

How Great? How Small!

God, in his word, reminds us how brief our life is, how small, how insignificant, we humans are. Alas, we too often forget this, and get inflated ideas of ourselves and other men. Here are some salutary words drawn from the Bible:

When I look at your heavens [O LORD], the work of your fingers, the moon and the stars, which you have set in place, what is man that you are mindful of him, and the son of man that you care for him? (Ps. 8:3-4).

O LORD, what is man that you regard him, or the son of man that you think of him? Man is like a breath; his days are like a passing shadow (Ps. 144:3-4).

Stop regarding man in whose nostrils is breath, for of what account is he? (Isa. 2:22).

What is your life? For you are a mist that appears for a little time and then vanishes (Jas. 4:14).

And yet, as I say, man can ignore God's perfect estimate, to get inflated views of himself. The Dorset poet, William Barnes (1801-1886), captured this superbly in a poem he penned about himself and his thoughts. Here it is:

How Great? How Small!

How Great Do I Become!

*How great do I become! How great!
With all my children now full-grown,
And settled, each a wedded mate,
And all with children of their own.
I first was one, and then one more
Well-wived; and children made me ten;
And they with all their wives or men,
And children, now make me two score,
With children's children, far or nigh,
How great I am become! Am I?*

*I own a share of Weston folk,
On Norton work I have some hands,
At Beechley I send up a smoke,
My surname sounds on Ashridge lands.
In Meldon church my voices sing,
Yes, there I have young tongues to pray,
And I have boys and girls at play
Below the rocks, at Clewewell spring,
With all the souls that I may claim
How great I am! How great my name!*

*But oh! how little can I track
The longsome team of father men,
That runs, from me to elders, back
A chain of links beyond my ken.
O'er what dear heads, by one and one,
My name at length came down on me
I know not now, nor may I see
Below me one child's child's sweet son.
No. I am only one of all
Those links of life. But one. How small!*