

The “Quickening Ray” That Changes *Everything*



The tragic events of a beloved pastor’s passing shocked and bewildered all who knew him. Against this backdrop, treated with sensitivity and reverence, a profound spiritual parallel emerges: When God grants “a quickening ray” into people and circumstances, it transforms them and changes the outcome.

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“For God, who commanded light to shine out of darkness, has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.”

— 2 Corinthians 4:6

Preface

This article addresses a tragedy it highlights that shook an entire congregation and left family, friends and a community of faith reeling in the aftermath, struggling with questions and finding few answers. A beloved pastor did the unthinkable and ended his own life following unrelenting pain and despair. This tragedy serves as the backdrop for a profound theological parallel it revealed. I write with reverence and compassion here, not judgment in any capacity as I am assuredly not qualified. Just as Scripture records the moral collapse of David and the denial of Peter not to condemn them but to instruct us, this reflection seeks to draw illumination from tragedy.

The event is deeply personal to many who knew and loved this pastor. He was known for his warmth, integrity, and devotion to Christ. He was also known for his steady, lifelong insistence that human will is the decisive factor in every moral and spiritual outcome. His counsel and preaching - both his own and that of the Sr. Pastor of the congregation where he served for many years, could often be summarized in a single word: *Choose*.

It was therefore the ultimate irony that in his final act, this man did something wholly contrary to everything he had lived, taught, and believed - suicide. The tragedy stands as a painful contradiction: one that, when carefully considered, reveals an even deeper truth about divine sovereignty and human inability.

Part I – The Tragedy

After a debilitating injury and surgery, he was left with relentless pain, muscle spasms, and sleepless nights. His body became both prison and tormentor. As time wore on, depression settled in like a heavy fog coupled with the pain. Those closest to him saw a once-vibrant soul fading under the weight of exhaustion and despair.

Then came the unthinkable: one day, he ended his own life.

The news stunned an entire region. Friends, congregants and fellow ministers were united in disbelief. The same voice that had so often urged others to “trust God’s

goodness no matter what” now silenced by hopelessness, made a choice – a devastating and permanent one. The counsellor, respected for his wisdom, who admonished others to *always* choose wisely, succumbed to pain induced depression and chose to end his life by his own hand. Neither the pain, anguish, shock nor confusion this would cause his wife, children, church family and community was enough to stay his hand. Darkness now obscured the light of discernment which had come to define him for so many who knew and respected him.

“God could have sent an angel”

At the memorial, the senior pastor, said, “God could have sent an angel or a passerby to intervene.” Indeed, He could have. God had another option as well: One “quickening ray” of divine light could have pierced that dark hour, changing everything. Yet, for reasons hidden within His own counsel, God did not intervene.

This raises a haunting question: Since God could have changed the outcome but did not, does that inaction contradict His goodness? The answer, I am persuaded, lies not in contradiction but in revelation. The event, tragic as it was, became for me a lens through which to view the deeper mystery of grace and salvation: Consider the following and the principle they reveal.

“The Lord brings the counsel of the nations to nothing;
He frustrates the plans of the peoples.” (Psalm 33:10)

“He thwarts the plans of the crafty,
so that their hands achieve no success.” (Job 5:12)

If these verses are true - *and they are*, then God is neither passive nor powerless. He does thwart plans, but not all of them. He acts or withholds according to His sovereign will and infinite wisdom, and often in response to the prayers of His people when they are asked “according to His will” (1 John 5:14). I say “often” because many people in many congregations *were* praying and asking God for a healing, restoring touch for this man. God *could* have prevented the suicide, just as He *can* prevent the sinner’s spiritual ruin. In both, He either speaks the word that changes everything or withholds it. In either case, He remains good, loving, just and sovereign.

This is not fatalism; it is realism: the realism of Scripture itself. Every conversion, every prayer answered, every heartbeat is sustained by the divine command. When God says, “*Let there be light,*” light explodes forth. When He does not, darkness and the resultant choices made as its result, remains.

The paradox, then, is not that God failed or refused to act, but that He acts *always* with purpose, *even in withholding*. And herein lies the parallel that became inescapable: just as God could have intervened in that physical tragedy, He alone intervenes in the spiritual tragedy of sin.

God is *not* the author of sin (James 1:13), but He is sovereign over *all outcomes*. The pastor acted from his now depression-darkened will; God did not coerce the choice. Yet God *could* have prevented it and didn't. Just as He could successfully "draw" every sinner but doesn't. *This doesn't make Him culpable; it makes Him sovereign.*

The alternative - a God who wants to prevent tragedy but can't - is not biblical Christianity

Part II – The Spiritual Parallel

The tragedy that shook that congregation also exposed, with painful clarity, a spiritual law at work beneath every human story: **when God speaks, outcomes change; when He withholds His quickening word, the outcome stands.**

Just as the absence of one radiant beam from heaven left that tormented man in the darkness from whence the seed of his final, decisive choice grew, so the absence of divine illumination leaves the sinner bound within their own blindness. The same God who could have sent an angel to stay a hand also commands the light that awakens faith.

“For God, who commanded light to shine out of darkness, has shone in our hearts to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ.” (2 Cor 4:6)

At creation, darkness did not consent to illumination; it simply *obeyed* the Creator's command. So too, when God shines the light of regeneration into a soul, the darkness cannot resist. The “quicken ray” of divine grace dispels unbelief, awakens faith, and births repentance (2 Tim. 2:24-26; 1 Tim 1:15; Acts 16:14; 18:27).

Many insist that God merely offers light and then waits for our permission to turn it on. Yet how can one who is blind to glory grant consent to behold it? We do not cooperate with a light we cannot see – literally and metaphorically. The decisive act to illuminate must be divine, or salvation would forever remain impossible.

When Peter confessed, “You are the Christ, the Son of the living God,” Jesus declared, “Flesh and blood has not revealed this to you, but My Father in heaven.” (Matt 16:17) Peter’s faith was not the product of independent reasoning but *the effect of revelation*.

Faith as Gift, Not Production

Faith is ours by possession, not by manufacture. It is like sight: we exercise it, but we did not create the eyes that see. The Saviour often said, “*Your* faith has saved you,” leading many to suppose that faith is the result of the human will. But He also said, “Blessed are *your* eyes, for they see.” This does not presuppose we produced our own eyes. Both statements are objectively and subjectively true simultaneously, for the faith that believes and the eyes that see are alike the work of God. Yet once granted, they become truly “ours”. The contradiction emerges when we insist that in the one aspect – faith, that is our doing, while in the other physical eyes that see, is God’s.

Charles Wesley captured this mystery of God’s “quickenning ray” in lines that have never lost their power:

“Long my imprisoned spirit lay,
Fast bound in sin and nature’s night;
Thine eye diffused a quick’ning ray—
I woke, the dungeon flamed with light;
My chains fell off, my heart was free,
I rose, went forth, and followed Thee.”

- *The soul does not negotiate or barter its release; it passively receives it.*

Sovereign Mercy and Divine Selectivity

If every heart received this same quickening ray, none would remain blind. Yet Scripture declares, “The god of this world has blinded the minds of unbelievers” (2 Cor 4:4). When God chooses to shine, blindness flees; when He withholds, darkness remains.

On the road to Damascus, Saul’s companions saw the light and audibly heard the voice of Jesus yet understood nothing. Only Saul received the understanding of who it was that appeared to Him (Acts 9:7; 22:9). The Lord Himself said of him, “He is a chosen instrument of Mine.” (Acts 9:15). This was further confirmed by the servant Jesus sent to pray for him following that experience. Ananias said,

“Brother Saul, receive your sight: The Lord has chosen you to know His will, to see the righteous one and to hear words from His mouth.” (Acts 22:14).

- That is sovereign grace in a nutshell: selective, purposeful, unearned and revelatory.

This selectivity offends human pride but glorifies divine mercy. God’s grace is not arbitrary; it is wise, holy, and perfectly aligned with His eternal purpose. “He has mercy on whom He will have mercy.” (Rom 9:15) **To demand mercy is to nullify it.** Justice may be owed; *mercy never is*. Thus, God can never rightly be charged with cruelty or injustice if He for His own reasons, withholds it.

The analogy deepens: just as not every physical sufferer is healed, even when it is sought earnestly in prayer and though God could heal all, not every sinner is regenerated though He could save all. *In both cases His will to act is governed by His sovereign, eternal purpose.*

The Fallacy of “Allowing God”

Modern preaching often pleads, “*Allow God to work in your life.*” This theme was echoed regularly in the assembly where the pastor served and ministered. But no corpse ever grants permission for resurrection. Lazarus did not authorize his revival; the widow’s dead son did not nod assent before he breathed again. Christ acts by command, not consultation. The “valley of dry bones” in Ezekiel 37 neither gave consent nor cooperated with God’s sovereign decree to “command breath to enter them”. This reference was clearly in Jesus’ mind when He told Nicodemus that this “wind” is analogous to the Spirit and concluded saying “So it is with *everyone* born of the Spirit.” (John 3:8).

“He spoke, and it was done;
He commanded, and it stood fast.” (Ps 33:9)

To speak of *allowing* God is to invert Creator and creature. Potter and clay. Divine power is not contingent upon human consent. The same God who could have sent one restraining angel to that pastor’s side could also send one quickening word into the dead heart of any and every sinner. The first He withheld; the second He bestows where He wills. Satan’s ability to hinder and blind is not greater than God’s to free and illuminate. Jesus said what is impossible with man is possible with God – and said it in the very context of “who then can be saved?” (Matt. 19:24-26). Further, and strikingly inconsistent is that the pastor in this story *was desperate for* God to “touch”

him and in no way resisting the same – yet no touch from heaven came, despite his “allowing” God to do just that.

The Distinction Between God’s Love and God’s Benevolence

Scripture distinguishes between God’s universal benevolence as evidenced in His granting the rain to fall and sun to shine on the wicked and the righteous, and His covenantal love. Jesus said, “He who loves Me will be loved by My Father, and I will love him and manifest Myself to him.” (John 14:21) And the psalmist: “As high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is His love toward those who fear Him.” (Ps 103:11)

John 3:16 is often misread as an assertion of undifferentiated Divine affection. The Greek adverb *houtōs* – “so” in English, means *in this manner*, not *so much*. God loved the world *thus*: by giving His Son *so that* every believing one (*pas ho pisteuōn*) should have life. The verse describes the *mode* of love, not its universal quantum. And it tells us the object of that sending – all the believing ones.

Major lexicons (BDAG, Thayer) acknowledge *houtōs* *can* mean either “in this way” or “to this degree,” but the parallel with 1 John 4:9 (“*By this* [*houtōs*] the love of God was manifested”) shows John consistently uses it to describe *manner*, not *quantity*.

However, even for the “in this manner” it still references degree because God was willing to give His only Son – but here the explicit emphasis *is* qualified: “So that all the believing ones will not perish...” They are the selective group for whom the Son was given.

Understanding that distinction restores the verse’s precision: the love of God manifests itself *effectually* in those who believe, not *equally* in all regardless of faith. Such an idea expressly contradicts Jesus in John 14:21, 23 and Psalm 103:11. The apostles, per every recorded interaction we have in scripture, never preached, “Jesus loves you,” to a current unbeliever. Their message was about the death and resurrection of Christ as Lord and Judge, with the command to “Repent and believe the gospel.” *Love is known by revelation, not assumption.*

- John 3:16 therefore, does not contradict John 14:21, 23 nor Psalm 103:11.

Part III – The Limits of Human Choice

The notion that man's choice determines divine outcome collapses the moment Scripture is allowed to speak for itself. The will *can* and *does* choose, so do not misunderstand me to say it does not. However, it chooses *only* within the limits of what the mind perceives and the heart desires. James confirms this when he said all temptation occurs when of *his own desires* man is enticed and led astray (Jas. 1:14). Where light is absent, understanding is absent; where understanding is absent, choice is enslaved and conditioned *by that reality*: even when results of those choices have permanent consequences. As the pastor's physical life permanently ended that day, so also the eternal consequences of choices made from the confines of a darkened understanding carry permanent results. If we look at the following passages, the underlying principle becomes crystal clear:

“They know not what they do.” (Luke 23:34)

“Had the rulers of this world known, they would *not* have crucified the Lord of glory.” (1 Cor 2:8)

Ignorance here is not innocent. It is blindness. Those who killed Jesus still acted with cruelty, malice and even glee as they horrifically tortured Him. In these ways, they understood what they did to Him. *But they did not understand who He was.*

- Knowledge of who He was *would* have altered the outcome. In the economy of redemption, the “quickenning ray” illumination is not incidental; it is **decisive**.

The same principle appears in Christ's own explanation of the parable of the sower:

“When anyone hears the word of the kingdom and *understands it not*, then the evil one comes and snatches away what was sown in his heart.... But he who hears the word and immediately receives it with joy, yet has no root in himself, endures for a while; and when tribulation or persecution arises, he falls away.” (Matt 13:19).

Lack of understanding precedes loss; superficial reception without inward illumination ends in collapse. Both outcomes demonstrate that hearing without divine quickening produces no lasting fruit.

This is why the account of Paul's conversion is so revealing. His companions on the road to Damascus *saw* the light and *heard* the voice (Acts 9:7; 22:9), yet neither perceived nor comprehended the speaker of His message. The same light shone upon many, but only one heart was penetrated by understanding. The others remained physically sighted yet spiritually blind: a living illustration of Christ's words, “Seeing

they see not, and hearing they hear not.” (Matt 13:13). In the parable of the sower, Jesus further confirmed that only those who “hear the word of the kingdom *and understand it*”, bring forth fruit (Matt.13:21).

“And a certain woman named Lydia, a seller of purple... heard us, *whose heart the Lord opened*, that she attended unto the things which were spoken by Paul.” (Acts 16:14)

The text says the Lord opened Lydia’s heart to Paul’s message. Understanding was the turning point. Once enlightened, she responded by “heeding the things spoken by Paul.” Before enlightenment, she could not. *Otherwise, God’s act for her was trivial at best or irrelevant at worst.*

These three scenes; Paul’s companions, Christ’s parable, and Lydia’s awakening, form a single theological thread: the **selectivity of the quickening ray**. It shines sovereignly, not universally. When it falls upon a soul, comprehension is birthed, and the will *follows*. Where it does not, the will is unmoved by the gospel.

- Divine illumination does not violate freedom of choice; it *creates* it. Prior to it, the only option was choice conditioned by darkness.

The will, then, is not the engine of salvation but the recipient of sovereign, enabling grace. Choice is real – “I rose went forth and followed Thee”, but it *is always the effect* of sight, not the cause of it. The soul does not negotiate its release; it receives it.

All Prayer for the Lost Presupposes These Truths

- Prayer for the lost presupposes and assumes the premise herein: The quickening ray that changes everything *is* the answer! Otherwise, such prayer is theologically inconsistent at best and *irrelevant* at worst.

Part IV – The Analogy Completed

Had God sent a single restraining messenger, be it an angel or a passerby, to that pastor’s side as the Sr. Pastor said in the memorial service, the outcome *would* have changed in an instant. In the same way, one “quickenning ray” of light likewise *would* have transformed despair into surrender, silence into prayer, death into deliverance. How can I be certain of this?

1. By the plain testimony of scripture herein.

2. By the testimony of all who knew and respected this beloved leader. If we accept their testimony of his steadfast character at face value, this conclusion is impenetrable.
- Yet the same sovereign God who withheld that moment of temporal mercy commands eternal mercy to shine into hearts *as He wills* (Rom. 9:14-18).

The tragedy thus becomes a mirror of a larger reality: **where the quickening ray of grace shines, life triumphs; where it does not, darkness rules.** The difference lies not in the strength of human will but in the will of God, who alone says, *“Let there be light.”*

- **God shining inwardly does what no human exhortation, argument, or resolution could accomplish.**

Grace is not distributed by whim but *by wisdom*. The mystery is not why God does not shine on all, but that He so shines on *any*.

“He has mercy on whom He will have mercy, and He hardens whom He will.” (Rom 9:18)

To the pride of flesh this sounds unjust, but to humble faith it is grounds for immeasurable and humble gratitude: Those in, for and to whom He shines His “quickenning ray” know they contributed nothing to His so doing – **“So that no flesh should boast”**. If salvation depended on the will of man, none would be saved because apart from His ray of light, all abide in darkness.

Conclusion – The Ray That Changes Everything

This, then, is the application and parallel drawn from tragedy: the same light that *would* have stayed a desperate selectively shines to save desperate souls. The “quickenning ray” is not a metaphor only; it is the very command of God that brings light from darkness, faith out of unbelief, a heart of flesh from a heart of stone and worship out of ruin.

- The wonder is not why He so acts only in some, *but that He acted at all*.