



My Mother's Clock

"He has made everything beautiful in its time." - Ecclesiastes 3:11

Most people have a favorite place in their home and mine is the living room. It's not that large, but I love the high ceiling and east facing windows that direct streams of morning sunshine into bright patches of light along the walls and carpet. Nor is it elaborately furnished; a couch, coffee table and oversized chair are its basic components. Here is where I prefer to work, read, ponder or just nap. And lately I might just stare in awe at our most recent acquisition standing proudly in the entryway: the cherry wood grandfather clock that belonged to my parents.

The stately clock might seem more fitting in a grander home than ours, but it was the one thing I really wanted as an heirloom from my mother's house. In the relatively short time it's been here, I've come to appreciate the complexity of this fine mechanical timepiece that stands in stark contrast to the low-maintenance quartz clocks of today. Rather than changing a battery once or twice a year, the clock's heavy brass weights must be wound regularly, no less than once a week. And unlike the flawless precision of modern clocks, a grandfather clock must be adjusted to assure accuracy by tweaking the position of a nut at the bottom of the pendulum.

Maybe because it's beautiful, or because it demands more attention than most clocks that I'm so drawn to it. Or perhaps the constant ticking and resonant chiming that declare its presence also beckon my affection. Or maybe what it represents to me is so very special, a bittersweet reminder of a past era and life I shared with my parents. Its familial modifier, "grandfather," aptly labels this heirloom.

Both my parents' names are engraved on a small metal plate just beneath the clock's bright gold face. Alongside each name is a respective college graduation date; the clock was issued decades ago in commemoration of the UC Berkeley alumni. Among them were my father and mother who, as countless others, lived, loved, married, beget children and departed from the ranks of those they left behind.

Among the mementos both tangible and intangible is this clock that abides with me in the sphere my parents no longer inhabit. The constant ticking and sway of its large pendulum declare to me, moment by moment, the time of day but they also portend the brevity of life. Each tick slips into the past never to be regained, and I'm as powerless to change this reality as the clock that declares it. If I pretend otherwise, I'm as wrong as a timepiece improperly set that consequently cannot fulfill its purpose. But in spite of the inevitability of the fleeting moments great hope remains; those born of God were predestined to fulfill a glorious, divine purpose surpassing the dimensions of earthly time and space.

Indeed, before He fashioned the heavens and a world whose turning launched the first passing moment, the Creator knew His own. Then, in the fullness of time (Galatians 4:4), God became the Son of Man, born into a fallen world to bear its sins and redeem the souls washed clean by His blood. These are the ones also chosen to share the glory of the Father, Son and Spirit (John 17:22). Among them are we, though in God's mind before the foundation of the world, in due time we too joined a turning planet marked by minutes, hours, days and years. Like the hairs of our head countless but known fully to God, our moments included a glorious one when our second birth transformed us forever.



Hence amidst the continuum of the fleeting hours we're changed. And we no longer merely pass the time; instead we redeem it (Ephesians 5:16), walking not as fools, but circumspectly through the wisdom of the Scriptures. These immovable Words (Matthew 24:35) shine forth as a light in darkness (2 Peter 1:19); they are given by our Heavenly Father who can neither be moved nor be subject to time. Yet He reaches into the temporal world to meet us where we live and breathe. Therefore we, in the moments allotted to us, are able to gain wisdom by heeding His living Word that pierces the soul and spirit (Hebrews 4:12), and makes the fleeting vapor of our life count for all eternity.

So when a final heartbeat marks my passage into eternity to become unfettered by time, my mother's clock will remain behind, probably ticking away in some other earthly home. But for now I enjoy it in our house while it serves as a type of personal monument to my parents and the life they shared both with and without me. The familiar Westminster melody sounds every 15 minutes and announces each new hour with a familiar strain that also resounds today in England from Big Ben. But this chime also carries with it a hymn declaring an important truth: God's guidance is our foundation through life's stages, hour by hour, year by year, in season and out of season. This worshipful hymn was written centuries ago to accompany the bells of Westminster, yet the truth of its words remain:

*Lord though this hour,
Be Thou our guide
So by Thy power
No foot shall slide.*

- By Mary Nixon