



CAPITOL COMMISSION™

The Word on Trials and Afflictions

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PSALM 119:71

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Trials are as certain to come into our lives as the sunrise. The fact that we live in a sin-cursed world assures us we will face a variety of difficulties and afflictions. Illness in our own lives or in those of friends and family. The loss of loved ones. Unfair treatment by others. Difficulties in our jobs or careers. Financial troubles. These are just a few examples of the trials and afflictions we will all face. Many of the Psalms reflect the believer's response to life's troubles and hardships. Throughout the Book of Psalms we find comfort and encouragement for times of distress. The writer of Psalm 119 was well acquainted with trials and afflictions, and in this Psalm we find an amazing statement regarding a believer's response to affliction:

It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I may learn Your statutes. Psalm 119:71

You might recall from our study of Psalm 119 several years ago that this is a very unique chapter of the Bible. It is by far the longest chapter and all but four of the 176 verses contain some reference to God's Word. It is divided into sections of eight verses with each verse in that section begins with a letter of the Hebrew alphabet. This was to draw attention to the importance of the content and aid in memorization. It is actually a prayer praising God's Word, making proclamations about God's Word, and asking for help to understand and apply God's Word to life.

"It is good for me that I was afflicted..." What an amazing statement! It is difficult to think of such a thing. How can we come to the place where we consider trials and affliction to be "good for us"? Before we ponder this amazing verse, let us read the next section of Psalm 119.

Many believe that David was the author of the 119th Psalm. If so, he was certainly well acquainted with trials and affliction. You can read in 1 & 2 Samuel of the many adversities he faced. He was unfairly pursued by those who should have honored him. He faced terrible consequences for his own sin and failure. He saw the negative affect on his people of decisions he made as king of Israel. He was betrayed by his own son and closest advisors. Yet, if indeed it was David who penned these words, he could say, "It is good for me that I was afflicted..." If fact Psalm 119 speaks of affliction several times:

Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep Your word.

Psalm 119:67

I know, O LORD, that Your judgments are righteous, and that in faithfulness You have afflicted me. 119:75

We also read of affliction in verses 50, 92, 107, and 153. In this epic chapter dedicated to God's Word, this demonstrates that it is there we must go when we face trials and afflictions in our own lives. Let us look carefully at God's Word on trials and affliction and let this prepare us to deal with the troubles we are bound to face in our lives.

"IT IS GOOD FOR ME THAT I WAS AFFLICTED..."

The Psalmist gives us a striking general statement, "It is good for me that I was afflicted..." This seems at first glance contradictory – that affliction can be good for us. Yet this is a truth that runs throughout Scripture.

"As for you, you meant evil against me, but God meant it for good in order to bring about this present result, to preserve many people alive. Gen. 50:20 (Joseph, speaking of the afflictions his brothers put him through.)

Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials, knowing that the testing of your faith produces endurance. James 1:2-3

In this you greatly rejoice, even though now for a little while, if necessary, you have been distressed by various trials, so that the proof of your faith, being more precious than gold which is perishable, even though tested by fire, may be found to result in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Jesus Christ... 1 Peter 1:6-7

"Blessed are those who have been persecuted for the sake of righteousness, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. "Blessed are you when people insult you and persecute you, and falsely say all kinds of evil against you because of Me. "Rejoice and be glad, for your reward in heaven is great; for in the same way they persecuted the prophets who were before you. Matt. 5:10-12

We also exult in our tribulations, knowing that tribulation brings about perseverance... Romans 5:3

Because of the surpassing greatness of the revelations, for this reason, to keep me from exalting myself, there was given me a thorn in the

BIBLE STUDIES

INTERIM BIBLE STUDY: **TUESDAY, AUGUST 20**, TREASURER'S CONFERENCE ROOM

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flesh, a messenger of Satan to torment me—to keep me from exalting myself! Concerning this I implored the Lord three times that it might leave me. And He has said to me, “My grace is sufficient for you, for power is perfected in weakness.” Most gladly, therefore, I will rather boast about my weaknesses, so that the power of Christ may dwell in me. Therefore I am well content with weaknesses, with insults, with distresses, with persecutions, with difficulties, for Christ’s sake; for when I am weak, then I am strong. 2 Cor. 12:7-10

Our verse and these other passages encourage us to change our perspective. We see suffering, illness, misfortune, pain, and adversity as bad and things to be avoided. However God uses these things for good in order to perform His work in our lives. It does not say the affliction itself is good. It points out that which it accomplishes in our lives is good. Just as we are to value God’s Word and spiritual things above the silver and gold of earthly riches, we come to value God’s work in our lives over earthly comfort. Thomas Manton reminds us, "Our desire to glorify God should prevail above our desire for our own comfort, ease, safety, and welfare." He goes on, "It is better to have holiness than to have health, wealth, and honor..." It is this attitude which will allow us to say, "It is good for me that I was afflicted".

“...THAT I MAY LEARN YOUR STATUTES.”

The Psalmist now gives a specific description of how afflictions were good for him, "...that I may learn your statutes". How are trials and affliction good for us? What "good" can times of affliction bring into our lives?

We should first **realize the danger inherent in times of blessing and comfort**. We tend to become lazy, careless, and self-sufficient when things are going well. When King David was at ease in his palace he fell into sin with Bathsheba. (2 Samuel 11). Times of trial and affliction can make us thoughtful and careful about spiritual and eternal things.

God may use trials and affliction to **make us aware of our need for salvation**. It may be through ordeals of distress and hardship that God "gets our attention" and points us to our need for Him. The disciples asked Jesus about a tragedy that had taken place. Jesus used the occasion of these events to remind them, "...unless you repent, you will all likewise perish." (Luke 13:3,5). Tragic events were a

reminder of the certainty of death and of the need for repentance and faith in Christ.

For the believer, however, God will use trials and afflictions to make us more like Christ. Afflictions may be used by God to correct **us from past or present sin or to keep us from future sin**. "Before I was afflicted, I went astray, but now I keep your Word (Ps. 119:67)". This is discipline as a father might correct his son. We read of this discipline in Hebrews:

⁵"My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor faint when your are reproved by Him; ⁶For those whom the Lord loves He disciplines, and He scourges every son whom He receives."

⁷It is for discipline that you endure; God deals with you as with sons; for what son is there whom his father does not discipline?⁸ But if you are without discipline, of which all have become partakers, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. ⁹Furthermore, we had earthly fathers to discipline us, and we respected them; shall we not much rather be subject to the Father of spirits, and live?¹⁰ For they disciplined us for a short time as seemed best to them, but He disciplines us for our good, so that we may share His holiness.¹¹ All discipline for the moment seems not to be joyful, but sorrowful; yet to those who have been trained by it, afterwards it yields the peaceful fruit of righteousness. Hebrews 12:5-11

We must point out that for the unbeliever trials and affliction are but a sign of God’s punishment, judgment and wrath upon their life. The child of God, however, is never "punished" for sin. That punishment was taken by Jesus Christ when he suffered and died upon the cross. We no longer stand before God as our judge but rather as our Heavenly Father who lovingly corrects and disciplines us in order to make us more like Christ. As believers, God corrects us in love, not punishes us in anger.

➤ **WHAT IS OUR RESPONSE TO THE TRIALS AND AFFLICTIONS THAT COME INTO OUR LIVES? WE CAN BECOME ANGRY AND BITTER; FAILING TO LEARN WHAT GOD HAS TO TEACH US. OR, WE CAN SEE SUCH CHALLENGES AS GIFTS FROM GOD, ACCOMPLISHING HIS WORK IN OUR LIVES. THEN WE CAN SAY WITH THE PSALMIST, "IT IS GOOD FOR ME THAT I WAS AFFLICTED..."**