

Podcast 251 God is Smooth

I like to keep Johnny active. Two evenings a week, Mondays and Wednesdays, he goes to a fitness class. On Friday he attends Taekwondo, with my second son and his wife. The class is held at an inner city Baptist church. This church is very involved in the community and when you walk in the door there is a desk an African American man named Andrew who is on duty. He and I have just clicked from our first meeting.

I look forward to taking Johnny to class, making sure he's checked in, and then often I'll go for a prayer walk. After about a half hour I will take a seat in the lobby and reminisce with Andrew and his friends. I discovered he's a seasoned minister. I almost said "retired," but he's not retired because he, like me, doesn't believe in that concept. He just has different activities now.

One evening we were talking about all that's going on with the pandemic, and all the things that are going on behind the scenes that are not reaching the media which are very good. Most of what you see and hear are negative but he and I have experienced a lot of positive results. There are people coming to Christ during this quarantine atmosphere. I've talked to a large church, and found out their attendance is up online. Their giving is also up. A friend of mine who is a speaker related, "I miss the personal interaction after I give a talk, but I have more people attending my events online than in person."

Andrew has seen God moving in his one-on-one ministry with people in hospitals, people that he reaches out to, people that are still part of his ministry. As we shared how God was at work, Andrew looked at me and he said, "God is smooth." I like that expression, because God is smooth, and God is working, and our God is making all things work together for good. If He's not behind this event, He's certainly using it to His glory, because God is so great and He is so good.

I'm going to pray, and then I'm going to give you a little heads up because I am interested in what those words mean to you. And then we're going to talk some more.

Father, thank You for being God - not one of the gods or a lesser god, but You are God with a capital G. I love all those passages in Isaiah where You declare that You look across the heavens and there is no other god but You. You are supreme, You are the Almighty, You are El Shaddai, and we draw near to You now and ask You to help us to contemplate You in the midst of this significant event that is changing the world. In faith we believe You are changing the world for Your purposes and Your plans, and we worship You. Help us now as we do so, and draw near to each of us where we are in our walk with You, people that are hurting, people that are not aware of this concept, I pray that somehow, You'll plant seeds of faith and hope in all of our hearts. In Jesus' name, Amen.

Not everyone is rejoicing. I just heard of somebody ten minutes ago that is struggling, and this might be their end, as they're in the hospital. I have several friends, I think there's eight people I pray for daily now, who are battling cancer. So

I'm not trying to be flippant, because I'm bearing a lot of burdens with my brothers and sisters in Christ, and I'm tempted to be discouraged on one hand, but at the same time, I don't believe that we ever are discouraged to the point that we lose hope. That's what Paul says in Corinthians. He says we're discouraged, but we're not overcome. So even though I do think God is smooth, I also know that God is afflicted when we're afflicted, and He bears our burdens, and for those that are hurting, He's sitting on the couch next to you with His arm around you, and He's hurting, too. But in the big picture, God is not exasperated and wringing His hands and wondering what He's going to do next. God is smooth. Okay, so what do you think when I say God is smooth? What images come to your mind?

Scott: Well, I've had the thought a couple of times during this whole craziness we call 2020 that God is a master orchestrator, because there have been little stories here and there and things in my life that have happened that fit right in with the concept of God working together all things for the good of those who love Him. It's like a perfect symphony, there are some really dark moments and things that almost scare you here and there, but every little piece has its place. It's like a Mozart symphony where everything fits perfectly. There isn't one note wrong, and I'm confident that it's going to end triumphantly. But it sure feels like we're in the dark section where it feels like it might fall apart, but there are moments when it really is smooth, and I think, "Huh. There is no one but our God who could have orchestrated this to happen this way."

Steve: Amen. I like that. Master orchestrator. Here are some passages that we can look at with this same theme. One of my favorite names for God is Redeemer. He is our God who is working all things together for good. In Genesis 50:20, Joseph is talking to his brothers. He looked at them and said, "As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good, to bring it about that many people should be kept alive, as they are today."

That passage keeps surging up in my heart. You meant evil but God is using it for good. I do believe there are people today that are using this virus for evil, and they mean it for evil, but God means it for good. In that same vein, I remembered my prayers in 2011 where I asked God to help me to love Him with all my heart, soul, mind, and strength. And then my world fell apart. I look back now and I think, "You know, I prayed for this to happen, and God knew everything that needed to happen to answer my prayer." Subsequently 2012 became the hardest year and the best year of my life. I did not understand God's method, but His method hit the mark, and God answered my prayer exceedingly abundantly above all that I could have asked or thought.

We pray for things to happen, but then we miss the answer. When He's working we need to have eyes to see what the Spirit sees and ears to hear what the Spirit is saying. IN our current crisis, think about how many times we prayed for the hearts of the fathers to be turned towards their children just on this podcast? Scores of times. God is answering those prayers. I pray this for myself as well as for others. Lots of

prayers have been prayed for fathers to have their heart turned towards home and for families to be knit together and not torn apart by activities and running here and there? In my limited world I see family activities on the increase. It is difficult to buy a bicycle or a kayak because families are doing lots of things together and the supply is limited. Not only are families spending more time together like riding bicycles and kayaking, I have seen more families walking in our neighborhood than I have seen as long as I've lived here, which is almost fifteen years.

The other thing that usually takes Dad away from being with his family is when he's staring at football, baseball, or basketball. Those sports were not available for months. They had to quit being addicted to sports cold turkey. I spoke to one of my neighbors that I have begun to know better because of this pandemic, and he said, "I'm not watching professional sports again. I'm done." His objections are more about kneeling for the national anthem.

I think it is amazing how families are spending so much time together. Could we have ever seen that happening in such a short amount of time? I couldn't! And yet, we pray, and we think, "God, how are You going to answer this prayer?" And God is answering prayers. I'm convinced He's doing more that we realize. I think He just gives us enough of a glimpse to encourage us. While we might not understand His methods, He is hitting the mark, and He's restoring the hearts of fathers to kids and kids to their fathers. So I'm very encouraged.

At the same time, when I go on Facebook I am tempted to be discouraged because of the divisiveness and polarization in our country. It is then that I've got to look up and be encouraged, because I don't believe God is discouraged. Here's the biblical basis for God being in control. I'm going to read this passage in three different translations to receive the full impact. Isaiah 42:1-4 is talking about Jesus. "Behold My Servant, whom I uphold, My Chosen, in whom My soul delights; I have put My Spirit upon Him; He will bring forth justice to the nations. He will not cry aloud or lift up His voice, or make it heard in the street; a bruised reed He will not break, and a faintly burning wick He will not quench; He will faithfully bring forth justice. He will not grow faint or be discouraged till He has established justice in the earth; and the coastlands wait for His law." He will not faint or be discouraged. Another translation says, "He will not fail or be discouraged" while another version says, "He will not falter or lose heart until justice prevails throughout the earth."

God is not growing faint. He's not getting overwhelmed with the task of restoring families. He's not getting discouraged. His heart is not failing Him. He's not faltering. He's God, and He is going to establish justice in the earth. Not in heaven, on the earth, right here where we live.

I have a prayer list that I go through on a regular basis, and on one day of the week, I pray against certain things. I pray against abortion which is murder. We want God to eliminate that from our country. But when you think about it, the real root of abortion is fornication, which you don't hear many folks talking about, at least I don't.

So I pray against fornication, I pray against sodomy, I pray that God will rid us of racism. I've just added to my prayer list the riddance of trafficking children, which I know too much about now. I pray against organizations like the NEA, the ACLU, and Planned Parenthood.

Then I remind myself we are not fighting against flesh and blood enemies, but against evil rulers and authorities of the unseen world, against mighty powers in this dark world, and against evil spirits in the heavenly places. So even though I'm praying that God will shrink and diminish and bring those organizations with all their devilish agenda to naught, I also do a lot of binding the strong man. I resist the devil in Jesus' name. I ask God to rebuke the principalities and powers behind these organizations, because I don't have flesh and blood enemies. I can be tempted to get real upset at certain politicians, and then God stops me and reminds me where the real battle lies.

Although I do send emails, and I do make my voice heard, because I'm an American citizen, but I seek to direct my energy where it needs to be, and bind up the strong man, because we can't spoil this house, we can't spoil his goods, until that strong man is bound up. Another interesting passage is found in Proverbs 16:3-4, "Commit your work to the LORD, and your plans will be established. The LORD has made everything for its purpose, even the wicked for the day of trouble." I don't understand it, but I'm not discouraged because God knows who's out there, and God knows what's happening, and it does evil has been taken up a notch and as Scripture predicts, "evil people and impostors will go on from bad to worse, deceiving and being deceived." (2 Timothy 3:13)

Scott: I've been praying a lot against fear and hatred lately because it seems like those two foul spirits have just been unleashed on the world. I mean, people are just giving in to fear all over the place, and the Bible's clear, perfect love casts out fear. We have not been given a spirit of fear, you know, we, especially Christians, we need to not be afraid in this time. I've seen a lot of the church just sort of collapse in fear over the last several months, and that discourages me. But I also have seen them rising up and seen some strong voices encouraging the other direction, you know, and I've seen people praying against fear, so that's been very helpful. And hatred is just rampaging, especially on social media, and I think people, even people who aren't Christians, I think are getting tired of that, as evidenced by when my daughter and her fiancé now got engaged the other day and we posted it on Facebook, you know, with a few pictures, and people came out of the woodwork to comment on it and send texts. I mean, my wife couldn't respond fast enough. She was getting so many congratulations from all over the place from people we hadn't heard from in decades sometimes. And she even said, like, "I think people are just starving for something good." Like, they're so tired of all the evil that they want something, some good news, which ought to be good news for Christians because we have the good news. So let's share it!

Scott: That verse we looked up earlier when we were talking about hope, Hebrews 6:19: “We have this hope as an anchor for the soul.” Like, I haven’t felt much before this happened, I don’t know if I ever would have described hope as an anchor for my soul, and our culture has assaulted hope for I don’t know how long. But, you know, you hear people dismiss hope as, “It’s a waste of time.” And I’m like, I think we need to reconsider that a little and pray for hope. So I’ve been praying for hope this year as well as praying against fear and hatred.

I battle discouragement myself, which is probably why I cleave to these passages that God is not discouraged. And I think of that verse that says, “May the God of all hope fill you with joy and peace in believing.” I frequently pray that when I’ve found myself kind of slipping that God will continue to breathe hope into my heart. He’s the God of all hope.

God is working, God’s got it all lined up just the way He wants. I am not one who throws up their hands and says, “Come, Lord Jesus!” I am not giving up. God is going to establish His kingdom on this earth. He’s not yielding the field, you might say. He’s going to turn things back to what He designed. God is the one that created family. He’s the one that created marriage. He’s the one that created dads, and He’s not going to fail nor be discouraged until He restores marriage and family and fathers to their proper function. He created them, He designed them, He’s going to restore them, and He’s going to do it here, not in heaven. He’s not going to yield the field and put us all in a spaceship and take us to heaven – “Oh, we made it! The devil now can rule the world.” No! He’s going to restore it right here. Revelation 11:15 declares, “The seventh angel blew his trumpet. There were loud voices in heaven. ‘The kingdom of the world has become the kingdom of our Lord and of His Christ, and He shall reign forever and ever.’”

Jesus is not yielding the throne, and even though there’s going to be a day, and we read that in Scripture, when it looks like all is lost, Jesus is going to become king forever and ever. So God is smooth, and God is working in ways that we don’t even know and we’re just seeing the tip of the iceberg of the ways that God is turning people’s hearts toward home.

I haven’t even mentioned the increase in home education. I’m a home educator and an advocate for homeschooling. I’ve written a math curriculum for homeschoolers. Lately I’ve been spending time in our warehouse doing things like assembling block kits because we’re having trouble keeping up with the demand. I even took a drive up to our block supplier. I think that’s the first time in over twenty years, and I had my backseats put down, and I filled them full of ten blocks and hundred blocks so we could keep the production going. Now my granddaughters are assembling block sets, and one of my sons and I were standing there just grinning. Another generation of Demme kids making block sets. But we’re not alone in this. I’m friends with several people in the vendor world, and home education is on the rise.

I have never seen home education as an academic alternative; I believe home education is a place where families can become closer together, can learn together and grow together and connect. So I see an increase in home education as an answer to prayer. I'm not happy that schools are struggling. I am happy when I see families together and dads thinking about their children differently and spending more time with them.

Let's pray: Father, thank You that You are smooth and You're love, and You're just, and You're fair, and You're king, and when You put all these attributes together, You can't be anything but smooth. Thank You that You're not discouraged and You're not faltering and You're not losing heart, and help us to drink of that spirit. Give us faith. Help us, when all around our soul gives way, help us to make You our hope and stay in a fresh way. And if anybody is listening that is particularly discouraged, deliver them from evil and give us our daily bread. Give us what we need to sustain ourselves and to find fresh hope. And may the God of hope fill us all with joy and peace in believing in our God, who is smooth. In Jesus' name, Amen.