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## Advent Devotional "Preparation"

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Advent Devotional  
December 22, 2013  
Preparation  
Luke 1:76 12/22

At 94, my mother has a mind not nearly as reliable as it once was. At times she remembers people and events well; at others, confusion abounds. As her eyesight and hearing prove less and less reliable, she spends more and more time thinking about the past. In our conversations, I hear echoes of what occupies her mind.

Recently Mother has talked at length about education. Her mother-in-law was a schoolmarm, as indeed was her own mother—and her father was an educator for a time. She and her husband completed college, and he seminary. Their only child, in the words of his two sons, has more education than can do anybody any good. Their child's wife acquired a graduate degree. Their grandsons followed in their father's footsteps with their own advanced education, and both married educated women, one with a graduate degree. Mother's proud of all the family's education, though not in the same way as an aunt who loved to brag about "having a doctor in the family." When she muses about her family's educational history, Mother's mind and conversation turn instead to cost and return on investment.

Those are not terms she uses. Instead, she talks about the things family members have given up in pursuit of education, and the way in which those sacrifices have prepared them for future opportunities.

She talks of how all of us have prepared for life, prepared to be of service in the Lord's kingdom. We are all fortunate, she says: fortunate in our choices, fortunate in our outcomes, and fortunate in our relationships.

Mother's thoughts as reflected in our recent conversations rise up to meet this passage from Luke. Making preparations entails paying costs of all kinds. Students pay the cost of time and effort spent studying, of career options deferred or forsaken, of families delayed. They wager that most precious of coinage, time, against an uncertain future. My elders spoke truth in my youth when they said "get that education; once you have it, no one can ever take it away from you." What they neglected to consider was the world's uncertainty. Death or circumstances can do what "they" can't; circumstances can render learning irrelevant.

Luke speaks of going before the Lord to prepare the way for Him. Preparing the Lord's way involves the same uncertainties as getting an education, or preparing one's body for athletic competitions, or even saving for the future. We prepare ourselves solely in the hope of future possibilities, though we have no control over that future. That future can so easily change in an instant, particularly for athletes, or even over a matter of months. Disease, natural disaster, accident—all can change the future on a dime.

The most difficult aspect of preparing the Lord's way is that we are responsible for preparation, preparation of ourselves and our world, without any real say in outcome. Outcome rests in the realm of faith, not of our responsibility. And so often we don't see outcome

until years, decades later—or perhaps never. Sometimes those who come behind us see the outcome. Early Baptist missionaries to China, for example, often spent their entire years of service without acknowledged converts, though their preparation of the Lord's way bore fruit in later generations.

We humans find preparation difficult without obvious outcomes to pursue and in which to find our reward. Luke reminds us that our task is to live in the moment of preparation and leave outcomes where they belong—in God's hands. Our surrender of our wills to God's and our willingness to become not only God's bondservants, but also God's partners in His kingdom's work, offer us a life of joy. Living in that moment, focusing our energies on God's tasks for us in preparation of His outcomes, releases us from our accustomed worries to live that life of joy.

Ray Granada