

## A Life O'erruled by God

(If you would like to listen to this hymn featuring the Royal Albert Hall, London pipe organ please visit:  
<https://youtu.be/zJ2onHkNOEO>)

Anna L. Waring was born in 1820 at Neath in Glamorganshire, South Wales. By the age of 13 she had composed the words for 36 hymns. She had been brought up as a Quaker but by age 22 came to prefer the Anglican tradition. Anna Waring's hymn "*Father, I know that all my life*" didn't make it into our hymnbook without some significant word changes. See if you can pick some – the original verse:

*Father, I know that all my life Is portioned out for me,  
 And the changes that are sure to come I do not fear to see;  
 But I ask Thee for a present mind Intent on pleasing Thee.*

Compared them the words we know so well;

*Father, I ask that all my life  
 May be o'erruled by Thee,  
 The changes then that surely come  
 I shall not fear to see;  
 I ask Thee for a steadfast mind  
 Intent on pleasing Thee.*

We can see the intent of the words has changed somewhat. I wonder why? Possibly Ms Waring got her inspiration from passages such as Jer 13:25 "*This is thy lot, the portion of thy measures from me, saith the LORD; because thou hast for-gotten me, and trusted in falsehood.*" Or, Ecc 5:18 "*Behold that which I have seen: it is good and comely for one to eat and to drink, and to enjoy the good of all his labour that he taketh under the sun all the days of his life, which God giveth him: for it is his portion*" The Hebrew word for portion is almost invariably found in tandem with the word for inheritance.

So, we might ask, "*Is our portion or lot in life so mapped out for us by God that there is an inescapable inevitability about our journey? Once embarked on a course, is there no way out?*" **I don't believe so.** Yes, the Father knows the beginning from the end. Yes, he can make of us a vessel for honour or a vessel for dishonour. Yes, he desires that all men everywhere might be saved and none perish – but that is not to be. We know that some will not be saved and that many will perish in ungodliness and unbelief. "*Jacob have I loved, Esau have I hated*". Why? Because of the choices they made in their lives. Whereas Jacob loved and embraced the promises to his father and grandfather before him, Esau despised the heritage left to him. He served the creature and not the creator. Esau chose his portion in life and God allowed him the freewill to enjoy it. Yet if we choose unwisely, our lot and portion may well prove to have a less than happy ending. There is no inevitability about the direction our life takes. We reap what we sow, but I believe the Father chooses the timing of the harvest.

From our carnal perspective, embracing the thinking of the flesh, we may think God very unfair – we see an evil man living in luxury; dying a peaceful death, whilst we trying to live a godly life, have to face daily troubles and hardships in our service to Him. The circumstances into which we are placed by our Heavenly Father can, as the expression goes, make us or break us. The ability to change those circumstances may be beyond our control, but the mind and attitude we bring to those conditions will make all the difference.

Trying circumstances can ensnare us in a world of self-pity, bitterness - even self-indulgence, or they can be faced and endured without fear, knowing that God has provided the way of escape. Not necessarily escape from the physical conditions, but certainly escape from the burdens of the mind. Our God is faithful. He will not suffer us to be tempted above that we are able; but will with the temptation also make a way to escape, that we may be able to bear it.

If all our life is overruled by God, then the changes that surely come will not necessarily make us more comfortable or prosperous or appreciated. On the contrary, our portion and lot in this life may find us weighed down with burdens and trials because we are putting, before all, the seeking of His kingdom and righteousness. There is a beautiful choral work called *Behold our Risen Lord*, the chorus of which goes *“Beyond the pain, there is hope; beyond the cross there is life; beyond the grave there is glory – when we behold our risen Lord”*. Our Lord Jesus Christ endured the pain and suffering by looking beyond to the glory and life that lay ahead. With a steadfast mind, intent on pleasing his Father, our Lord could rise above the trials and find peace and comfort beyond human understanding. It’s a peace and comfort we too can find. There is hope, there is life, there is glory – when we behold our risen Lord.

The second verse of the hymn reads...

*I ask Thee for a thoughtful love,  
Through constant watching wise,  
To meet the glad with joyful smiles,  
And wipe the weeping eyes;  
A heart at leisure from itself,  
To soothe and sympathize.*

Isn’t it true that so often, those who find their life beset with troubles on top of troubles, are the *very* ones who turn out to be the best at providing comfort and compassion to others in need? We all know someone in whose heart lies that *“hidden person...filled with the imperishable beauty of a gentle and quiet spirit, which in God's sight is very precious”*. Let’s look out for our brothers and sisters with a similar spirit; those in need of our thoughtful love and constant watching – not to pry, but to be there to soothe and sympathize as we have the opportunity. To actually *do* that practical act of kindness – a card, a call, a meal. Don’t make it a random act, make it intentional and considered. Let’s remember them all, by name, in our prayers.

*Wherever in the world we are, brothers and sisters, In whatsoever estate, we have a fellowship of hearts To keep and cultivate; And a work of lowly love to do For Him on whom we wait.* Our fellowship is not a sterile set of words and definitions we take off the shelf to read then argue about – it’s a fellowship of hearts; in which we are to play our humble part as keepers and cultivators – discerning with love in our tending lest we root out one of God’s seedlings.

Now, you may not be aware of this, but Ms Waring penned a verse that didn’t make it into our hymn 137. It goes like this...

*I would not have the restless will  
That hurries to and fro,  
Seeking for some great thing to do  
Or secret thing to know;  
I would be treated as a child,*

*And guided where I go ...*

Not a bad sentiment. We can be very busy being busy. Being heard, being seen, sometimes perhaps being a busy body. What she is trying to say perhaps is, that the drive to lead can sometimes stem from wrong motives. Leaders, like the centurion in Matt 8, understand that they are themselves servants of a higher authority, and that they too are as much in need of guidance as those they seek to shepherd. A true leader leads by example. *"Whoever would be first among you",* said our Lord in Mark 10, *"must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man came not to be served but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many."*

The final verse in the hymn reads this way...

*I ask Thee for the daily strength,  
To none that ask denied;  
A mind to blend with outward life  
While keeping at Thy side;  
Content to fill a little space,  
If Thou be glorified.*



*Glorifying the God of Creation*

To be in the world but not of it... over the years many have so blended with that outward life that there is no longer a distinction. The inner conviction and commitment to the Christ life has faded to just a little space. But that's not what the verse means when it says, *"content to fill a little space"*. This ties in more with verse 3 - the works *"of lowly love"*.

There's that happy balance between being content to fill no space at all in the work and the desire to be seen as the prime mover and doer of great works. A quiet and gentle spirit needs to be applied to

---

all our works – looking to **do the useful** and **not the great**. Of course, all our efforts are as nothing in comparison to the great work wrought by our Lord Jesus Christ. To him be the glory; not us. Any mighty work in which we play a part, is due to our Lord and our Father's work in us. *"I also labour"*, said Paul in Colossians, *"striving according to his working, which worketh in me mightily"*.

In summary then, what changes have been made in our lives over the last week, the last month, the last year? Have all things continued as they were from the beginning? Has it been business as usual for you? Have we blended so well with outward life that we have failed to keep the Lord at our side? If a man or woman chooses to keep God out of their lives then, most times, He will respect that desire. The easiest way to do that of course is to close His book or to close the communication with Him. when we freely invite the Lord to be an intimate part of our lives by the reading of the Word and the communion of prayer, then changes will surely come – for good.

In conclusion, a short quote, which I have paraphrased...

*"All in relation to life - its origin - its continuance - its changes - its seasons - childhood, youth, middle age, old age - all are in the hand of God. All the days of our lives are in the hands of God. We must calmly and faithfully commit the whole of them to Him. This we may feel in all seasons of life and in all times of danger; of sickness; of feebleness. We will live as long as God has appointed; we will pass through such changes as he directs; we will die when and where and how he chooses. In the faithful discharge of our duty, therefore, let us commit all these things to him, and leave all at His disposal."*

Finally, from Gal 2:20...

*"We have been crucified with Christ: nevertheless we live; yet not us, but Christ lives in us: and the life which we now live in the flesh we live by the faith of the Son of God, who loved us, and gave himself for us."*

AMEN.

Peter Collins

The most important aspect of our caring for ourselves and each other is our relationship with God and the way God can help us. Read more on the Adelphicare website...

[https://www.adelphicare.org/pages/you\\_and\\_god.html](https://www.adelphicare.org/pages/you_and_god.html)

---