

August 19, 2022

Dear Members and Coworkers,

Georges Seurat is known for the pointillist technique of painting that he used to create very large paintings. His most famous and recognizable painting, "Sunday Afternoon on the Island of La Grande Jatte", depicts several people lounging on the lawn on a hillside by the water. You would probably recognize it if you saw it. In my early twenties, I had the opportunity to see this painting in person, and only then was I able to appreciate the grandeur. Seurat's technique requires viewing the painting from a distance to see the full scene. However, when viewing the painting up close, I was amazed to see how the image was composed exclusively of several dots of color to create the impression of an image. I remember the surprise of seeing how the selection of unexpected colors was used to create the illusion of other colors when combined. The green lawn consisted of yellow and blue, but also red and purple, among other colors. To create such a work of art, Seurat needed to focus very closely on the work he performed at a micro-scale, giving attention to the selection of color, one dot at a time.

When Seurat first presented his masterpiece to audiences, people didn't appreciate the magnitude of the work. Since it was initially displayed in a smaller space, observers considered it to be messy and blurry. The dots of color didn't look like shapes when viewed in medium range. Only when standing from afar could they view the entire image and see the shapes and contours come into view. After placing the work of art in a much larger venue for viewing, his innovative painting was finally appreciated and became one of the most famous to be produced in the 19th century.

This serves as a useful example for us when considering our lives in the context of our Christian development in the Church of God. In living our lives to develop our Christian character, our actions on a day-to-day basis occur at the micro-scale. Just as Seurat carefully placed one dot on the canvas at a time, we make decisions each moment to direct our actions. Each of these actions works together to construct the greater composition of our lives. Some decisions are good, some decisions might not be so good. But they all work together to make us who we are.

This same principle applies when we bring others into view as well. Other people in our life add more figurative dots onto the canvas of our lives. And so on, as we add more elements to our lives, more and more dots appear. Up close, where we have the ability to see and control the decisions and actions we take, everything is comprehensible. We can see where we've done well or made mistakes. We can see the individual building blocks in our life for what they are.

But sometimes, as we back up, trying to evaluate the bigger picture, things begin to look messy or even confusing. We no longer see the individual actions and decisions, but we can't see the big picture either. This is where we might begin to see an interaction with someone that offends us because something is blown out of proportion. Perhaps a work situation becomes frustrating because politics or mismanagement corrupt the working environment. We may even feel dismayed with the state of the Church of God, having diminished from its once great stature. Even though we may see everything accurately from this perspective, we might not understand how it fits together.

We have to remember that God is the artist who paints the big picture. He has a purpose for us that we cannot completely comprehend, because we cannot fully see from His vantage point. Our way of understanding the details of our lives, the work of the Church, and the events in the world is simply limited. "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways," says the LORD. 'For

as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts” (Isaiah 55:8-9). God alone is the One who understands how all the elements in our lives and the world we live in fit together in His master plan.

When we see a seemingly messy view of things, small or great, we must not become discouraged and give place for sin to fester. The problems we see and the frustrations we experience can easily prevent us from thinking with the mind of God to put things into perspective. Even if we don't fully understand it, the messiness we might experience serves a purpose! We still have to fully experience the difficulties, but in the big picture, these are opportunities for us to grow stronger in our spiritual development. Recall how David had to go *through* the valley of the shadow of death – not around it, or in the other direction (compare Psalm 23). Likewise, God tests us through our sometimes-messy situations. We go through them so we can grow.

It can be easy to read Romans 8:28 without taking it to heart: “And we know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose.” God has a distinct purpose for each one of us, which He fulfills by curating our circumstances. When we might get into a conflict, fall victim to pressure, get into a situation of confrontation, find contention in something that we don't agree with, or any myriad other difficulties, God presents us a choice in how to respond. We can allow ourselves to get poisoned by the apparent problems, or we can handle our situations with grace, knowing that God gives us the experience to grow from.

And this is where faith enters the picture. We know that God has a plan, and we must have faith in it. If we understand that He has a purpose for us, we will only succeed by living in earnest belief in that *fact*. The point of control in life that we have is with each moment, each decision, and each action. One by one. Just as a pointillist painting comes together one dot at a time, our spiritual development takes place one choice at a time, stepping out in faith.

Our perspective makes a difference. We can choose to see through a lens of negativity, picking out the problems and focusing on them. Or, we can choose to see through the eyes of God, focusing on the positive attributes presented to us. Clearly, the choice that is most constructive and useful in overcoming the messiness of life involves heeding the admonition from God. “Finally, brethren, whatever things are true, whatever things are noble, whatever things are just, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, if there is any virtue and if there is anything praiseworthy—meditate on these things. The things which you learned and received and heard and saw in me, these do, and the God of peace will be with you” (Philippians 4:8-9).

Additionally, we are very pleased to enclose for our readers in the USA a copy of our new free booklet, “*God Is... Our Destiny.*” For our readers in other countries, the booklet will be mailed separately.

In Christ's Service,



Eric Rank