

Suffering Affliction: Focusing on Our Master Teacher

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Few things in life hurt as much as problems with those who are close to us in life.

Most people invest most heavily in their family and friends; thus our wife, husband, children, and close friends become the precious treasures of life.

So what happens when we lose them?

What happens when a child is swept away lamentably, a marriage ends horribly, a wife is taken tragically, a husband is gone unexpectedly, or friends are ripped from us unknowingly?

Those are times of deepest woes.

Those are the afflictions that we can say overwhelm us like a flood.

Those are the sorrows that can make our world crash down all around us.

Those are the problems that can plague us so that we feel like we cannot make it through another wave of trouble.

This morning one of the classic passages on being completely overwhelmed with grief, sorrow and pain is 1st Samuel 30.1-6

Now for a moment look closely at the 6th verse. If it isn't marked, underlined, or highlighted – then do it now. This is the essence of God's recovery program for those who are hurting!

1 Samuel 30:6 Now David was greatly distressed, for the people spoke of stoning him, because the soul of all the people was grieved, every man for his sons and his daughters. **But David strengthened himself in the Lord his God.**

The key is the last phrase. This idea of “strengthened”. The question we need to ask is how did David do that? What is the key when we are struggling?

This was a sore trial to the man after God's own heart, and could not but go very near him.

- *Saul had driven him from his country, the Philistines had driven him from their camp, the Amalekites had plundered his city, his wives were taken prisoners, and now, to complete his woe, his own familiar friends, in whom he trusted, whom he had sheltered, and who did eat of his bread, instead of sympathizing with him and offering him any relief, lifted up the heel against him and threatened to stone him.*
- *It is the duty and interest of all good people, whatever happens, to encourage themselves in God as their Lord and their God, assuring themselves that he can and will bring light out of darkness, peace out of trouble, and good out of evil, to all that love him and are the called according to his purpose, Rom. 8:28. It was David's practice, and he had the comfort of it, What time I am afraid I will trust in thee. When he was at his wits' end he was not at his faith's end.¹*

¹ Henry, Matthew, *Matthew Henry's Commentary on the Bible*, (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publishers) 1997.

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Friend, there are times in our lives when the circumstances will not produce any joy or happiness. There are times when we find ourselves in dark places, like David. We look about, and the situation looks hopeless. What should we do? Be discouraged? Give up? Say we are through? Friend, if we are children of God, we will encourage ourselves in the Lord. We will turn to Him at times like this. Sometimes the Lord puts us in such a spot so we will turn to Him. He wants to make Himself real to us. It was during times like these that David wrote some of his most helpful psalms. When troubles come, you can thumb your way through the Psalms and find where David is encouraging himself in the Lord. Several times he says, "The LORD is good ... Let the redeemed of the LORD say so." David found this to be true.²

The idea is to grab onto the Lord and hold on for dear life. That is exactly the way this word (Strong's # 2388) is used in the Old Testament!

- **HOLDING ON FOR DEAR LIFE:** 1 Kings 1:50 Now Adonijah was afraid of Solomon; so he arose, and went and **took hold of** the horns of the altar.
- **HOLDING ON FOR DEAR LIFE:** 1 Kings 2:28 Then news came to Joab, for Joab had defected to Adonijah, though he had not defected to Absalom. So Joab fled to the tabernacle of the Lord, **and took hold of** the horns of the altar.
- **PLEADING FOR THE LIFE OF A CHILD:** 2 Kings 4:27 Now when she came to the man of God at the hill, **she caught** him by the feet, but Gehazi came near to push her away. But the man of God said, "Let her alone; for her soul is in deep distress, and the Lord has hidden it from me, and has not told me."

This word shows up 34 times in Nehemiah and is used for the repairs of the walls (chapter 3) and the holding of weapons as they work (chapter 4).

- **BUILDING A WALL:** Nehemiah 3:4 And next to them Meremoth the son of Urijah, the son of Koz, **made repairs**. Next to them Meshullam the son of Berechiah, the son of Meshezabel, **made repairs**. Next to them Zadok the son of Baana **made repairs**.
- **HOLDING A WEAPON:** Nehemiah 4:16-17 So it was, from that time on, that half of my servants worked at construction, while the other half **held** the spears, the shields, the bows, and wore armor; and the leaders were behind all the house of Judah. 17 Those who built on the wall, and those who carried burdens, loaded themselves so that with one hand they worked at construction, and with the other **held** a weapon.

Ever feel drowned by sorrow? Ever feel overwhelmed by grief? Then reach out and grab the Lord by faith like you would do if it was the horn of the altar, like it is the feet of the only One who can save your beloved child, or like it was the wall that alone can stand between you and your enemies, or like the only weapon you have to stay alive when attacked. That is the way the man after God's heart did it – and that is how we should respond!

So whenever we feel drowned by sorrow, whenever we feel overwhelmed by grief -- be careful – we are on sacred ground as a believer.

- We are at a place when God's Voice is heard most clearly,
- We are at a place where God's Presence is felt most closely,
- We are at a place where God's Guidance is given most powerfully.

² McGee, J. Vernon, *Thru the Bible with J. Vernon McGee*, (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers) 2000, c1981.

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And that is the message of our text this morning. Open with me to the 6th Blessing of Affliction. It is found in Psalm 119.107:

I am afflicted very much; Revive me, O Lord, according to Your word.

**The 6th blessing of Affliction is seen in Psalm 119 as:
AFFLICTION FORCES US TO TEST HIS PROMISES.**

Listen to the expanded message of Psalm 119:107 –

- **I am afflicted** (remember the usage of this Hebrew word # 6031 implies an affliction that affects us in a physical way);
- **Very³ much** (remember this is the same word used to describe the extent of the waters of the Global Flood of Noah and the Ten Plagues of Moses upon Egypt);
- **Revive⁴** (remember that this is the same word as the one that describes God's deliverance of Rahab out from the complete destruction of Jericho)
- **Me, O Lord, according to YOUR WORD** (remember this is that synonym for the Bible that describes God's Word as the Divine Voice that guides us through life [Strong's #1697]).

Afflictions allow us to experientially test God's promises.
Affliction is a blessing.

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.

This morning we find that when troubles come, and we experience affliction it forces us to test the Promises of God. Remember that this is the 6th 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. 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

³ The word for "very much" is an adverb. It is the same Hebrew word used of the way the waters of the Flood covering the earth (Genesis 7.18-19) and of the way the plagues covered Egypt (Exodus 9.3 on cattle; Exodus 9.18 the hail; Exodus 10.14 the locusts). Do you feel like troubles are raining down like the Flood of Noah? Do you feel drowned by your pain and problems? Then affliction can force you to test the promises of the Lord who wants to revive you by listening to the Lord's Voice in His Word – guiding, leading, rescuing, and comforting! Are your life's pains like the plagues sometimes? Another one coming and you haven't even recovered from the last one? Then affliction can force you to test the promises of the Lord who wants to revive you by listening to the Lord's Voice in His Word – guiding, leading, rescuing, and comforting!

⁴ 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). Do you ever feel like you are not going to survive what you are going through? The pain, the hurt, the crumbling of everything you have held onto? Then you feel like Rahab did when the city of Jericho was destroyed – and God rescued her, spared her, revived her as Psalm 119 says. And that is what He allows afflictions to do in our lives (tear things down) so He can allow us to test His promises (revive us, rescue us, spare us)! Then affliction can force you to test the promises of the Lord who wants to revive you by listening to the Lord's Voice in His Word – guiding, leading, rescuing, and comforting!

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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

Lessons on Ending Well by Making the Right Choices Now from Psalm 71:1-24

1. **Test God's Promises by fleeing to the Lord instead of living in confusion.** Psalm 71:1 In thee, O LORD, do I put my trust: let me never be put to confusion.
2. **Test God's Promises by crying to the Lord before giving up to troubles.** Psalm 71:2 Deliver me in Your righteousness, and cause me to escape; Incline Your ear to me, and save me.
3. **Test God's Promises by running into God's Refuge – thus trusting God's Word more than his fears.** Psalm 71:3 Be my strong refuge, To which I may resort continually; You have given the commandment to save me, For You are my rock and my fortress.
4. **Test God's Promises by asking for God's help before becoming bitter.** Psalm 71:4 Deliver me, O my God, out of the hand of the wicked, Out of the hand of the unrighteous and cruel man.
5. **Test God's Promises by remembering His faithfulness.** Psalm 71:5 For You are my hope, O Lord God; You are my trust from my youth.
6. **Test God's Promises by praising God for His plan for your life.** Psalm 71:6 By You I have been upheld from birth; You are He who took me out of my mother's womb. My praise shall be continually of You.
7. **Test God's Promises by allowing my life to testify for the Lord.** Psalm 71:7 I have become as a wonder to many, But You are my strong refuge.
8. **Test God's Promises by praising God so much -- no time was left for complaints.** Psalm 71:8 Let my mouth be filled with Your praise And with Your glory all the day.
9. **David had learned he could trust God to the end of life.** Psalm 71:9 Do not cast me off in the time of old age; Do not forsake me when my strength fails.
10. **Test God's Promises by taking your fears to God in prayer (“do thy friends despise, forsake thee? Take it to the Lord in prayer. In His arms He'll tend and shield thee – thou shalt find a solace there!)** Psalm 71:10 For my enemies speak against me; And those who lie in wait for my life take counsel together, 11 Saying, “God has forsaken him; Pursue and take him, for there is none to deliver him.” 12 O God, do not be far from me; O my God, make haste to help me!” In a modern sense David trusted God as much as in 911!

That's as far as we got last time. Now the rest of the Psalm:

11. **Test God's Promises by learning to never give up – even when alone, neglected, sick, ignored, rejected, maligned, and forgotten by everyone in the world ----- EXCEPT GOD!** Psalm 71:13 Let them be confounded and consumed Who are adversaries of my life; Let them be covered with reproach and dishonor Who seek my hurt. 14 But I will hope continually, And will praise You yet more and more.
12. **Test God's Promises by finding ways to bring God into the conversation.** Psalm 71:15 My mouth shall tell of Your righteousness And Your salvation all the day,

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For I do not know their limits. **(When is the last time you brought up the subject of the things of God – into a conversation?)**

13. **Test God's Promises by humbly depending on the Lord.** Psalm 71:16 I will go in the strength of the Lord God; I will make mention of Your righteousness, of Yours only.
14. **Test God's Promises by making a life long commitment to the Lord!** Psalm 71:17 O God, You have taught me from my youth; And to this day I declare Your wondrous works.
15. **Test God's Promises by serving God even when you get out of season, past your prime, and old and gray – by finding young people to invest your life into.** Psalm 71:18 Now also when I am old and gray headed, O God, do not forsake me, Until I declare Your strength to this generation, Your power to everyone who is to come. **(Just like Bill Eddy!)**
16. **Test God's Promises by seeking to never stop experiencing God daily.** Psalm 71:19 Also Your righteousness, O God, is very high, You who have done great things; O God, who is like You? **(Just like Howard Smith)**
17. **Test God's Promises by seeing affliction as a blessing.** Psalm 71:20 You, who have shown me great and severe troubles, Shall revive me again, And bring me up again from the depths of the earth. **(Just like Ezra, Job, Joni Erikson Tada, Phillip Yancey, and many sweet saints suffering this morning!)**
18. **Test God's Promises by allowing the Lord be in charge of your life.** Psalm 71:21 You shall increase my greatness, And comfort me on every side.
19. **Test God's Promises by breaking from the crowd and stay involved in personal worship.** Psalm 71:22 Also with the lute I will praise You— And Your faithfulness, O my God! To You I will sing with the harp, O Holy One of Israel.
20. **Test God's Promises by staying enthusiastic for the Lord.** Psalm 71:23 My lips shall greatly rejoice when I sing to You, And my soul, which You have redeemed.
21. **Test God's Promises by allowing God invade all of your life.** Psalm 71:24 My tongue also shall talk (hagah = meditate) of Your righteousness all the day long; For they are confounded, For they are brought to shame Who seek my hurt.

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