

# BE THOU MY VISION

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There's nothing like a good epic that spans time following a character's development through major life stages. Epics are especially riveting when the story has a redemptive quality to it and taps into universal themes that speak to Truth. Themes like freedom, justice, forgiveness, mercy, trustworthiness, sacrifice, and others tend to put the trials and tribulations of the character in the epic into a broader, timeless context. They point to something outside of the individual. These themes are the traits of God calling the character in the epic into *being* as the character navigates the trials and tribulations that beset them. These themes call the character into the larger framework of THE STORY, which is God's metanarrative throughout the ages.

Although the reader of these redemptive epics can see universal themes playing out in the story, the character doesn't always have the benefit of seeing his or her role within the broader context of that theme. Some characters never know how their actions or stances contribute to the great universal themes of God, but they merely respond to a sense of purpose, a sense of calling and repentance, and they aren't interested in personal glory.

Characters like Jean Valjean in *Les Miserables*, who finds redemption from sins, which fundamentally changes his value system. He dies without fanfare and requests to be buried in an unmarked grave. No statues or buildings erected in his memory, yet he dies contented, having known forgiveness and having pursued righteousness. Similarly, in *The Count of Monte Cristo*, the character Dantes demonstrates that forgiveness is much more powerful than vengeance, turning traditional notions of power and powerlessness upside down. Redemption changes things, but the road to redemption is usually fraught with struggle, pain, and heartache as precursors.

We are inspired by characters who are refined throughout life and go through a transformational process that ends up anchoring them somewhere outside of themselves. The truly great and universal themes such as faith, love, hope, redemption, and justice exist outside of time and space. Since these themes are tethered to God and are unchanging, they call us to *become* what the image of God in us is calling us to *be* in life. They call us to *repentance*, which means to "change one's mind" in the original Greek, and repentance helps us see our individual lives within God's metanarrative.

*Be Thou My Vision* is a befitting song for the biographical epic of our lives as Christ-followers. This Middle-Irish poem written sometime between 300-800 CE is a lyrical epic now in the form of a song that encapsulates life's purpose and meaning in four stanzas. The words gracefully reframe our thoughts about our place in the cosmos, and they have as much meaning in supposed *modern* times as they did in the days of kings and clans ["high king of heaven"]. We exist in time and space and are bound by the clock and by our physicality, yet our egoic tendency [our sinfulness] causes us to think of ourselves as being the center of the universe. We spend so much effort meeting our desires and needs and foolishly chasing after the same idols of wealth and power that our ancestors did ["money I heed not nor man's empty praise"].

God, on the other hand, is not confined to time and space and God exists everywhere. God is the container of literally everything as well as being the creator and sustainer of all. Reckoning with God and realizing that we are not the center of the universe is often realized through some level of pain or suffering. We would not learn the necessary lessons that teach us God's universal truths without some level of struggle. Just like Jean Valjean and Dantes, we need to have been wronged in order to experience the healing that comes through forgiveness. We need to have experienced hardship to know what it is like to have hope. We need to experience imprisonment, or at least to recognize the prisons of our own making, to desire Christ's freedom. We need to recognize that we are lost to be found. It seems that the core lesson of our lives always leads back to repentance and surrender as the starting and re-starting place. In a very real sense, surrender, repentance, and redemption are the constant ebb and flow of our entire lives.

### SCRIPTURE AND PRACTICE:

Practice *Lectio Divina* with the following passage from Matthew 4:16-17. First, read it through to get the general understanding of the content. Take a few slow breaths and then re-read the passage, paying attention to a word or an image that stands out to you. Meditate on that word or image while reading the passage a third time and answer the questions after the passage.

#### MATTHEW 4:16-17

v. 16 The people who were sitting in  
darkness saw a Great Light,

And those who were sitting in the  
land and shadow of death,  
upon them a Light dawned.

v. 17 From that time Jesus began to preach and say,  
"Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."

- Do you need to *see* differently? If so, how?
- How might your current circumstances teach you about the greater truths of love, grace, forgiveness, justice, healing, etc., in order for you to see yourself in God's metanarrative and over-arching plan of redemption?
- Ask God to continue to "change your mind" about things that are keeping you from seeing God's presence and his work in the world. God helps us *repent*, to change our minds, and God's kindness leads us to that point [see Romans 2:4].