

A voice says, "Call out."  
Then he answered, "What shall I call out?"  
All flesh is grass, and all its loveliness is like  
the flower of the field.  
The grass withers, the flower fades,  
When the breath of the Lord blows upon it;  
Surely the people are grass.  
The grass withers, the flower fades,  
But the word of our God stands forever.

Isaiah 40:6-8

# IMPERMANENCE

**T**O THE UNTRAINED HEART, WE HUMANS are surrounded by substantial, seemingly permanent things. Around our own house and dotting the land are trees that have been in place for many decades. The oak, hickory, and walnut trees grow slowly, ploddingly, and have in their tortuous bark the look of great age and permanence. In these parts, even many of the man-made components of the landscape appear to have been in place forever: the acres upon miles of rusted barbed wire, ancient ponds and depressions, hillsides of prairie grass.

On the north side of our house, the land gently rises across the front lawn, rises a little more where we cleared the prairie grass for our orchard, then descends down a rounded slope to the gravel road below. Across the road the land rises again to mirror the hillside on our side of the road.

For the first few years after we moved here fifteen years ago, we enjoyed the view across this small valley to the gently curved rise, where in the summer the tall green grasses would wave in the strong winds before a thunderstorm, and in the autumn, when the grasses had dried, the color of their amber stalks was intensified by the burnt amber of the setting sun. The hillside had been something substantial, permanent, almost primal as it was crafted into its present shape millennia ago by a passing glacier.

## BULLDOZERS

One day, however, the gentle rolling slope of the hillside was no longer there. One day the incessant clatter and groaning of a huge bulldozer methodically reshaped the natural curves into systematic terraces more suitable for planting field corn and soybeans. In a few short days the soil of the hillside had been moved about at will and totally reshaped, as if nothing more substantial than a child's sandbox.

The farmer who owned that hillside had every right, of course, to do what he could to make his land more profitable. And who's to say that these changes were any worse than how we changed the appearance of our front field so that we could plant new fruit trees.

Now, again, the little hillside is being reshaped. The same farmer who terraced the land before has decided that it will be more profitable still if he removes the terraces for crops and plants, instead, houses. To that end the bulldozers and earth movers have returned with a vengeance, slicing off the crest of the hill to fashion out of the ancient loam something that will become a paved street with a broad cul-de-sac at its end. Once that is finished, and once the farmer finds people willing to purchase and build a house on each subdivided tract, the backhoes will dig rectangular basement holes here and there across the hillside, and cement will be poured for foundations. Then houses will spring up, and the view across the way will be dramatically different from the gently waving grass and free-roaming wildlife that was the hillside's aspect fifteen years ago.

## DEPENDABLY ETERNAL

His radiance is like the sunlight;  
He has rays flashing from His hand,  
And there is the hiding of His power.  
Before Him goes pestilence,  
And plague comes after Him.  
He stood and surveyed the earth;  
He looked and startled the nations.  
Yes, the perpetual mountains were shattered,  
The ancient hills collapsed.  
His ways are everlasting.

Habakkuk 3:4-6

No matter how substantial it may appear, nothing, absolutely nothing—save its human souls and God’s word—in or about this world is permanent. Everything around us, whether crafted by the fingers of man or God, will change, and eventually pass away. Stately trees and majestic mountains, skyscrapers and vast cities, grasslands and cavernous valleys—all will be done away with.

Man is born with a need to depend on something greater and more permanent than himself. Even if he labors against it in theory, in practice each person knows there is a God, and that there is something attractive about Him. One component of that attraction is God’s permanence—His eternity. Everything else may crumble about us, but the triune God remains.

Still, some spend a lifetime in a vain search to find that dependable permanence on this temporal plane. Some put their faith in their own species, reasoning that since modern man is evolution’s highest result, it follows that he will endure and only continue to rise ever higher. Some put their faith in man’s inventiveness and technology, trusting in his scientific advances to be man’s salvation and hope. Others put their faith in the work of their own hands, building ever higher and smarter and stronger, crafting their modern idols from concrete and steel and curtains of glass. Some get it half right and conclude that man on this earth is doomed, yet search for their salvation in the stars, rather than in heaven.

We all need something on which to depend—something that will never change. We all want to rise in the morning with the assurance that things around us will be as they were when we pulled the covers up last night. We want our house still to be standing; we want our husband or wife still by our side; we want our children still to

be in the next room and still loving us. But none of these things are permanent.

We must look somewhere *beyond* this temporal plane for something absolutely dependable, unchangeable, permanent.

Not only is God Himself eternal, but *who He is* is eternal as well. His character is unchanging, His regard for those who belong to Him unflinching. God’s love for His creation, His people, is dependably permanent.

A psalm. For giving thanks.  
Shout for joy to the Lord, all the earth.  
Worship the Lord with gladness;  
come before him with joyful songs.  
Know that the Lord is God.  
It is he who made us, and we are his;  
we are his people, the sheep of his pasture.  
Enter his gates with thanksgiving

and his courts with praise;  
give thanks to him and  
praise his name.  
For the Lord is good and  
his love endures forever;  
his faithfulness continues  
through all generations.

Psalm 100:1-5 NIV

We all want to be able to stand upon a firm, unmovable foundation. Search as we may, we’ll not find it here, or anywhere around us. We can travel around the globe, dedicating our lives to the pursuit, but our search will be in vain. Mountains will crumble, valleys will change, and grassy hillsides will be remade into the likeness of man. Only God—through Christ—will endure forever. 

**The immutability of God appears in its most perfect beauty when viewed against the mutability of men. In God no change is possible; in men change is impossible to escape. Neither the man is fixed nor his world, but he and it are in constant flux. Each man appears for a little while to laugh and weep, to work and play, and then to go to make room for those who shall follow him in the never-ending cycle. In a world of change and decay not even the man of faith can be completely happy. Instinctively he seeks the unchanging and is bereaved at the passing of dear familiar things.**

A.W. Tozer

*O Lord! My heart is sick,  
Sick of this everlasting change;  
And life runs tediously quick  
Through its unresting race and varied range:  
Change finds no likeness to itself in Thee,  
And wakes no echo in Thy mute Eternity.*

Frederick W. Faber

“Therefore everyone who hears these words of Mine

and acts on them, may be compared to a wise man who built his house on the rock. And the rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and yet it did not fall, for it had been founded on the rock. Everyone who hears these words of Mine and does not act on them, will be like a foolish man who built his house on the sand. The rain fell, and the floods came, and the winds blew and slammed against that house; and it fell—and great was its fall.”

Matthew 7:24-27