

GOD'S TAPESTRY

SERMON by Rex Morgan on 17 September 2016

When I was going through a trial in life some time ago some friends sent me a card, which I found very comforting and helpful.

It contains a poem entitled *"The Plan of the Master Weaver."* You've probably come across the analogy that our life is like a beautiful tapestry that God is weaving with both light and dark coloured threads, picturing joyful and sorrowful times.

Many of us have seen tapestries adorning the walls of ancient castles or churches. Usually they depict battle or country scenes. Tapestries have been woven for hundreds of years in many diverse cultures. Important structures and buildings of the Greek Empire, including the Parthenon, had walls covered by them. In the 13th and 14th centuries the Church recognised the value of tapestries in illustrating Bible stories to its illiterate congregations.

The celebrated Bayeux Tapestry is made up of a series of scenes from the life of Harold and of the invasion and conquest of England by William the Conqueror. This embroidery is about 70 metres (or 230 feet) long. It contains 1522 motifs and inscriptions in Latin, worked in red, green, blue and yellow wool, on a white canvas foundation, and is still in good condition.



Figure 1 - The Bayeux Tapestry

The top side of a weaving or tapestry looks better than the bottom. We are generally in a position of only being able to see the knotted ends and frayed edges of what God is doing in our lives. We see the bottom of the tapestry, which looks like a haphazard jumbled mess.

But if we could view the other side of the picture we would see that God is doing something beautiful. We are on the underside, going through painful circumstances, but not always knowing God's purposes for them.

That's what the poem points out. Another similar and famous poem was written by Benjamin Malachi Franklin, but was popularised by Corrie Ten Boom in her famous book *"The Hiding Place"*.¹

A video reading of the poem can be viewed [HERE](#).

Let's look at the poem more slowly and see what lessons we can glean from this picturesque analogy.

*"My life is but a weaving
between my Lord and me
I do not choose the colours
He worketh steadily"*

It is a partnership between God and us. Our thoughts, imaginations, motives, actions, attitudes etc are all threads and each moment of time is like the shuttle that weaves those threads into the tapestry of our life.

God is involved too, as the master weaver behind it all, weaving various situations and circumstances through our lives.



¹ Cornelia "Corrie" ten Boom (b. Amsterdam, April 15, 1892; d. Orange, California, April 15, 1983) was a Dutch Christian Holocaust survivor who helped many Jews escape the Nazis during World War II. In 1970, Ten Boom co-wrote her autobiography, *The Hiding Place*, released in 1971 and which was made into a film of the same name two years later starring Jeannette Clift as Corrie. (Wikipedia)

There are a couple of scriptures that refer to life being like a weaving.

Isaiah 38:12

Like a shepherd's tent my house has been pulled down and taken from me. Like a weaver I have rolled up my life, and he has cut me off from the loom; day and night you made an end of me.

The context is King Hezekiah talking about his death. He describes his life as being rolled up like a weaver rolls up a tapestry carpet.

Job 7:6

My days are swifter than a weaver's shuttle,
and they come to an end without hope.

A similar context, where Job is speaking of his impending death when suffering his great trials.

Here's a more positive verse on the way God is weaving our lives in a pattern:

Jeremiah 29:11-12

¹¹ For I know the plans I have for you," declares the Lord, "plans to prosper you and not to harm you, plans to give you hope and a future."¹² Then you will call on me and come and pray to me, and I will listen to you.

The context here is that God was speaking to the exiles in Babylon who had lost everything and were now slaves. No matter how difficult their life was now, God was going to rescue them - they did have a future and a hope. And so do we, even when we go through trials. They are part of God's plan for our lives. As a tapestry maker, He has a pattern to work to.

Joseph's life was a fantastic example of that. The brothers sold him into slavery, he was thrown into prison for something he didn't do -- there were lots of hard times and dark threads in the tapestry of his life, but then he was raised to prominence in Egypt and the gold threads came to the fore.

It is all summed up in **Genesis 50:19-20**

¹⁹ But Joseph said to them, "Don't be afraid. Am I in the place of God? ²⁰ You intended to harm me, but God intended it for good to accomplish what is now being done, the saving of many lives.

*Oft times He weaveth sorrow
and I in foolish pride
Forget He sees the upper
and I the underside.*

The wording on the greeting card my friends sent me is quite different, and even better in some ways. Mr Hallmark has expanded the wording:

"The Plan of the Master Weaver"

*Our lives are but fine weavings
That God and we prepare,
Each life becomes a fabric planned
And fashioned in His care.
We may not always see just how
The weavings intertwine
But we must trust the Master's hand
And follow His design.
For He can view the pattern
Upon the upper side,
While we must look from underneath
And trust in Him to guide...*

*Sometimes a strand of sorrow
Is added to His plan,
And though it's difficult for us,
We still must understand
That it's He who fills the shuttle,
It's He who knows what's best,
So we must weave in patience
And leave to Him the rest...*

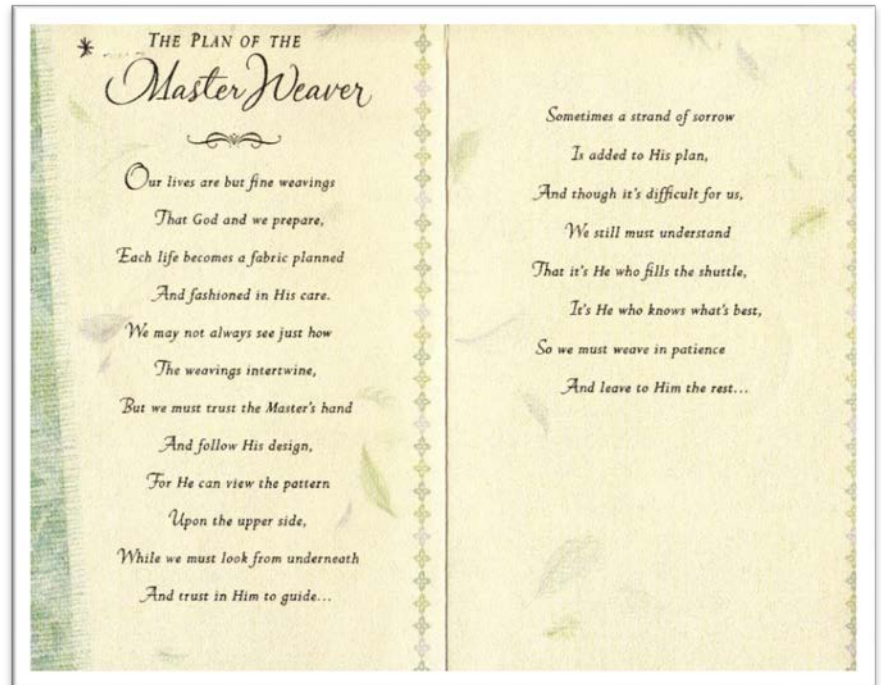


Figure 2 – The Plan of the Master Weaver

Sometimes we wonder why God doesn't answer our prayers, when we pray for long periods of time, seemingly with 'no answer'.

One amazing thing to remember is that the Father didn't even answer Jesus when he prayed to have the cup lifted out of His hands. Well, God answered, but the answer was "No". It wasn't the answer Jesus physically wanted. He didn't want to go through that trial of death, but He had to.

There were quite a few dark threads woven into the tapestry of His life. The flight into Egypt to survive soon after His birth, people mocking and scoffing and calling Him illegitimate etc.

Matthew 26:39

Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, "My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as you will."

He even prayed the same thing three times, but the response was still 'No'!

Then of course there are the multitude of examples in **Hebrews 11**. Just breaking in at the very end of the chapter in **verses 36 to 40**:

Hebrews 11: 36-40

³⁶ Some faced jeers and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. ³⁷ They were put

to death by stoning; they were sawn in two; they were killed by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated— ³⁸ the world was not worthy of them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, living in caves and in holes in the ground.³⁹ These were all commended for their faith, yet none of them received what had been promised, ⁴⁰ since God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect.

They went through terrible traumas and tragic times. They only really saw the underside of the tapestry but God gave them a glimpse of the beautiful upper side, and that's what they depended on. They had faith that the other side of the tapestry was worth dying for. They had faith to trust that the Master Weaver knew what He was doing.

One thing I was reading about weaving says "In some weaving traditions, the weaver begins with a pattern, a plan, but the work is complex and mistakes are inevitable. Things do not always go according to the pattern. The master weaver is one who can incorporate the 'mistake' into a new, unique masterpiece."

So God can blend our ignorant human mistakes into a new masterpiece in our lives.

Ephesians 2:10

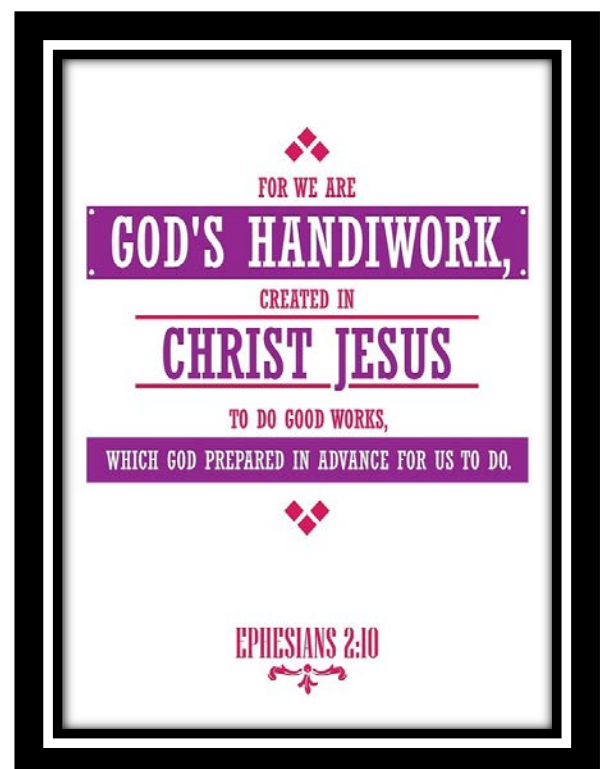
For we are God's handiwork, created in Christ Jesus to do good works, which God prepared in advance for us to do.

The word "handiwork" (NIV) is also translated "masterpiece", "workmanship", "work of art". The word is literally "poem", from the Greek word "poiema."

Going back to **Hebrews 11:39-40** we see an interesting aspect:

Hebrews 11: 39-40

³⁹ ...yet none of them received what had been promised, ⁴⁰ since God had planned something better for us so that only together with us would they be made perfect.



God is not only making a separate tapestry out of each of our lives, but He is joining all of these tapestries together to make a master tapestry of all human life.

God is weaving our lives together with all the others, as each of our lives touches so many other lives. Each person is a thread in the giant tapestry of life.



It's interesting that the thing that gives us our identity, the unique substance running through all our cells is DNA, which

is like a thread or strand. So each of us has the DNA threads inside of us. We are made up of threads and we are a thread in God's tapestry of life.

On a larger scale, isn't it interesting that the world is now connected by the worldwide web, which is a weaving analogy, as a spider weaves a web. Each computer on the internet is like a thread of the web, and even the messages we send by email are called "threads."

The "Worldwide Web" could have easily have been called the "mine", or the "mesh". The creator of the web chose the term "web" simply as a matter of choice over the other alternatives he considered.

So the internet is like a massive tapestry. But getting back to the tapestry that God is making of all of our lives, does it remind you of one our hymns?

Berners-Lee, the creator of the Web, chose the name "World Wide Web" because he wanted to emphasize that, in this global hypertext system, anything could link to anything else. Alternative names he considered were: "Mine of Information" (Moi); "The Information Mine" (Tim); and "Information Mesh" (which was discarded as it looked too much like "Information Mess")

*Our many lives are woven, fitly blended
As tapestry created by Thy hand.
Within each thread, Thy glory is extended,
With every colour, quality, and strand.
Upon Thy loom, our differences become one;
A pleasing tribute to thee and Thy Son.*

The Church is also a tapestry, with all of our lives woven together, as our various giftings and attributes all touch one another to form a picture. Maybe it will make you feel better to realise the Auckland congregation as we see it is just the underside of tapestry! Only God can see the upper side, and He is working it out so that it is a beautiful masterpiece blending in with the tapestry of GCI as a whole, and on beyond to the whole world.

One thing you can be sure of is that at the very centre of the tapestry is Jesus Christ!

The tapestry began with Him ("the Lamb slain from the foundation of the world"), and He is the golden thread woven throughout the scriptures. Each of us is just a part of the Body of Jesus Christ, and each of us is becoming more like Him, "transformed into His image" as Paul said (2 Corinthians 3:18).

In a way He is the upper side of the tapestry that we are the bottom side of. When God looks at us He sees Jesus Christ.

Looking at the last verse of the poem:

*Until the loom is silent
and shuttles cease to fly,
Will God roll back the canvas
and explain the reason why.
The dark threads are as needful
in the skilful Weaver's Hand
As the threads of gold and silver
in the pattern He has planned.*

So we don't always understand the reasons for our trials and problems at this time, but hopefully this analogy is of help as we come to grips with them. We can only see the underside, but eventually we'll see the full picture and marvel at the wonderful masterpiece God has made of the tapestry of our lives!

Corrie Ten Boom, who popularised the poem in her book "The Hiding Place" lived in Holland in the Nazi era and started providing hiding places for Jews who were fleeing for their lives. She was caught and spent months in concentration camps for doing this. In her book "Tramp for the Lord" she talks about her globe-trotting life after release from the concentration camps.

On page 12 of "Tramp for the Lord" Corrie says:

Looking back across the years of my life, I can see the working of a divine pattern which is the way of God with His children. When I was in a prison camp in Holland during the war, I often prayed, "Lord, never let the enemy put me in a German concentration camp." God answered *no* to that prayer. Yet in the German camp, with all its horror, I found many prisoners who had never heard of Jesus Christ. If God had not used my sister Betsie and me to bring them to Him, they would never have heard of Him. Many died, or were killed, but many died with the Name of Jesus on their lips. They were well worth all our suffering. Faith is like radar which sees through the fog – the reality of things at a distance that the human eye cannot see.

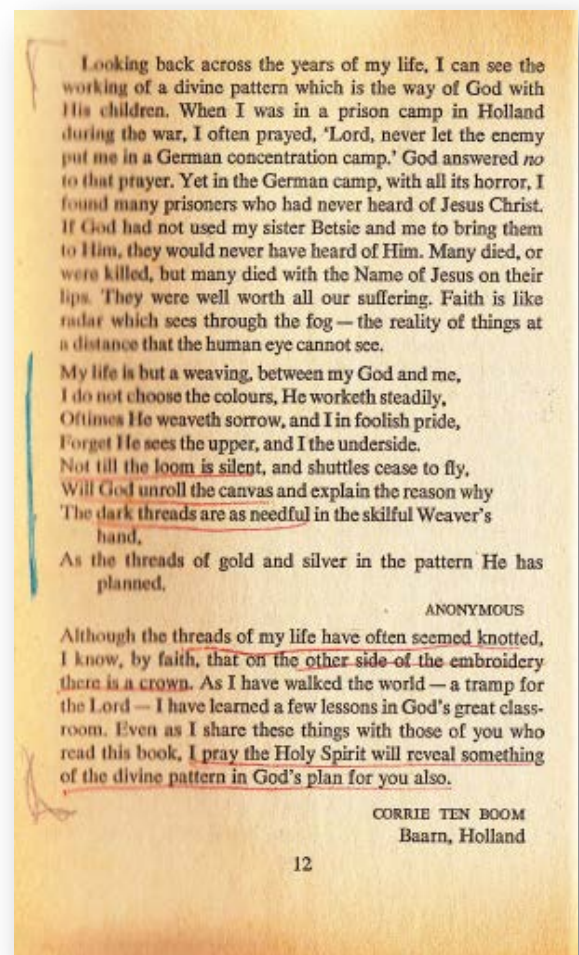
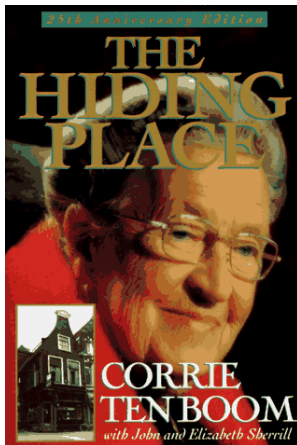


Figure 3 - a page from Corrie ten Boom's book "Tramp for the Lord"



*My life is but a weaving, between my God and me,
I do not choose the colours, He worketh steadily.
Oftimes He weaveth sorrow, and I in foolish pride,
Forget He sees the upper, and I the underside.
Not till the loom is silent, and shuttles cease to fly,
Will God unroll the canvas and explain the reason why
The dark threads are as needful in the skilful Weaver's hand,
As the threads of gold and silver in the pattern He has planned.*

ANONYMOUS ²

Although the threads of my life have often seemed knotted, I know, by faith, that on the other side of the embroidery there is a crown. As I have walked the world - a tramp for the Lord – I have learned a few lessons in God's great classroom. Even as I share these things with those of you who read this book, I pray the Holy Spirit will reveal something of the divine pattern in God's plan for you also.

CORRIE TEN BOOM
Baarn, Holland

I'd like to conclude with a video of actress (and author) [Evelyn Hinds](#) playing Corrie reciting the poem in her younger days.

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=2rXLmIx0SsI>



² Corrie ten Boom cited the author of the poem as being unknown. In 1950 the poem was published in a newspaper, *The Memphis Commercial Appeal*. It was written by a man named Benjamin Malachi Franklin in the late 1940's. He was born in 1882 and died in 1965. Evidence of his authorship was submitted to the satisfaction of the U.S. Library of Congress and a copyright certificate was issued to his grandson.