

## **Soli Deo Gloria. The divine perspective**

Pastor Sylvia Barrett

May 29, 2016

‘I looked for a man among them who would build up the wall and stand before me in the gap on behalf of the land so I would not have to destroy it, but I found none.’ Ezekiel 22:30 NIV

One of the 4 major prophets: Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and Daniel.

The wall we are talking about here is not made of stones, nor is it Donald Trump’s proposed wall between Mexico and the USA, it is a wall of faithful people united in their efforts to resist evil. A human wall of people, just like you and me, who made a decision to stand in the gap, and stem the tide of evil in the world.

**And there is evil in the world.** There is good, and there is the opposite of good. And the opposite of good is evil. You are either heading towards God right now, in a holding pattern, or you are heading in the wrong direction.

**The huge gray area between good and evil;** that is the holding pattern, and it’s more commonly called rationalization. Where we either talk ourselves into things, or talk ourselves out of them. Where life’s knee jerk reactions to circumstances either head us off in the wrong direction, or put us literally in a tailspin.

Going round and round and round and round and round in circles, as we try to decide what to do for the best. This is the no man’s land of the soul, or what John Lennon called the ‘valley of indecision.’

I, alongside with you, and countless others, I suspect have spent many happy days, weeks, months and even years in the valley of indecision. We’re not ready to move forward, but we don’t want to fall back either,

so we stay, exactly where we are, rehearsing endless 'what if' scenarios. Sound familiar?

**Enter God's grace**, which stops us in our tracks, turns us around, sometimes none too gently, and heads us back in the right direction.

Jesus never said 'wait a minute, let me think about this, or 'I'll get back to you, or 'I don't know what to think, what do you think?'

**Neither did those brave men and women** who gave their lives for their country. They chose to do the right thing, and they are the reason we are here today in a free and beautiful country that has never known domination by another country, apart from the English, and you sent them packing soon enough.

**This weekend we celebrate those** who have gone before us, and deliberately chosen to step up to the plate, to step out of their comfort zone, to do the right thing. To do good. To stand in the gap, and protect our homeland, our freedom, and our heritage. They stood in the gap for their children, our children, their children's children, our children's children, their way of life, our way of life, and they call on us to follow their example.

**My father was 21 when he stood in the gap.** He was a long tall skinny drink of water, with glasses, in his last year at Art College, when he enlisted in the army at the beginning of World War II. He took part in the D Day invasion of France in 1944.

I expect there are people in your own families who have served in one of the armed forces. My father returned home at the end of the war, but so many did not.

**So how do we stand in the gap today?** What can we do to honor the memory of all those who have gone before us. How do we focus on good, and forget the bad and the ugly? Well, there are three letters I

want to introduce you to: **SDG. Soli Deo Gloria. Glory to God alone.** What has that to do with the gap, you might ask...

**It has everything to do with the gap, because it is all about focus.** If you focus on good, you are far more likely to achieve it.

**We know already that if our focus is on self,** self-interest, self-preservation, self-seeking and selfish, then we definitely, no doubt about it, 100% sure that we will find ourselves heading in the wrong direction. And focus is needed for the gray area in life, when we are going round and round and round and round, trying to decide what to do for the best. Focus, can help us see clearly, act decisively, and move forward, which by now you must know is one of my favorite subjects. Moving forward.

**Imagine an archery course,** set up with a large target far, far away. You pick up your bow and arrow and point it generally in the right direction. Chances of hitting the bullseye, slim to nil. Now imagine picking up the bow and arrow and focusing on the target, on the bullseye, squinting with concentration, pulling back the bowstring and letting go.

**That is the sweetness of success.** Which is why I want you to remember **SDG. Soli Deo Gloria.** The divine versus the human perspective. Stop thinking about yourself all the time. Start thinking what God is telling you. What is the divine perspective in your life? What are His plans for you? What is your purpose in life? What difference can I make? How can I leave this earth a slightly better off place than it was when I first arrived? If you have never asked yourself any of these questions, maybe this is a good time to do so.

**There are so many men and women, who put their own lives on pause,** like my father, and did the right thing. Not only as soldiers, sailors and airmen, but as men and women of faith, who have stood in

the gap for what they believe. Think of the disciples. They didn't just put their life on pause. They hit the stop button, skidded to a halt, left their fishing boats and never went back. They faced persecution, torture, and death for what they believed in.

**The Old Testament prophets.** They came from different backgrounds, but could never return to a normal life, once they had taken on the responsibility of becoming a messenger of God. SDG Soli Deo Gloria. All the way. Semper Fi. They were the Marines of the Bible!

**The letters in the New Testament,** point to whole communities of young Christians, who gave up their old ways, and embraced the way of Christ. They, too, stepped in the gap, to stand firm for a whole new way of life. Soli Deo Gloria. Glory to God alone. They focused on God, and how to be obedient to Him, and their master, Jesus.

So this weekend I want you to think about what you can do to step in the gap. To make a difference. And there are three phrases I would like you to concentrate on:

**Looking back, looking around, and looking up.**

**Look back at our heroes of the past.** What motivated them? What drove them forwards out of the valley of indecision, and in the right direction? Patriotism. Integrity. Character. Take a walk around Neahwa Park and pay your respects at the various war memorials there. First World War. Second World War. Korea. Vietnam. These heroes were regular people just like you and me They were tested on the battlefield, and will be forever remembered for their actions.

**What do you want to be remembered for?**

**Alfred Nobel** looked around, and read a premature obituary about himself, describing him as a merchant of death, because of his invention of dynamite. He hit the stop button, skidded to a halt, and

changed his total perspective on life. He founded the Nobel peace prize. That is what he is remembered for today.

What will you be remembered for? Look around?

What difference can you make? Can you find a gap to stand in?

**When you've finished looking back, look around**, and check out what we are doing for our returning veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan. Stand in the gap for those who serve our country today. Thank them for their service. Support the organizations that support them. We are blessed to be living in a free country. Listen to the news. There are many countries in the world where freedom is not an option, where opinions are stamped upon, and people's rights ignored. If you get the opportunity to help a veteran. Take it. Don't wait for someone else to step in the gap. Step forward. Our own American Legion here in Milford. Let's support it. Eat pancakes. Lots of them!

**Lastly, I want you to spend time looking up. Soli Deo Gloria. Glory to God alone.** Thank God, each and every day, that it is solely through His grace, that the human race has survived at all. There have already been times when it has been a close run thing between survival and extinction. When good has been threatened by evil.

**Johann Sebastian Bach**, at the top of every piece of church music he wrote, and he wrote a lot, would write 'JJ' Jesu, Juva. Jesus help me. And at the end of every piece of church music he composed he would write 'SDG' Soli Deo Gloria. Glory to God alone.

What would take for us to start our day saying on our knees 'Jesus, help me'. And finish our day with a grateful 'Soli Deo Gloria' before switching out the light.

This is what Max Lucado had to say on the subject of looking up:

Some years ago a sociologist accompanied a group of mountain climbers on an expedition. Among other things, he observed a distinct correlation between cloud cover and contentment. When there was no cloud cover and the peak was in view, the climbers were energetic and cooperative. When the gray clouds eclipsed the view of the mountaintop, though, the climbers were sullen and selfish.

The same thing happens to us. As long as our eyes are on God's majesty there is a bounce in our step. But let our eyes focus on the dirt beneath us and we will grumble about every rock and crevice we have to cross. For this reason Paul urged, 'Don't shuffle along, eyes to the ground, absorbed with the things right in front of you. Look up, and be alert to the things going on around Christ- that's where the action is. See things from his perspective.' (Colossians 3:1-3 The Message)

Soli Deo Gloria. The divine perspective.

Stand in the gap.

Look back. Look around. Look up.

Don't focus on you. Focus on God.

Find out where He is at work, and go join Him.

He's waiting for you to press the stop button, screech to a halt, and head in the right direction. Towards Him. Today.

Let us pray:

Heavenly Father, on this Memorial Day weekend, help us make it all the more memorable by our decision to move forward in life, trusting in You. We look around this glorious world, and we believe you are the Architect and Artist of all we see. You made the stars, that we might strive to reach for them. You made our hearts pliable, so that we might

reach out to others with compassion. Help us to find our focus. Our north star. Our Savior. Jesus Christ. Our way home to You. **Amen.**