

The Blessing of Affliction

by Bill McLeod

God's purpose in affliction is to bring us face to face with His will, to keep us humble and dependent on Him, and to correct our sinful ways.

Duration: 37:58

Scripture: Psalm 85:8, Psalm 107:4-7, Psalm 107:10-12, Psalm 107:17-20, Psalm 107:23-30, John 5:14

Topics: "Affliction"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher shares a personal anecdote about a man named Brother Harry who initially struggled with his preaching. However, after surrendering to God, his life turned around. The preacher emphasizes that God afflicts us out of love and for our own good. He references Psalm 107 to illustrate how those who cry out to the Lord in their troubles are saved and delivered. The sermon concludes with the message that we should praise the Lord for His goodness and wonderful works, even in times of difficulty and uncertainty.

Transcript

It says, They wandered in the wilderness in a solitary way. They found no city to dwell in. Hungry and thirsty, their soul fainted in them.

Then they cried unto the Lord in their trouble, and he delivered them out of their distresses, and he led them forth by the right way, that they might go to a city of habitation. Then verse 10, Such as sit in darkness and in the shadow of death, being bound in affliction and iron, because they rebelled against the words of God and contemned the counsel of the Most High. Therefore he brought down their heart with labor.

They fell down, and there was none to help. Then they cried unto the Lord in their trouble, and he saved them out of their distresses. He brought them out of darkness and the shadow of death, and broke their bands in sunder.

Then verse 17, Fools, because of their transgression and because their iniquities are afflicted, their soul abhors all manner of meat, and they draw near unto the gates of death. Then they cry unto the Lord in their trouble, and he saves them out of their distresses. He sent his word and healed them and delivered them from their destructions.

Then 23, They that were down to the sea in ships that do business in great waters, these see the works of the Lord and his wonders in the deep. For he commands and raises the stormy wind, which lifts up the waves thereof. They mount up to the heaven, they go down again to the depths.

Their soul is melted because of trouble. They reel to and fro and stagger like a drunken man, and are at their wits' end. Then they cry unto the Lord in their trouble, and he brings them out of their distresses.

He makes the storm a calm, so that the waves thereof are still. Then are they glad, because they be quiet. So he brings them unto their desired haven.

Oh, that men would praise the Lord for his goodness and for his wonderful works to the children of men. David said, Before I was afflicted, I went astray. But now have I kept thy word.

Psalms 119, verse 67. And also in that same psalm he said things like this, It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I might learn your statutes. And again, I know, he said, that thou in faithfulness hast afflicted me.

And I want to talk about the blessings of affliction. It's not exactly a revival message, but I think it has something to do with it. Let's pray.

Father, we ask you indeed from our heart of hearts again to refresh us, visit us, make your word live to us. Open our eyes in Christ's name. The Bible says that God does not willingly afflict the children of men.

But it doesn't say he doesn't do it. He doesn't do it willingly, but he often has to do it. To bring us face to face with the issue of his will, or whatever he's saying to us, he has to do it.

Whom the Lord loves, he chastens and scourges every son whom he receives. If you endure chastening, God deals with you as with sons. For what son is he whom the father chastens not? But if you be without chastisement, then are you illegitimate children and not sons.

Furthermore, we've had fathers of our flesh who corrected us, and we gave them reverence. Shall we not much rather be in subjection unto the Father of spirits and live? For they verily, that is our earthly fathers or parents, they verily chastened us after their pleasure. But he, that is God, for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness.

Do not despise the chastening of the Lord, nor faint when you are rebuked of him, the Bible says. And God afflicts us to your people in faithfulness. And sometimes it takes the form of sickness, and sometimes it takes the form of financial reverses, and sometimes it takes the form of problems in my family, and sometimes it takes the form I lose my job.

It's not to see if these things happen that necessarily means that God is afflicting you. Because remember, man is born into trouble as the sparks fly upward. But our business is to find out if what is happening is because God is speaking to my heart.

Harry Ironside, I heard him preach as a very young pastor. Well, I wasn't even a pastor, I was just newly converted in Winnipeg. I read one or two of his books.

And he told about being invited to a church to minister for a week of evangelistic meetings, and he arrived there, and got to the church, and preached that night, and the preacher said nothing to him about a place to stay, nor did anybody else. And he wound up in the park, sleeping on a bench in the park, because he

happened to be dead broke. Well, he ministered the next night, he had nothing to eat that day, and again nobody asked him where he was staying, and nobody offered him a meal.

And this went on for three days. And the third night he overheard two ladies speaking, and one of them said, Brother Harry didn't preach with his usual power tonight. And he said, I felt like saying, Lady, just try me on a beefsteak.

But what happened was this. He had a controversy with God, and finally on that park bench one night, he surrendered to God. And the very next day, somebody asked him where he was staying, and everything turned around.

And God is like that. He doesn't willingly afflict us, he afflicts us because he loves us. It's for our good.

I had a crusade in mid-city Michigan some years ago, and an elderly gentleman sang. He was, I think, 84 years old. I forget his name now.

Beautiful singer. His voice was just perfect. He sang for Billy Sunday and Crusades many, many years ago.

And I remember a line in one of the songs he sang was something like this, He won't make you go against your will, but he'll sure make you willing to go. And I never forgot that. No, he won't make you go against your will, but he'll sure make you willing to go.

And God has a thousand ways of doing that, of bringing us to an end of ourselves so that we gladly accept the will of God. Not grudgingly, but gladly. Miriam ran into some problems.

She thought she was just as big as Moses was, and God said, if her father had spit in her face, she'd have to go outside the camp for seven days, send her outside the camp for seven days, which was God's way of saying, Miriam, I just spit in your face. Well, somebody must have, because she got leprosy, you know. I mean, she was covered with leprosy in an instant.

Now, God did that to her, to afflict her, to deal with her wicked pride, and so on. And I'm sure at the end of seven days when she came back in the camp, she was very, very small, and very quiet. God has wonderful ways of dealing with us.

David sinned, and didn't own up to it till after the child was born, so it may have been a full year. It was a rotten year. In Psalm 32, he talks about it.

He said, day and night, God's hand was heavy upon me. My moisture is turned into the drought of summer. All I could think about was his sin.

But it wasn't the point yet where he was willing to confess it, forsake it, and gain God's forgiveness. He finally did. But day and night, the hand of God was on him, and he was being afflicted.

Sometimes our afflictions take the form of mental problems, in the sense that we're filled with confusion. We don't know which way to turn. We don't know what to do next.

Oh, like David said, his moisture was turned into the drought of summer. I counseled with a preacher one time, and he said, I'm as dry as a piece of leather that's hung on the sun for two years. Brother, that's dry.

Another pastor told me, he said, there's just no water flowing, not even a trickle, not a drop flowing out from my life to anybody. And we counseled together, prayed together. And while we were kneeling in prayer, he suddenly got to his feet and walked away.

And I opened my eyes and watched, and he walked to a pillar in the middle of the room, put his arms around the pillar, and sat against the pillar, and he started to bawl. And then I walked over and stood beside him, and finally he was aware of the fact that I was standing there. He could hardly speak.

He said, Brother Bill, the water's flowing. The water's flowing again. But God had to afflict him to bring him to an end of himself.

We can be strong when we're healthy and got money in the bank, but when we don't have money in the bank and we're not strong, then what? Oh, it says in Psalm 107 that men would praise the Lord for his goodness and for his wonderful works to the children of men. We might have added a little postscript from Job 33 to what we read in Psalm 107. It says, Lo, all these things work of God oftentimes with man.

He looks upon man, and if any say, I have sinned and preferred that which is right, and it didn't profit me, then God turns with favor to that person. All these things works God oftentimes with man. He works it with you.

I don't think there's a person in this room that God has not afflicted in some measure, in some way, at some time, and perhaps currently even. Thank God that David finally faced up to it, met with God. He paid an awful price, of course we know, but thank God he humbled himself.

He might not have. He might have been like King Asa. The Ethiopians and the Lubens came in with an army of a million men and 300 chariots, and here was little Judah.

They relied on God, they called on God, and God gave them a glorious victory. Some years later, the northern kingdom of Israel came down, and instead of trusting God to give them the victory, they sent money. King Asa sent money to one of the kings of Syria, and so he went and attacked some of the northern Israel, and they withdrew their army, and Judah didn't have to go to battle.

And God sent a prophet to King Asa, and he really laid it on the line that he'd relied on money and a Syrian king, a sinner, instead of relying upon God. What was Asa's reaction? He was filled with anger, he was angry, he threw the prophet in prison, he afflicted some of the people, and God moved in, and he got sickness in his feet. His disease became exceedingly great.

But it says, in his disease, he did not seek to the Lord. He sought to the physicians, and the Chronicler simply says, he died. It's not wrong to go to a doctor, it's wrong to go to a doctor without first going to God.

That's the problem. That was his problem. And so God sent this affliction on him, to bring him to face the issues.

We don't always react rightly to God's afflictions, sometimes we act wrongly. I remember when I first went to Saskatoon in 1962, a Christian friend told me about a friend of his, who was in the hospital, very, very ill, and he went to see him, and he offered to pray for him, and the sick man said, don't bother, God and I have a controversy, and I'm not giving in. And he died in the hospital.

So it doesn't always work. But God does it to your people, because He loves us. Whom the Lord loves, He corrects.

It says in Proverbs, He corrects. And God knows exactly what kind of medicine you need or I need. Exactly.

He knows how to do it, when to do it, the measure He has to carry through on. He knows it all. If you'll remember, in John chapter 5, the man at the pool of Bethesda, Jesus healed him.

It says he'd been a long time in that case. He must have been filled with frustration, because he wasn't well enough to get up and run to the pool when the angel troubled the water. He could never make it in time.

Somebody else got there first, and the first one that got there was the one that was healed. Jesus healed him. Later on, Jesus found him in the temple, and He said this, go and sin no more, lest a worse thing come upon thee.

Which means, of course, that what had come upon him was because of his sin. Now he was forgiven, and God said, don't do it again. In Psalm 85, I will hear what God the Lord will speak, for He will speak peace to His people and to His saints, but let them not turn again to folly.

God speaks peace, and then God says, don't turn back to folly again. The second affliction may be worse than the first, if we do. Now, the affliction may not, of course, and certainly doesn't always take the form of sickness.

I intimated that before. There's a thousand ways open to God. But when things happen that are adverse, it's time to pray and find out what God is saying.

Because sometimes, you know, pride being such a subtle thing, it can creep in, and God has to do as He did with Paul. Lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. So even Paul was subject to pride.

You know, Spurgeon was sick, an ill man, the last 20 years of his ministry, of his life. His wife was bedridden for 20 years. And they were sitting one night by a fireplace, and the fire was burning purely.

And apparently a log in the fire, and there was sap in the log. As the sap got hot, it expanded somehow, or the log expanded, and a note came out of this log. And they said it was a beautiful, beautiful, high song note.

They just sat there and listened. They were entranced by it. And then she said to her husband, Dear, that's what God's doing to us.

He's put us in the fire so we can sing. And Spurgeon said he knew that God was doing it because there was such a tendency for him to be proud. He had every reason to be proud, looking at it from the natural viewpoint.

He could go anywhere in Great Britain, and if there was an hour's notice, he was going to preach in the open air somewhere, there'd be 10,000 people waiting to hear. And not one of them came by bus. When he left his own church once every two or three months and rented the Surrey Hall Music Garden, seating

20,000 people, he told all his people to stay home and pray.

This is for sinners only. The place would be packed to the doors, and maybe 10,000 people out in the street trying to get in. And many times when he was preaching, the anointing of God was so powerfully upon him that the congregation would leap to their feet and stand transfixed.

They didn't want to miss even the movement of a finger. The power of God was so on him. And he thanked God for his faithfulness in afflicting him to keep him humble.

So God will afflict us because he loves us, he knows what the problems are, he knows how to deal with them, and our business is to pray. I remember one time years ago, I had criticized a pastor to another person, and God talked to me about it, and I just shrugged it off. And a couple of days later, I went to get out of bed in the morning, and it was just like somebody had rammed a red-hot sword into my back.

And every time I moved in the bed, I got the sword. It was so bad that when they came to take me to the hospital, some people, friends of mine, they had to carry me in a blanket. The four corners of the blanket.

I was in the middle of the crazy thing, and they took me into a van and took me to this hospital. The doctors examined my back and said they were going to have to operate and fuse some vertebrae there. I didn't want that.

God was talking to me. And finally, stubborn Scotsman though I am, I said, okay God. And you know, they didn't have to operate.

I was in traction for ten days in that hospital, expecting an operation, but thank God I didn't need it. I got out of there. I called up this pastor.

He came to my house. I asked his forgiveness. I've never had trouble with my back since, you know.

But people, God does things like this because he loves us. He wants us to be the best we can for his glory. Because in heaven, you know that old song? Used to hear Mark Grip and his wife sing it.

I wish I had given him more. I wish I had given him more. When I stand in heaven and look back at life in this, I wish I had given him more.

What should my reaction be when God leaves his hand on me? How do I handle this? Well, how did Micah handle it? Micah 7.9? He said, I will bear the indignation of the Lord because I have sinned against him. I'll bear it. I know what's happening.

I know what's going on. I've sinned and God is dealing with me. I will bear the indignation of the Lord because I've sinned against him until he paid my cost and execute judgment on my behalf.

He'll bring me forth to the light. He knew that God would bring him out of the darkness, the affliction he was in. He had no doubts about that.

But he would patiently, meekly bear the indignation of the Lord. In Lamentations chapter 3, it says, why does a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins? Why do we complain? The margin says murmur. Sometimes we do a lot of murmuring.

That used to be a big problem in my life. Murmur about this, murmur about that. Why does a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins? Let us search and try our ways and turn again to the Lord.

Let us lift up our heart with our hands unto God in the heavens. Now I've heard it said that you can't search your own heart. Only God can do that.

Lamentations chapter 3 declares, I can search my own heart. I can do it to a point. I need God's assistance.

I'll call him too. But there's some things I know about. I don't need God to tell me.

I know they're there. Let us search and try our ways and turn again unto the Lord. Let us lift up our heart with our hands unto God in the heavens.

In Psalm 26, we have four words, examine me, prove me, judge me, try me. In two verses, examine me, prove me, try me, judge me. Oh dear people, God is our best friend.

You know a good friend will tell you if things are wrong. He won't pat you on the back. I remember hearing about a fellow, he bought a new suit.

His wife thought it was horrible, so he went to see his friend. He said, I bought a new suit. What do you think of it? And his friend said, do you want me to tell you the truth, or do you want me to be nice? We want our friends to tell us the truth, not to be nice, because that doesn't help.

Faithful are the wounds of a friend. Faithful are the wounds of a friend, but the kisses of an enemy are deceitful. Somebody tells you your fault, he's your friend, or he wouldn't be telling you that.

I preached one time, and I used an illustration, and even as I was using it, I thought to myself, this really, nah, this really isn't fitting, but I did it anyhow. And at the door, an old man came up. He was probably the age I am now, and he said, young man, you should not have used that illustration.

I said, brother, thank you, I knew that already. God had spoken to my heart, but I thanked him for saying what he said. And people who criticize you are often your best friend.

Listen to what they're saying. Maybe God is speaking through them. I don't remember who it was, but this preacher was telling us he had serious back problems, and the doctors had told him it'll get worse and worse.

You'll wind up in a wheelchair, then you'll wind up in bed, and then you'll die. And he was praying by the hour for God to heal him. He felt he dealt with everything he knew, but God didn't heal him.

Then a guy showed up in his church, and he was a big mouth. You could hear him a mile away. This guy was always yak, yak, yakking, you know, and he couldn't stand him.

And one day in a big department store, he saw this guy, and he tried to get away so the guy wouldn't see him, but the guy saw him, and he hollers at the top of his lungs, hey, pastor, I want to pray for you. Oh, no. Now everybody in the store is watching, you know.

This guy comes running over, get on your knees. He gets down to his knees, red as fire, you know, and the guy lays hands on him and prays for him, and he was instantly healed. You can't tell God how to tie up

the package that comes as a gift, you know.

And so when you ask God to speak to you, to do something for you, let him be God in that. Let him do it any way he wants, when he wants, through whom he wants. I was talking to a fellow one time, and I said, you know, I said, God uses our wives to sandpaper rough spots.

And he started to laugh. And he just about collapsed on the floor laughing. He said, I never heard it put that way before.

But he said, man, in my life, is it ever true. So I'll bear the indignation of the Lord because I've sinned against him. I'll ask him to search my heart.

I'll humble myself before him. Whatever God says, I'll do. And here we have to think of Job chapter 36.

It starts off beautifully. It says, God never takes his eyes off the righteous. Isn't that nice? Day and night, he never takes the eyes off the righteous.

The eyes of the Lord are in every place beholding the evil and the good. Now if you're doing evil, it's not so nice to think that the eyes of God are upon you. But he never takes his eyes off the righteous, but with kings are they on the throne.

He's made us kings and priests, it says in Revelation, and he's done that. He's lifted us. He's exalted us.

He never takes his eyes off the righteous, but with kings are they on the throne. Yes, it says he establishes them forever. And they are exalted.

And then comes the if. And if they be bound in fetters and held in cords of affliction, what then? Then he shows them their work and their transgressions that they have exceeded, and he opens their ear to discipline, and he commands that they return from iniquity. He commands that they return from iniquity.

I can never understand how Christians can say as they often do, God doesn't tell me what's wrong. I've asked him a thousand times, and he doesn't tell me what's wrong. He's probably told you a thousand times, but you're not listening.

We don't want God to say certain things to us. We don't want God messing around to something that happened five years ago. And so we don't hear what he's saying.

And then we conclude God's not speaking. Listen. Think of it from another angle.

If I'm not listening, why should God speak? Why should he waste his time speaking to me if he knows I'm not going to listen anyhow? Then he shows them their transgressions that they have exceeded. It says he opens their ear to discipline, and he commands that they return from iniquity. If they obey, they're blessed.

If they don't obey, they're cursed. In 1 Corinthians chapter 5, they had a sin in the Corinthian church. A man was sleeping with his mother.

Paul said that they should deliver such a one unto Satan for the destruction of the flesh, so that the spirit might be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus. In other words, he was going to get deathly ill, and if he didn't deal with his sin, he would die. But God's purpose was that his spirit might be saved in the day of the Lord Jesus.

In 1 Corinthians chapter 11, speaking of the Lord's table, the fact we need to examine ourselves before we ever come to the Lord's table, and some people don't, he says, because of this, that has become some people don't, they don't see it. They don't see it's Christ. It's a memorial feast for Jesus, his death and resurrection.

They don't see that. And he says, because of this, many of you are weak and sickly, and many sleep, many die. He goes on to say this, if we would judge ourselves, we would not be judged.

If I'll judge my sin, God won't have to. But when we are judged, we are chastened of the Lord, that we should not be condemned with the world. So a Christian believer, if he persists in sin, may lose his life, but not his salvation.

O people, let's search and try our ways, and turn again unto the Lord. Let's not make the mistake that the Pharisees made. They tithed regularly.

Why is it in our churches we feel if a person tithes, he's a red-hot 99% Christian? The Pharisees all tithed. Were they 99% red-hot Christians? No, they were filled with hypocrisy. And Christ said, You pay tithe of mint and anise in common, but you have omitted the weightier matters of the law, judgment, mercy, faith, and the love of God.

These ought you to have done, and not to leave the other undone. Which is to say, there are things more important than tithing. Judgment, mercy, faith, and the love of God.

Job went through the kind of trials we find it hard to even understand. He said, He runs on me like a giant. He breaks me with breach upon breach.

He takes me by the neck, and he shakes me. He sets me up for his target. The arrows of the Almighty are within my bosom.

The poison wealth is drinking up my spirit. Here in the opening chapters it says he was a perfect and an upright man, one that feared God and turned away from evil. What in the world was God up to? God's always up to something.

I heard somebody say, You never know what God has up his sleeve. I know what he's got up his sleeve. It's called an arm.

And Jesus Christ is called the arm of the Lord. And people, he's constantly working in our hearts, and will continue as long as we live. Now, David said, Thy gentleness has made me great.

God didn't chase him with a big club. God gently came, firmly came, though, but gently. He gently leads those that are with young, and every Christian in a certain spiritual sense is pregnant with spiritual young, and God gently leads us because of this.

But he can never ignore our sin. He has to deal with it. He does not, I say again before I close, he doesn't afflict us willingly, nor grieve the children of men.

So grieve the heart of God, that he has to do what sometimes he has to do. I was with a pastor down in the New England States. He got on the bandwagon on a glory trip, and got his people to go into a big building program, which cost some millions of dollars, got 11 acres of land, built a beautiful building.

Then they ran out of money, and they ran out of everything, and he lost most of his people, and he wound up in a little strip mall with two rooms he was renting, and about 50 or 60 people. And he said, I was on a glory trip, and God and his kindness brought it to an end. He took me one day to show me the church building, which was now owned by some office company, in turn, was a beautiful, beautiful-looking building.

God didn't bail him out even when he repented. There's some things God can't do, you know. But now God was blessing him because his heart was humble.

But he had to face up to the fact that he had led those people on a personal glory trip, and he'd done some things God didn't want done. He wasn't really praying about it. You know how it goes? You get an invitation, let's say to move to Vancouver, and the salary will be \$5,000 a year more than you're getting now.

You say, hey, you pray and I'll pack. I mean, our mind is made up. That's got to be the will of God.

I'll tell you, Minneapolis had a crusade there. There's a fellow there named Milk Burke. He might be listening.

He's in heaven now. Milk had been offered a job in Denver, Colorado, and they told him within five years your salary will be the same as the President of the United States. I think it was \$250,000.

I don't know what it is now. So he and his wife decided, let's go. And that night, he was late getting to the meeting, and just as he walked in the door, I was saying something like this.

If the pastor should announce from the pulpit that he was going to Vancouver from Winnipeg or someplace because he was going to be offered \$5,000 a year more, what did you think? You'd say, that rascal? He's a money grabber. Good riddance. Bad rubbish.

And then I said, but you people do it all the time and think nothing of it. And that's what I was talking about when he walked in the door. And he got ahold of me after the meeting.

He said, you rascal. You blew it all away. I said, what did I blow away? Then he told me about this Denver thing.

He said, we haven't even prayed about it. They prayed about it, and God said, Milk, stay in Minneapolis. You know what he used to do? On a cowboy outfit.

He was a great big guy. A cowboy outfit, big hat, the whole bit. And he'd go drumming up kids for Sunday school.

And God said, this is far more important than earning \$250,000 a year in Denver, Colorado. Thank God he listened. Maybe you're being afflicted in some way or other.

And before I close, I must say this. When Lazarus died, Jesus said, this sickness is not unto death, but for the glory of God, that the Son of God might be glorified thereby. Master, John 10, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind? And Jesus said, neither has this man sinned nor his parents, but that the works of God should be made manifest in him.

In one of my churches years ago, a lady, she had four or five children. All her children were dead, killed in separate accidents, but one, her husband was killed in an accident. It was a very unusual thing.

She had open ulcers on her legs and rarely got to church. People, listen, let me tell you something. She was the happiest Christian I ever knew.

I went there one day to cheer her up, and she cheered me up. I once asked her, I said, Mrs. Wonka, have you ever felt badly that God has put you through these awful trials? And she went into a rhapsody of delight, how good God had been. And she meant it from her heart.

And I'll tell you something. When I had her funeral, the whole town was there. They had to get the town hall.

It was packed to the doors. It was the only time in my experience where the sinners were saying, Amen, preacher. I'd say, Mrs. Wonka was a real Christian.

Amen, preacher. Everybody knew her. Everybody knew her story.

And so sometimes afflictions come, and it's not because of sin, because God wants to demonstrate his grace in your life. Be like Paul. I take pleasure in infirmities and reproaches and necessities and distresses and persecutions for Christ's sake, for when I'm weak, then I'm strong.

The lame take to pray, not the well and the strong. And when Jacob wrestled all night with God, he wound up with a limp forever. His thigh was out of joint.

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