

TWO FATHERS, TWO FEASTS

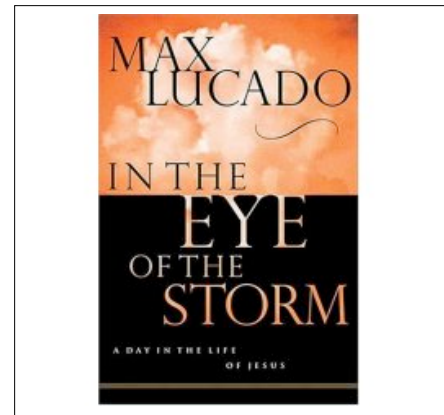
by Max Lucado

I DROVE THE FAMILY TO Grandma's last night for Thanksgiving. Three hours into the six-hour trip, I realized that I was in a theology lab.

A day with a car full of kids will teach you a lot about God. Transporting a family from one city to another is closely akin to God transporting us from our home to his. And some of life's stormiest hours occur when the passenger and the Driver disagree on the destination.

A journey is a journey, whether the destination be the Thanksgiving table or the heavenly one. Both demand patience, a good sense of direction, and a driver who knows that the feast at the end of the trip is worth the hassles in the midst of the trip.

The fact that my pilgrims were all under the age of seven only enriched my learning experience.



As minutes rolled into hours and our car rolled through the hills, I began to realize that what I was saying to my kids had a familiar ring. I had heard it before—from God. All of a sudden, the car became a classroom. I realized that I was doing for a few hours what God has done for centuries: encouraging travelers who'd rather rest than ride.

I shared the idea with Denalyn. We began to discover similarities between the two journeys. Here are a few we noted.

In order to reach the destination, we have to say no to some requests.

Can you imagine the outcome if a parent honored each request of each child during a trip? We'd inch our bloated bellies from one ice-cream store to the next. Our priority would be popcorn and our itinerary would read like a fast-food menu. "Go to the Cherry Malt and make a right. Head north until you find the Chili Cheeseburger. Stay north for 1,300 calories and bear left at the Giant Pizza. When you see the two-for-one Chili Dog Special, take the Pepto-Bismol Turnpike east for five convenience stores. At the sixth toilet ..."

Can you imagine the chaos if a parent indulged every indulgence?

Can you imagine the chaos if God indulged each of ours?

No is a necessary word to take on a trip. Destination has to reign over Dairy Deluxe Ice Cream Sundae.

“For God has not *destined* us [emphasis mine] to the terrors of judgement, but to the full attainment of salvation through our Lord Jesus Christ.”¹

Note God’s destiny for your life. Salvation.

God’s overarching desire is that you reach that destiny. His itinerary includes stops that encourage your journey. He frowns on stops that deter you. When his sovereign plan and your earthly plan collide, a decision must be made. Who’s in charge of this journey?

If God must choose between your earthly satisfaction and your heavenly salvation, which do you hope he chooses?

Me, too.

When I’m in the driver’s seat as the father of my children, I remember that I’m in charge. But when I’m in the passenger’s seat as a child of my Father, I forget that he’s in charge. I forget that God is more concerned with my destiny than my belly (although my belly hasn’t done too badly). And I complain when he says no.

The requests my children made last night on the road to Grandma’s weren’t evil. They weren’t unfair. They weren’t rebellious. In fact, we had a couple of cones and Cokes. But most of the requests were unnecessary.

My four-year-old daughter would argue that fact. From her viewpoint, another soft drink is indispensable to her happiness. I know otherwise, so I say no.

A forty-year-old adult would argue that fact. From his standpoint, a new boss is indispensable to his happiness. God knows otherwise and says no.

A thirty-year-old woman would argue that fact. From her standpoint, *that* man with *that* job and *that* name is exactly who she needs to be happy. Her Father, who is more concerned that she arrive at his City than at the altar, says, “Wait a few miles. There’s a better option down the road.”

“Wait!” she protests. “How long do I have to wait?”

¹ 1 Thessalonians 5:9, neb.

Which takes us to a second similarity between the two journeys.

Children have no concept of minutes or miles.

“We’ll be there in three hours,” I said.

“How long is three hours?” Jenna asked. (How do you explain time to a child who can’t tell time?)

“Well, it’s about as long as three Sesame Streets,” I ventured.

The children groaned in unison. “Three Sesame Streets?! That’s forever!”

And to them, it is.

And to us, it seems that way, too.

He who “lives forever”² has placed himself at the head of a band of pilgrims who mutter, “How long, O Lord? How long?”³

“How long must I endure this sickness?”

“How long must I endure this spouse?”

“How long must I endure this paycheck?”

Do you really want God to answer? He could, you know. He could answer in terms of the here and now with time increments we know. “Two more years on the illness.” “The rest of your life in the marriage.” “Ten more years for the bills.”

But he seldom does that. He usually opts to measure the *here and now* against the *there and then*. And when you compare *this* life to *that* life, this life ain’t long.

Our days on earth are like a shadow.⁴

Each man’s life is but a breath.⁵

You are a mist that appears for a little while and then vanishes.⁶

2 Isaiah 57:15.

3 Psalm 74:10; 89:46.

4 1 Chronicles 29:15.

5 Psalm 39:5.

6 James 4:14.

As for man, his days are like grass, he flourishes like a flower of the field; the wind blows over it and it is gone, and its place remembers it no more.⁷

“It’s a short journey,” I offer to the children. “We’re almost there.”

I know. I’ve been there before. I’ve driven this road. I’ve covered this territory. For me, it’s no challenge. Ah, but for the children, it’s eternal.

So I try another approach. “Just think how good it will be,” I depict. “Turkey, dressing, pie . . . I promise you, when you get there, the trip will have been worth it.”

But they still groan.

Which takes us to the third similarity.

Children can’t envision the reward.

For me, six hours on the road is a small price to pay for my mom’s strawberry cake. I don’t mind the drive because I know the reward. I have three decades of Thanksgivings under my belt, literally. As I drive, I can taste the turkey. Hear the dinner-table laughter. Smell the smoke from the fireplace.

I can endure the journey because I know the destiny.

My daughters have forgotten the destiny. After all, they are young. Children easily forget. Besides, the road is strange, and the dark night has come. They can’t see where we’re going. It’s my job, as their father, to guide them.

I try to help them see what they can’t see.

I tell them how we’ll feed the ducks at the lake. How we’ll play on the swings. How they can spend the night with their cousins. We speak of sleeping on the floor in sleeping bags and staying up late since there is no school.

And it seems to work. Their grumbling decreases as their vision clears—as their destiny unfolds.

Perhaps that’s how the apostle Paul stayed motivated. He had a clear vision of the reward.

⁷ Psalm 103:15, 16.

Therefore we do not lose heart. Though outwardly we are wasting away, yet inwardly we are being renewed day by day. For our light and momentary troubles are achieving for us an eternal glory that far outweighs them all. So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen.⁸

It's not easy to get three girls under the age of seven to see a city they can't see. But it's necessary.

It's not easy for us to see a City we've never seen, either, especially when the road is bumpy . . . the hour is late . . . and companions are wanting to cancel the trip and take up residence in a motel. It's not easy to fix our eyes on what is unseen. But it's necessary.

One line in the 2 Corinthians passage you just read makes me smile: "our light and momentary troubles."

I wouldn't have called them that if I were Paul. Read what he called *light and momentary*, and I think you'll agree:

- Imprisoned.
- Beaten with a whip five times.
- Faced death.
- Beaten with rods three times.
- Stoned once.
- Shipwrecked three times.
- Stranded in the open sea.
- Left homeless.
- In constant danger.
- Hungry and thirsty.⁹

Long and trying ordeals, perhaps. *Arduous and deadly afflictions*, OK. But *light and momentary troubles*? How could Paul describe endless trials with that phrase?

⁸ 2 Corinthians 4:16–18.

⁹ 2 Corinthians 11:23–27.

He tells us. He could see “an eternal glory that far outweighs them all.”

Can I speak candidly for a few lines?

For some of you, the journey has been long. Very long and stormy. In no way do I wish to minimize the difficulties that you have had to face along the way. Some of you have shouldered burdens that few of us could ever carry. You have bid farewell to life-long partners. You have been robbed of life-long dreams. You have been given bodies that can't sustain your spirit. You have spouses who can't tolerate your faith. You have bills that outnumber the paychecks and challenges that outweigh the strength.

And you are tired.

It's hard for you to see the City in the midst of the storms. The desire to pull over to the side of the road and get out entices you. You want to go on, but some days the road seems so long.

Let me encourage you with one final parallel between your life's journey and the one our family took last night.

It's worth it.

As I write, the Thanksgiving meal is over. My legs are propped up on the hearth. My tablet is on my lap.

I have every intention of dozing off as soon as I finish this chapter.

The turkey has been attacked. The giblet gravy has been gobbled. The table is clear. The kids are napping. And the family is content.

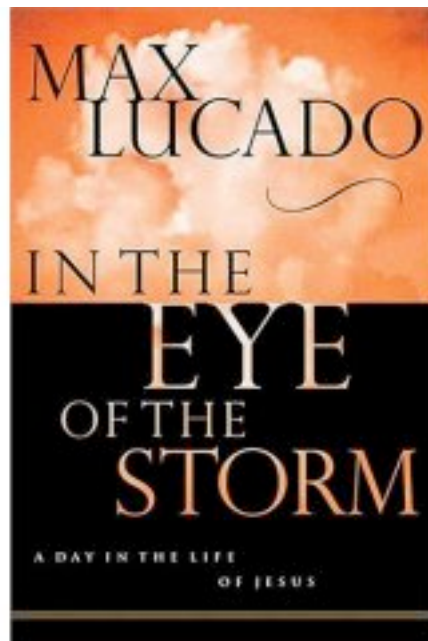
As we sat around the table today, no one spoke of the long trip to get here. No one mentioned the requests I didn't honor. No one grumbled about my foot being on the accelerator when their hearts were focused on the banana splits. No one complained about the late hour of arrival.

Yesterday's challenges were lost in today's joy.

That's what Paul meant. God never said that the journey would be easy, but he did say that the arrival would be worthwhile.

Remember this: God may not do what you want, but he will do what is right . . . and best. He's the Father of forward motion. Trust him. He will get you home. And the trials of the trip will be lost in the joys of the feast.

Now, if you'll excuse me, I'll close my eyes. I'm a bit tired from the journey, and it feels good to rest.



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In the Eye of the Storm

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