

The Blessing of Affliction – Bringing God to Our Doorstep

This morning you and I are just a heartbeat, just a brainwave, just a breath – away from the Door to Eternity.

For a moment can I remind you how fragile we are? To stay alive through this day the following systems must work in perfect harmony:

First, your sealed, four chambered, submerged pump (a.k.a. your heart) MUST work. What machine can compare with the human heart that HAS TO pump around 100,000 times EVERY DAY or we stop dead in our tracks. Our Creator placed within us this pump that has a work expectancy of over 70 years without shutdown for maintenance or repair.

But to stay alive more than our heart has to work. All day today all of these systems must work together.

- A heart that beats 103,000 times in 24 hours or you felt weakness.
- A supply of blood that must travel 168,000 miles through your body or your tissue and organs would slowly die.
- A set of lungs that breathed 23,400 times as you took your 20 breaths a minute, to inhale the 450 cubic feet of our atmosphere a day it takes to sustain our respiratory needs.
- A body frame strong enough to resist the weight of atmosphere that stretches 50 plus miles above us and that equals 2100 lbs. square foot or 15 lbs. square inch at sea level. So every one of us walks around with a total atmospheric pressure equally a load of 14 tons pressing us down. Now do you know why you are tired?
- A healthy organ system so that every cell of ours can be born again in our body every 28 days.

So -- this morning you and I are just a heartbeat, just a brainwave, just a breath – away from the Door to Eternity. And, if you ever want to get someone's attention just let him or her think that they are dying. It is amazing what goes on when we feel that death is near. Every relationship in

life is examined, every activity scrutinized and the best of the best is all we care about.

It was 2 ½ years ago that I sat on the white crinkly paper that covers those examination tables in my doctor's office. For several weeks I had to endure more exams, tests, pokes, and samplings than I knew were possible. My doctor had analyzed the results; now he sat on his stool in front of me looking up into my eyes. He was a brother in Christ, a godly man that I trusted, admired, and respected. With those sad eyes that told more than words he said, "It appears that you have cancer, liver cancer. There are very few options we have to treat that..."

That was all I heard. Immediately my mind went into warp speed. I left the room in my thoughts and raced to my family. At that moment I had an infant daughter, 2 toddler sons, and five other young children and teens, a wife, a ministry, and so on.

In a millisecond my ENTIRE life changed.

Everything I owned seemed so unimportant to me.

Every person I loved instantly rose to the top of my priority list.

And then like a flood I realized I might see Jesus Himself SOON, in a matter of just weeks or months. Everything I had ever read in God's Word, ever heard about Heaven, ever learned about eternity -- was all going to be actually my personal experience!

The fear of all the unknowns, the inevitability of all the pain, the loss of all the hopes of the future ministry, family joys and so on became my personal affliction.

And for those three weeks that I had cancer (or just thought that I did) that massive life dominating affliction BROUGHT THE LORD TO MY DOORSTEP! In fact I have often said since then that everyone needs to have cancer for three weeks!

And that is exactly the 7th and final blessing of affliction. Please stand as we read --

Psalm 119:153 **Consider my affliction** (code for IT HASN'T STOPPED) **and deliver me** (code for COME TO WHERE I AM AND BRING WHAT I NEED), **for I do not forget Your law** (code for I AM DOING MY PART).

Pray

One of our health challenged saints¹ sent this note to one of our now departed saints when that saint was told he had terminal brain cancer. I remember reading these words at his bedside where he died some weeks later.

Our greatest enemy is not disease, but despair.

Cancer is so limited. . .
It cannot cripple love,
It cannot shatter hope,
It cannot erode faith,
It cannot eat away peace,
It cannot destroy confidence,
It cannot kill friendship,
It cannot shut out memories,
It cannot silence courage,
It cannot invade the soul,
It cannot reduce eternal life,
It cannot quench the Spirit,
It cannot lessen the power of the resurrection.

...though the outward man perishes, yet the inner man is renewed day by day...we look not at the things which are seen, but at things which are not seen: for the things which are seen are temporary, but the things which are not seen are eternal." II Cor 4:16 & 18

The Great Physician isn't expensive, but His work is priceless! You are so loved, Pat

Afflictions allow us to experientially test God's promises.

Affliction is a blessing.

This morning we find that when troubles come, and we experience affliction watch out, if you are a believer – God is headed your way. Remember that this is the final point in our discovery in Psalm 119 -- of the Seven Blessings of Affliction.

AFFLICTION can be used by God to bless our lives. Have you marked the pathway of His blessing that He has laid out in His Word? Here is what the Lord has told us. Affliction can be a blessing if it --

¹ Personal card from Pat Bartlett to her friend Bill Robinson prior to 4.3.01.

1. PUSHES US INTO GOD'S WORD: Psalm 119:50
2. PULLS US BACK ONTO HIS PATH: Psalm 119:67
3. CHISELS GOD'S PLAN INTO OUR LIFE: Psalm 119:71
4. TEACHES US THAT GOD IS FAITHFUL: Psalm 119:75
5. KEEPS US FOCUSED ON OUR TEACHER: Psalm 119:92
6. FORCES US TO TEST HIS PROMISES: Psalm 119:107
7. BRINGS GOD TO OUR DOORSTEP: Psalm 119:153

Trials refine us, pain opens our eyes to the realities of life, and sorrow tunes us in to what really matters. And on and on through life it goes. Traumatic and painful experiences actually help us be more aware and apart of the world around us.

How do afflictions bring God near? By all the other wonderful blessings we have already learned. Through all these – He is NEAR!

Overview Chart on Affliction in Psalm 119

1. **AFFLICTION: PUSHES US INTO GOD'S WORD: Only God's Word can really help us in afflictions – cards, visits, gifts, activities all can only offer temporary relief through distraction or amusement.** Psalm 119:50 This is my comfort in my affliction (6040 emotional), for YOUR WORD (Reading Divine Word to find and follow God's Will for my life 565) has given me life. *Life often dulls or deadens us to spiritual things, so when God sends afflictions our way God's Word quickens us or "has given life".* So affliction makes God's Word comes alive, it is fresh and seems to jump off the pages at us.
2. **AFFLICTION: PULLS US BACK ONTO THE PATH: A consistent life is built by afflictions. God uses afflictions to pull us back and keep us on His path for our lives. Often we only call when we need something – so He gives us reason to call.** Psalm 119:67 Before I was afflicted (6031 physical) I went astray, But now I keep YOUR WORD (Reading Divine Word to find and follow God's Will for my life 565). *Affliction can stop us from straying away from God, so "now I keep". Have you ever been driving late at night and slowly drifted to the side of the road? Remember when you hit those rumble strips and the way you jerked the wheel -- so that you got back on the road quickly? Afflictions are the rumble strips God uses to make us jerk our wheel of life to get us back on the road and to keep us from heading into the ditch!* So affliction makes us start wanting to obey God's Word!
3. **AFFLICTION: CHISELS GOD'S PLAN INTO OUR LIFE: There are truths and lessons we only can learn in the furnace of**

trouble. And remember in the fiery furnace of Daniel 3, only the things that kept them from walking properly were burned away! So affliction scrapes away what is not part of God's plans for our lives – people, possessions, positions, and securities... Psalm 119:71 It is good for me that I have been afflicted (6031 physical), That I may learn YOUR STATUTES (Following the Divine Plans to build Life the way God intends it to be). *Afflictions can remind us in a life long way of God's Hand, His plans for us. Some of our greatest moments we will always remember were forged in the furnaces of affliction.* So affliction makes us want to find and follow God's plan for our life.

4. AFFLICTION: TEACHES US THAT GOD IS FAITHFUL: God's unchanging faithfulness is learned best in affliction.

Afflictions remind us that everything the Lord does is good, right, and the best thing there could be for us.

Psalm 119:75 I know, O Lord, that Your judgments (Building Life upon God's Unchanging Decisions) are right, And that in faithfulness You have afflicted (6031 physical) me. *Afflictions are very personal "me".* So affliction makes us feel God's arms around us.

5. AFFLICTION: KEEPS US FOCUSED ON OUR TEACHER: The onset of troubles marks the beginning of a personal tutorial with our Divine Teacher. Affliction is an opportunity to "delight" in Him or for us to "perish in our troubles.

Psalm 119:92 Unless YOUR LAW (Receiving Divine Instruction from the Divine Teacher that is perfect). had been my delight; I would then have perished in my affliction (6040 emotional). *Affliction "perishes" us or squishes our lives under its weight.* So affliction makes us keep our eyes on HIM!

6. AFFLICTION: FORCES US TO TEST HIS PROMISES:

Affliction usually increases, as we get older. But God's Word will always renew, refresh, and revive. Psalm

119:107 I am afflicted (6031 physical) very much; Revive me, O Lord, according to YOUR WORD (Hearing the Divine Voice walking us through life 1697). *Often we know so much more than we experience. Affliction is a reality check.*

Afflictions seem to grow through life to be more and more. After disasters people often listen better. The word for "very much" is the same Hebrew word used of the waters of the Flood covering the earth (Genesis 7, 18-19) and of the plagues covering Egypt (Exodus 9.3 on cattle; Exodus 9.18 the hail; Exodus 10.14 the locusts). The word

for “revive” is actually save my life and is the same Hebrew word as used for the rescue of Rahab from Jericho as the walls crumbled and everyone else was destroyed and she and her family alone were rescued (Joshua 2.13; 6.17, 25). So affliction makes us veterans in testing the promises of God!

- 7. AFFLICTION: BRINGS GOD TO OUR DOORSTEP:** When Ezra said deliver me – he was asking the Lord to come to him with what he needed. Isn't that what a deliveryman does? He brings exactly what we need? And that is the final blessing of affliction. Affliction comes with a promise from God for a special delivery. He comes right to us – with everything we need. Psalm 119:153 Consider my affliction (6040 emotional), and deliver me, For I do not forget **YOUR LAW (Receiving Divine Instruction from the Divine Teacher that is perfect).**

For just a moment think of the testimony of Job. I was reading through the remarkable record of Job in God's Word this week. Do you remember the conclusion of those 42 chapters? Real quickly think through the events. Job 1 introduces a wealthy and powerful man.

- o Job has flocks, treasures, servants, and family (Job 1.3).
- o Job is a good man with a close family (Job 1.4).
- o Job is also a godly man who was a praying dad (Job 1.5).
- o Job has a testimony in the sight of God (Job 1.8).
- o Job is “destroyed by God without cause” (Job 2.3).

All that to say that Job is by all human measures a great man, an exemplary man, a godly man. Any of us would admire his walk with the Lord, his testimony in his community, and his wonderful leadership in his family. Right? But look at what affliction did to him. Last chapter of the book, verses 5-6:

Job 42:5-6 “I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, But now my eye sees You. 6 Therefore I abhor myself, And repent in dust and ashes.”

When affliction comes it brings God to our Doorstep. We see Him as never before. Job did, we can. Life is full of trials. Most people face an uphill climb just to make it through life. But, when we become Christians there is an added amount of troubles that come our way.

Richard Swenson says²:

² Margin, p. 66-68.

"Life is full of daily *minor struggles*: ringing telephones, fighting children, traffic jams, and overdue bills. These chip away at our lightheartedness and erode our joy. Then there are the *major struggles*, such as the infirmities of aging, the loss of a job, or the divorce of your closest friends. These stressors don't chip, they detonate. We reel under the impact, and the pain is often palpable.

J. I. Packer says:

"This is the ultimate reason, from our standpoint, why God fills our lives with troubles and perplexities of one sort and another -- it is to ensure that we shall learn to hold Him fast. The reason why the Bible spends so much of its time reiterating that God is a strong rock, a firm defense, and a sure refuge and help for the weak, is that God spends so much of His time bringing home to us that we are weak, both mentally and morally, and dare not trust ourselves to find, or to follow, the right road ... God wants us to feel that our way through life is rough and perplexing, so that we may learn to lean on Him. Therefore He takes steps to drive us out of self-confidence to trust in Himself"³

Peter wrote to some suffering saints in the AD 60's. He gave them some rules for making it through problems in life. Living the way Jesus asked us to live is certainly not easy. To put it mildly, it is an agonizing struggle at times. Peter says endure the suffering such a life brings! WHY? Because:

1. AFFLICTION COMES BY SOVEREIGN DESIGN. 1 Peter 5:10 But may the God of all grace, **who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while**, perfect, establish, strengthen, and settle you.
 - o Peter reveals to us what may be called the law of Christian affliction. Affliction is the doorway to some amazing promises of God.
 - o God will restore, establish, strengthen and settle us who suffer affliction; and each of the words which Peter uses has behind it a vivid picture.
2. AFFLICTION COMES WITH A SUPPLY OF SPIRITUAL POWER. ["Restore or perfect"] 1 Peter 5:10 But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, **perfect**, establish, strengthen, and settle you.
 - o Through suffering God will RESTORE a man. The word for restore is difficult in this case to translate. It is **kartardizein**, the word commonly used for setting a fracture, the word used in Mark 1:19 for mending nets. It means "to supply that which is missing", to mend that which is broken.

³ (Knowing God [Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1973], p. 227).

- o So suffering, if accepted in humility and trust and love, can repair weaknesses in our character and add the greatness, which wasn't there. Look at Paul's testimony in II Corinthians 12:7-10. 2 Corinthians 12:7-10 And lest I should be exalted above measure by the abundance of the revelations, a thorn in the flesh was given to me, a messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I be exalted above measure. 8 Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. 9 And He said to me, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. 10 Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ's sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.
3. SUFFERING SOLIDIFIES OUR DAILY LIVING. ["Establish or confirm"] 1 Peter 5:10 But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, **establish**, strengthen, and settle you.
- o Through suffering God will ESTABLISH a man. The word is *sterixein*, which means "to make as solid as granite." Affliction will either cause us to collapse or – if we participate by faith, it can temper us like steel through the furnaces. The best example of this is Jesus Himself as He was tempted in Matthew 4:1-11.
4. SUFFERING STRENGTHENS OUR ENDURANCE. ["strengthen"] 1 Peter 5:10 But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, **strengthen**, and settle you.
- o Through suffering God will STRENGTHEN a man. The Greek is *sthenoun*, which means "to fill with strength." Here is the same sense again. A life with no effort and no discipline almost inevitably becomes a flabby life. Hebrews 2:18 For in that He Himself has suffered, being tempted, He is able to aid those who are tempted. Hebrews 4:15-16 For we do not have a High Priest who cannot sympathize with our weaknesses, but was in all points tempted as we are, yet without sin. 16 Let us therefore come boldly to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace to help in time of need.
5. SUFFERING SETTLES US IN CHRIST. ["settle or establish"] 1 Peter 5:10 But may the God of all grace, who called us to His eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after you have suffered a while, perfect, establish, strengthen, and **settle** you.
- o Through suffering God will SETTLE a man. The Greek is *themelioun*, which means "to lay the foundations." When we have to meet sorrow and suffering we are driven down to the very bedrock of faith. It is then that we discover what are the things which cannot be shaken. It

is in time of trial that we discover the great truths on which real life is founded.

- 1 Peter 2:21-25 For to this you were called, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: 22 “Who committed no sin, Nor was deceit found in His mouth”; 23 who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously; 24 who Himself bore our sins in His own body on the tree, that we, having died to sins, might live for righteousness—by whose stripes you were healed. 25 For you were like sheep going astray, but have now returned to the Shepherd and Overseer of your souls.
- Matthew 5:10-12 Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness’ sake, For theirs is the kingdom of heaven. 11 “Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake. 12 Rejoice and be exceedingly glad, for great is your reward in heaven, for so they persecuted the prophets who were before you.