, his Mother took them to her home in Greenville, Mississippi to live. When he came home from school one day she hadn't come home. Later she was found off the levy in the water in her car, drowned. Nobody ever knew if it was an accident. His Uncle Will took in the orphaned boys and raised them.

Percy went to the University of North Carolina as a pre-med major and eventually decided to go to Columbia University for medical school. He did not want to be a family practice doctor but a scientist. Remember, Percy was coming of age in the 1930's, both his parents had perhaps both killed themselves, and quite consciously but maybe under the surface he realized you cannot trust people, but you have to trust in something. He trusted science because it provided everything that really mattered. In the 1930's, it seemed a possibility that science could lead us into the 20th century with hope, future, and confidence.

After four years of medical school, he contracted tuberculosis and, in a sour turn of history, he spent two years in a sanatorium trying to get better. His medical school residency program told him that he would probably have to step away from medicine and he did so for the rest of his life. By his late 20's, he had had trauma after trauma in his life, shaking the core of who he thinks he is and what he ought do with his life. He spent the next years reading, writing, and traveling. Nobody read what he wrote, which is heartbreak for a writer.

Finally, about 15 years later, he got a novel published, *The Moviegoer*. Surprise of surprises, it won the National Book Award for fiction, catapulting him to a level of providence in the literary world that he never left. He wrote about 6 novels over the next 25 years. Novel by novel he gained prominence in the world of literature. New York literary critics loved his work. They thought they had discovered finally an "American Camus."

Albert Camus was a French novelist and philosopher, in the mid-20th century, known for his willingness to look the bleakness of the human condition right in the eye, with eyes wide open, without turning away. The critics in New York thought, "Now we have in Walker Percy our own Camus. He is someone who honestly addresses the heartbreaks, sorrows, angst, and tensions of the human heart and doesn't blink." Percy responded to them with these words: "But I always want there to be a hint of hope in my writing. You've not understood me if you think I am Camus. I have not wanted to be him. I want to be honest about who we are but I want there to be some hint of hope in my writing."

Albert Camus was somebody who wrote very important stories. In my dropped-out-of-college years in London one evening in a cafe with other dropouts, after having seen his film *The Stranger* at the French embassy, we tried to make sense of what this important, weighty and hard to understand film meant for us in the early 1970's.

Years later, I came across *The Plague*, also by Camus, and I would say, more so than *The Stranger*, that it has been a dominant story in my life. It is a book from which I have never been able to walk away. It is a story principally of two people, a priest and a physician, in a 20th century Mediterranean city. They had just come to town and were facing the bubonic plague, begun with a rat biting someone and causing the whole city to get sick and begin to die. The priest and physician debated throughout the story about what to do and how to respond. Camus wrote *The Plague* in the middle of the French village of Le Chambon.

Years ago I took my daughter and some friends to the Key Theater in Georgetown, an art-house theater. We watched a 1989 documentary, *Weapons of the Spirit*, by French filmmaker Pierre Sauvage. In his 40's, camera on his back, he took a train into a French village, Le Chambon. There, during World War II, Huguenot Christians of the village hid 5,000 Jews from the Nazis and helped them cross the border into Switzerland. He asked them, "Why did you care when most of Europe did not care? Why did you respond and push back against the Nazis when most of Europe did not?" This question does not make sense until 2 hours into the story when he finally tells the Huguenots, "I was born here. That is why this question means everything to me. You took my parents in and I was born here. I want to know, why did you care?" Also in this film, the filmmaker shows us the little house in Le Chambon where Albert Camus wrote *The Plague* while Huguenots were keeping the Nazis away from the Jews.

There is historical weight on this story. In *The Plague*, Camus asked, "So, what do we do with the horrors of the world? What do we do with the heartaches and complexities of history as they bear down on us?" How do we respond to these questions in *The Plague*? I have never been able to walk away from the question. I think there are some good answers but they are not easy or cheap. Walker Percy said, "You see I always want there to be some hint of hope in my writing." The Huguenots responded to the filmmaker's question, "Why did you care?" with a surprising nonchalance: "What else could we have done? I don't want to talk about it." Looking back a half century later, it could have been a lot of things. "Why did you respond? Why did you step in, and why did you resist?" The Huguenots answered, "What else could we

have done?" when most would have chosen to do nothing. The questions and their answer remind me of the Oxford moral philosopher Iris Murdoch who said, "At crucial moments of choice, most of the business of choosing is already over." That is true for all of us. When we respond like the Huguenots did, we are the hints of hope, each and every time.

Hope vs. Optimism – A Line in the Sand

For a long time I taught on Capitol Hill at the American Studies program that drew undergraduates from across the country into Washington for a semester. It was politics, political science, political analysis, economics, history and more. We took domestic and international issues and allowed 20 and 21-year old students to study life in the world through the lenses of these tough, debatable, and complex questions.

After a semester of allowing the students to watch and listen to the City of Washington, I would give them an essay written by Stanley Hauerwas and Thomas L. Shaffer, then professors at Notre Dame, "Hope Faces Optimism." In the essay Hauerwas and Shaffer discuss Thomas More, the lead character in Robert Bolt's play, *A Man for All Seasons*, that became an academy award winning film in the 1960's. Some 500 years ago, his friend King Henry VIII made Thomas More Speaker of the House of Commons and Lord Chancellor. As Speaker, he refused to support King Henry VIII's plan to divorce Katherine of Aragon and later refused to swear to the Oath of Supremacy, which would have legitimized the king's divorce, and eventually he was beheaded. Hauerwas and Shaffer argue that More was someone who was shaped by the virtue of hope, not by the false idea and false hope of optimism. He made a line-in-the-sand distinction between hope and optimism. I would say the longer I have lived in this city the more that distinction makes sense to me.

If you come to Washington full of optimism about what you might do, smart and ambitious that you are, gifted that you are, serious God-on-your-side as you are, you will find after a few years that it doesn't quite work out that way. "Now what am I going to do?" Most times as I have watched the city over the years, I see optimism cycling back into cynicism, pessimism swirling into the cesspool or toilet bowl of a hard-bitten cynicism. People say, "I know I was naive when I was 22. I am not anymore and you shouldn't be either."

But how are you going to be somebody who keeps at it over time? Hauerwas and Shaffer argue that because you see the virtue of hope it is different. The virtue of hope sees the brokenness, hurt, complexity, injustice and push-and-shove of brokenness in public squares all over the world and says, "I am not going to be surprised by them. I knew about them ahead of time. I am not going to be thrown off my horse because I already knew the brokenness ahead of time." As we navigate the shoals on our way trying to hold onto integrity, Hauerwas says that for the person formed by the virtue of hope, we can make our way through because we are not people who believe that, "Smart, good, and serious as I am, it will get done because it ought to get done. It is the right thing to get done."

Machiavelli writes about "realpolitik." I watched students bumping up against the spirit of Machiavelli. People who live in other parts of America don't really understand in some ways the complexity of life in the city. I grew up in a small farming town in California. My father actually had a joint job with the USDA and University of California and was back and forth from Washington to California for many years. He knew the city and pretty quickly would critique the beltway mentality, "That Beltway mentality back in Washington." I know it, see it and understand it in some ways, but I also say that I know those who live there and work on K Street, and it's cynicism you are breathing more than arrogance. Maybe cynicism is the tender underbelly of arrogance—the hubris. It may look like hubris in some faraway place in America. "They are just so full of themselves in Washington," he would say. But I think those of us who live here realize that the harder part of the story is, "How are you going to keep at this over time." Realize that cynicism is lurking around the corner of your heart and mine. As Otto von Bismarck is said to have put it about his own German political moment a century and a half ago, "If you want to respect sausage or law then don't watch either being made."

The longer I think about what he said, I don't think it is really as much a hard-edged cynicism as it is a hard truthful account of what you have to be able to take in and walk through and understand if you are going to take up vocation in the public square.

Stories of Students – Education Connecting to Vocation

I've had many students in the course of my life. I will tell you about a few of them who are doing different things in the world.

Students in my American Studies program a long time ago included David Cummins, Santiago Sedaca and Neil MacBride, now members at Restoration Anglican, and Cheryl and Lonni Jackson, Jennifer Jukanovich, David Franz, Amy Sherman, and Chris Ditzenberger. They came to this city full of ambitions and hopes, as all 21-year-olds seem to do.

David finished his Masters degree in Washington and got involved with the Salt Lake City Olympics. In his spare time, he and his wife are in charge of figuring out how Restoration Anglican is going to find a new place to live and build a new building. In his daytime hours, David and his company figure out how we are going to park our cars in the cities of the world. Parking may seem the bane of your existence. Nobody seems to care at all, but someone has to or we would never find a parking place anywhere. I wish the signs would be more legible and honest, that they wouldn't cheat you and take your money. I haven't yet figured out how David can get me a green pass to avoid all that. His is a common good worker and he does believe in it.

Santiago works nearby in Ballston (Arlington, VA). He heads the Kurana Group. His company is commissioned to help develop the political and economic infrastructure for countries that could make sense of infusions of aid from agencies such as USAID or the World Bank. It is hard

work, complex work. Santiago is committed to trying to step into history and create some ways for people around the world to have better lives than not.

Neil is the US Attorney for Virginia. You see his name sometimes in the paper and on the news. He's somebody who worked on Capitol Hill for a long time and has found his way through different blessings, politically. One of the things he does each day, beyond the pale of most of our imaginations, is he sees things coming across his desk which are affronts on the security of your life and mine. There are fascinating and hard conversations to have with people like Neil. Like other US Attorneys I have known, he sees things that we can't really imagine. They hear about stories and ideas and plots and serious proposals to actually disrupt, hurt, maim, and kill your children and mine and many others too. Especially in the post-9/11 world, Neil's work deals with a lot of that.

Cheryl and Lonni Jackson live in Falls Church and Cheryl works at The Lab School, across the Potomac River. She is someone whom I thought might be a college president but she chose The Lab School instead, working with kids who have special learning needs, different ways of learning. She has master's degrees from a couple of different places and is serious, calm, gifted and purposeful and steps in where there is need. In some ways, the stories never stop but Cheryl has decided this is where she wants to spend the working days of her life.

Lonni is the Co-President of the Mustard Seed Foundation in Falls Church. Mustard Seed Foundation provides grants to people all over the face of the earth who need things and hope for things and want to do good work in the world. Some years ago, after the genocide in Rwanda, Lonni was in Africa to see what Mustard Seed Foundation could do about it. He said to me, "I was on a hill looking out across the center of Rwanda. First you see that camp over there where the Hutus live. The Tutsis are over there and then over there are the mixed breeds and they can't have anything to do with the others." That was a completely new geopolitical moment of my life. I understood the Hutus and Tutsis and as sorrowful as their tensions are historically, there is a whole third population that is alienated from everyone else. The Mustard Seed Foundation steps into these moments, and places like this, and offers them some hope.

Jennifer Jukanovich came to study years ago and about a week before she finished college, she wrote me a letter and said, "I'm almost done. What do you think I can do?" I knew of a job and she got it and served there well for a few years, then went on to another job. Now, she and her husband live in Kigali in the middle of Africa and they are working on microeconomic development projects, trying to renew, economically, the state of Rwanda.

David Franz was bright and motivated when he came into my life, but not so purposeful in his studies then. His semester with us opened his mind to what he might do in his world. One by one he did many things over the next few years and finally entered a Ph.D. program in sociology at the University of Virginia and spent several years there. Because of the reputation of that program and his good work, he could have gone anywhere in the world. He chose to go back to his little farming community of a few thousand people in Shasta, California. It has changed

from a predominantly Anglo population to predominantly Latino over the course of a generation. David met up with the city manager there and decided he would try to bring a reweaving of the social project into the life of the town by developing reading programs and programs of support for kids whose families don't make reading a priority at home. He brings a sophisticated social science Ph.D. to try to bring city resources to bear on the needs of a particular community. He entered this smaller, ordinary setting to say, "What could I do to step into history here?"

Amy Sherman lives in Charlottesville, Virginia. She now has become one of the leading voices in America for the Church's responsibility to the cities of this country. She has written several good books about that. Most recently she wrote *Kingdom Calling*. She is passionate, articulate, committed, and trying to work out what it means for people of God to take responsibility for the places where they live.

I was with Chris Ditzenberger last week in Colorado. He is the rector at St. Gabriel the Archangel, an Episcopal church in the Cherry Hills part of Denver. In December we put on a breakfast at Denver Seminary with Tom Nelson, the author of a book called *Work Matters*. We have been taking Tom across the country to visit cities with seminaries. Tom is a good friend. He has asked us to help get his book and ideas out, so we have committed to traveling across America for a year meeting pastors, seminary professors, and business people in communities. After the Denver event, Chris said, "I have a sabbatical coming up this summer. Could I do it on this question of vocation and the mission of Christ in the world? Would you help me please?" Eventually Bill Haley and I went out to lead a retreat for 10 pastors from Denver with Chris at the center. Our large question was, "What is God doing in the world, the meaning of vocation and work for God's people, and how do pastors address these questions in the context of their own vocations?"

I got a letter from Chris yesterday. He wants to develop "eyes to see,"—an image we used when I was there last week. One evening we watched a film called *The Last Butterfly* on vocation and work. Probably my favorite film, it had the unfortunate timing of having its debut the same month as *Schindler's List*. You can imagine what that might have done for a Czech filmmaker who was taking his best shot at telling the story of the Holocaust and found himself competing against Steven Spielberg. *The Last Butterfly* ran at the Key Theater in Georgetown, but didn't make it to theaters across America. It is the historical fiction story of Antoine Moreau, the greatest mime artist in all of Europe. In the 1930's he travels from city to city, giving performances everyone wants to see. During WWII, he begins to lose his way vocationally, drinking too much, entering more of a life of a clown than an artist. During this sad period of time for him, he joins a troupe of actors, deciding to regain and take up his vocation one more night. He speaks quite loudly in silence to his audience, which includes the whole Gestapo of Paris. Saying not a word, everyone understands completely and clearly what he has said. The next day the Gestapo chief in Paris twists his arm behind his back and says, "All I want you to do is perform for some Jewish children, OK?"

Moreau agrees and they take him to Theresienstadt, a town in Czechoslovakia that was maintained by the Nazis to show the Red Cross the good care they were taking of the Jews. "Look! See them. We're taking such good care of the Jews here. There is no problem here for the Jews under our care," the Nazis say. The Red Cross asked few questions and didn't look behind the walls to see that the train tracks went to Auschwitz. The town was only a stop on the way. In Theresienstadt, the Jews themselves would choose what other Jews to put on the train to Auschwitz. It was a grizzly time in history—the Jews being made to be complicit in what was going on.

Antoinne Moreau goes to this town to give a performance for the children, having no idea what he is stepping into. All he knows is that the Nazis run the city of Jews and he is to do a performance for the children. The great people of the Jewish ghetto, who are themselves leaders of artistic communities throughout Europe, make up a little orchestra including the concertmaster for the Viennese Symphony and the Conductor for the Berlin Philharmonic. They are there to perform on their way to Auschwitz, watching their own people being sent off by their own people, week by week, under the mandate of the Nazis. Over time, Moreau begins to understand what is going on. In the moment when he begins to clearly see what he has been brought into, he begins to push back.

Moreau decides to retell the story of Hansel and Gretel, and as you hear the Jewish elders objecting to Moreau's version of the story, Moreau sends the message, without words, that "if you have eyes to see maybe you will see something in our silent telling of this story."

Audience viewed clip of the film, showing preparation for the Red Cross to visit Theresienstadt. They have painted buildings, planted flowers, displayed posters and are feeding the children bread in preparation for the visit by the Red Cross. Moreau is rehearsing his performance, having now understood what is going on.

The discussion with the Denver pastors was about "having eyes to see." To see that the task, the vocation, of the pastor is to help his people to begin to *have eyes to see* what is going on in the world.

That really is so much of the heart of the Biblical vision and of Jesus' teaching. How do you have eyes to see? Do you have eyes to see or not? Story by story, parable by parable we hear this question echoed. When Jesus responds to the simple story of seeds thrown out on different kinds of soil, he says, "Do you have ears to hear?" and he walks away.

What we pursued with the pastors was about vocations of people like my friends, like David and Santiago, who are in places around the world in their own congregations trying to be people in their own different sorts of ways. They believe in hope, have been formed by hope and are not giving into a kind of optimism, which will necessarily end its way in the toilet of cynicism.

The Last Butterfly is one more story of *having eyes to see*. It is Les Chambon again. It is the question the filmmaker asked, "Why did you have eyes to see? Why did you see yourself as implicated in history, as responsible for the way that things turned out when most of Europe seemed not to care? Why did you care?"

Living Proximately

As I have wrestled with this in my own thinking over the years, I have come to think that this language of living proximately allows us to hold on and become people like we ought to be in the world.

Some years ago *Comment* magazine asked me if I would write something on the vocation of politics. Over a summer I thought about it and offered them an essay that I called "Making Peace with Proximate Justice."

"Making Peace with Proximate Justice" (*Comment* magazine)

An essay and a symposium

"It is into this reality that my teaching has increasingly focused on the hope of proximate justice. How is it that we help people form visions and virtues that will sustain them in their vocations for the rest of life? That will, by grace, form in them the sufficient skills to navigate the shoals of a world that will disappoint them, that along the way will wound them? Because you too are someone who loves God and his world, you know that your longer hopes and dreams are for 25 years from now, praying that somehow you and those you love will keep on keeping on, having deepened and not discarded the beliefs about God and the world that seem so vital today. It is not easy.

At the Washington Institute we continue to believe that it is the willingness to pray and work towards proximate justice—the vision of something, rather than all or nothing—that allows us to keep going, even as we face what often seems insurmountable and unchangeable."

So you can think about what you have watched in the course of just this day. You may work in the city that takes you into complex questions of what is the right thing to do whether it is politics, economics, the law, social sectors or health care. How do you decide at the end of the hour, appointment or the day, "This is right" or "It's not this way," "I am going to work on this instead," or "This is the right way for us to go." The questions are never easy and the answers are even harder whether in *The Washington Post* headlines or the CNN online reports over the day. However you keep up, whether watching *The Daily Show* by night or Rush Limbaugh in the course of the day, find your ways into hearing what is going on and making your judgments about how you respond to what is going on.

We have questions, as did good people, God's people, over generations. In its own way it was the question of the Huguenots in the 1940's. "How will we respond to what is going on? What does it mean for us to know this?" The theme in this story of *The Last Butterfly*, even with just the short clip that you saw here, was, "I didn't know but now I know." One of the great questions we pursue wherever we go in our work is, "What does it mean to connect knowledge with responsibility? How do you know in a way which implicates you in what you know?"

As children of the enlightenment, it is very easy to imagine ourselves as being able to know about all kinds of things yet not be responsible for any of them. "Yes I know that; of course I know," we say and then walk away and take our souls off the moral hook of social history simply saying, "Of course I know, but what of it is for me?"

Speaking to students this past winter at Reed College, I began by telling them about the horrific murder that took place in Bethesda at a running store. Two women were in the store at night and one got awfully, horribly, tragically murdered. On the other side of the wall was the glitzy, glamorous Apple store, full of experts and "geniuses," people who tragically heard that night someone crying out, "Help me! Help me! Help me!" yet did nothing. They went home that night. The next morning there was yellow tape around the building and the news was out that someone had been murdered and had been calling out with decreasing energy, "Help me," the night before. How is it that we dare call people who work in stores like that "geniuses and experts?" What does it mean in the world we live in today that we can KNOW but not DO? In many ways it may be the hardest way, not just a 21st century problem but a perennial problem, to know and not do. It was a question the filmmaker asked the Huguenots and Jesus asked and the prophets asked, "How could you know but not do?"

When I think about what is called of all of us, I wonder, "How do we take up responsibility in history and realize that we may have a strong sense, a Biblically informed vision, that "it is right and just to do this'?" I know that some of you hear of stories and questions and cases in the course of your life and there are not many days when it seems all justice was done that day. "It all happened in the course of this day. Finally everything happened that should have happened. I can sleep tonight." It just doesn't work that way. If we are going to be people who keep on keeping on, we're going to have to figure out some way to connect vocation with eschatology. The eschatology of the people of God in the world is marked by a story that begins with creation and goes to consummation. The story is marked by these grand moments of redemptive history from creation to fall to redemption to consummation.

As the best writers put it, "we are stretched taut between now and not yet, between already and not yet, and between what we know ought to be." What we know is on the basis of the death and resurrection of Christ, "and yet, and yet, and yet..." We still live with the sorrows, aches, and groans as Romans Chapter 8 put it, "the groaning of creation itself; yearning, waiting someday for things to be set right." We ourselves live in that. Stretched taut as we are, how are we going to live apart from somehow deciding that it is better to have done some justice,

tried to make something happen that was right in the world this day, even realizing that when the day is all over it all won't have happened.

I think the same idea of proximate justice is worked out in the rest of life. I've often given wedding homilies. I am not a pastor but a professor, but I am sometimes asked to speak about the moral meaning of marriage. This particular homily was printed in the magazine, *Critique*, and written for a couple in Chapel Hill, North Carolina. She was finishing a graduate degree and her husband was beginning one. Good people, they still live there.

"Wedding Homily"

Critique magazine

Today is a day of covenant-making, this day of marriage, of promises made and of love declared. And we are your people, Madison and Pamela, the ones who have come together because of great love for you, and we are the ones who will stand with you, not only today, but for your life. More than any others on the face of the earth, we will hope for you, we will long with you as you find your way into the delights and graces of marriage.

But as we do that, we also say to you that we want you to know that the words you give to each other today will be morally meaningful, if they lead you into proximate happiness together. Proximate—not perfect? Yes, proximate, not perfect. Proximate means close, sometimes very close—but not quite. It is real, so real that it can be touched, but it is not complete, not perfect. At your very best you will disappoint each other; at your very best you will find that you cannot be all that the other requires. There will be needs unmet, hopes unsatisfied. And then what will you do? Will you be able to find honest and true happiness together, proximate happiness together, and be glad for that? Or do you require of yourselves, and this almost perfect day, a perfect marriage as the only possible future, the only future that you will accept?

Now I have done my best, I assure you, to glory in the flowers and the day and the family and friends celebrating with them at weddings. So I try not to ever be Puddleglum. But, I have included words like this each time I have spoken at a wedding. It is not surprising any more to have a stream of folks walk up to me afterwards, most married, sometimes saying, "That is just what I needed to hear today." I've only wanted to offer them something that might be a guide into a life together, to honor their hopes, the day, and the glory of the day. To say, "Would you be willing to make these promises if proximate happiness was yours 25 years from now? Will you require of the day more than that?" If it is politics and vocation, somehow woven into eschatology, it is the vocation of husband and wife and of marriage that will open into that same eschatological mission. We don't expect any part of life will ever be on this side of the eschaton, perfection. Yet, I live with people all day and talk with folks week after week who, in different sorts of ways, wrestle with this, strain with this, and wish it were different, "because I work so hard at it. I am better. I deserve more than that. It should have been different than

this in my life." In thousands of ways, because our hearts are thousands of kinds of hearts, we find ourselves strained against this "now but not yet" moment which all of us know. How will you find your way into a relationship with somebody, married or not, in the context of this story of marriage? Being willing to give yourself to the hope that maybe by God's great grace in 10 years you will find you are able to say, "Thanks be to God; we have found honest happiness together. We've found real happiness together. We have found a proximate happiness together. Thanks be to God."

I also offer these words of the poem by Madeleine L'Engle.

"The Weather of the Heart"

by Madeleine L'Engle

Because you're not what I would have you be
 I blind myself to who, in truth, you are.
 Seeking mirage where desert blooms, I mar
 Your you. Aaah. I would like to see
 Past all delusion to reality.
 Then would I see God's image in your face,
 His hand in yours, and in your eyes his grace.
 Because I'm not what I would have me be,
 I idolize Two who are not in any place,
 Not you, not me, and so we never touch.
 Reality would burn. I do not like it much.
 And yet in you, in me, I find a trace
 Of love which struggles to break through
 The hidden lovely truth of me, of you.

In the presence of my dear wife Meg, I would say there have been times in our lives together when we relied on these words of Madeleine L'Engle to come back together again as husband and wife. Where we found strain, hurt, and wound and were not quite sure what to say, if anything could be said, finding these words that are so wise and attentive to the complexity of her heart and mine were comforting. Then we were able to find words to say to each other to allow us to one more time enter back into what we hoped for and promised years ago.

"Because you are not what I would have you be, I blind myself to who in truth you are." Well, a lot more could be said about it than all of this.

One book I have liked very much, when getting at this question of proximate happiness in marriage, is a novel by Kate Kerrigan, *Recipes for a Perfect Marriage*. If you would like one some day then don't read this book. Read it if you are willing to live with proximate happiness. It is a story of a granddaughter and a grandmother. The grandmother lives in Ireland; the granddaughter lives in New York City, an editor of a major cooking magazine who also loves to cook. She learned to cook at the apron strings of her Grandmother during a summer in

Ireland. She watched her grandparents, sure that they had a perfect marriage. Now in her 30's, married, she realizes that there is hope and passion and longing and disappointment because it isn't perfect after all.

The story is painfully told between the granddaughter's life and her grandmother's life. With the gift of her grandmother's letters and diaries, the granddaughter reads the story of her life and slowly begins to be aware that her grandparents struggled deeply, mightily, in their years together. There was deep hurt that they never got over. There was perennial disappointment. There were arguments. There was frustration and silence over weeks, months and years. In the little girl's eyes they had a perfect marriage and now in her own marriage and in reading the diaries, she realizes it wasn't perfect at all. As she navigates her way through her own life and her grandmother's life, she begins to understand that there is a deeper story about what a good marriage is. Maybe there is a recipe but it wasn't what she thought it was when she entered into her own. Proximate living, whether proximate justice or happiness, means coming to the conclusion that something is better than nothing.

In Francis A. Schaeffer's book *True Spirituality*, he argues that as he watches churches and human beings, often there are many people who seem to live as "if you can't get all, you have to choose nothing." He says we live with this "paralysis syndrome of all or nothing" in too much of our lives. Imagine if perfection is possible. All should be achieved. If we don't get that, disappointment and hurt and sorrow and frustration set in. We then decide, "I'll just choose to walk away." Schaeffer says that often churches are full of people who walked away because after a time it didn't get to be what they wanted. Marriages are an awful lot like that with "all or nothing." They didn't get all and in sorrow and hurt they walk away thinking they would rather have nothing than not all of what they wanted it to be.

The Eschatological vision is ours as people of God. We groan with creation. People ask, "How are you?" every day. I'll respond, depending on whether I think they want an answer or not. If they want even a little bit of one I will say, "There are things I am very glad for today but there are things I have groaned about too." It is just the life I live. Every day I do both. There are things I am glad for, like the glorious hydrangeas in our back yard. The tiger lilies are behind them and the purple and orange look beautiful for a few weeks in June. It brings me great gladness.

Every night I go to bed groaning about things as concrete and real and weighty as the flowers in my yard. But you see, somehow you've got to decide whether something is better than nothing. The eschatological vision belongs to us and in it we find our own identities as God's people in the world. "Now, but not yet. Already, but not yet." We do groan with creation, believing, longing, hoping with creation itself that someday it will be set right.

25 years ago I bought a poster of the Edward Burne-Jones painting *Love Among the Ruins* at the National Gallery of Art and had it mounted. It was damaged in a later move. I first was upset and thought I would fix it, but then I thought I should keep it like this. It is on a sidewall in our

bedroom and is its own artistic reminder that love is always in the ruins. Of course it is a broken painting of *Love Among the Ruins*.

Showed audience the framed "Love Among the Ruins" poster.

If you have eyes to see you shouldn't miss the point here that even at our very best, our love is in the ruins. It isn't a bad love, or a false or wrongful love. It is a good, honest, and true love that in some ways finds its own rest in the proximate gift of God that we have access to as God's people of the world where we can touch and feel and see it to be real, realizing that at the end of the day it will still be a broken love.

In my study I have another version of *Love in the Ruins*, a novel by Walker Percy. This is the first of two novels about a fictional character named Thomas More. In Percy's fictional universe, More is a psychiatrist working at a place called "The Love Clinic" where they do experiments on love. He is a lapsed Catholic who drinks too much, makes bad choices and still wants to love and be loved. At the very end of this story, there is one of the most delightful paragraphs ever written by anyone.

If you are attentive to the questions and the strains of the enlightened world that is ours, one of More's inventions in this story is the "Qualitative Quantitative Ontological Lapsometer." He captures the last few hundred years profoundly and exactly in his satirical invention. The last paragraph of the book is one of my favorites:

"To bed we go for a long winter's nap. Twined about each other as the ivy twineth. Not under a bush or in a car or on the floor or any such humbug that has marked the past peculiar years of Christendom, but at home in bed where all good folk belong."

Whether it's a painting, a novel, my friends I know well, or students of mine wondering if it would be possible to live in the world without seeing the sausage being made, I have told you some stories of a few people who live across the city and around the world who have decided to connect their educations to their vocations, to be people who in their own sorts of ways are hints of hope. That is your vocation and mine; it is a vocation for all of God's people for everyone everywhere.