

Facing Afflictions

by Chuck Smith

God uses affliction to teach us important lessons, keep us from disaster, and guide us on the right path.

Duration: 26:42

Scripture: Psalm 1:1-3, Psalm 119:67, Psalm 119:71, Matthew 6:33

Topics: "Afflictions"

Description

In this sermon, the preacher emphasizes the danger of curiosity and fascination with evil things. He encourages believers to be simple and ignorant about the evil in the world, as it can lead them into dangerous places. The preacher also highlights the role of afflictions sent by God as a means to protect and guide His people. He references Psalm 1, which describes the blessings of delighting in the law of the Lord and meditating on it day and night. The sermon concludes by focusing on the importance of afflictions in teaching believers God's statutes and keeping them on the right path.

Transcript

This morning we'd like to draw your attention to just three of the verses out of 119. Verse 67, Before I was afflicted, I went astray, but now I have kept thy word. Verse 71, It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I might learn thy statutes.

Verse 75, I know, O Lord, that thy judgments are right, and that you have in faithfulness afflicted me. So it's interesting how the Bible seems to make a distinction between being sick and being afflicted. The Bible tells us that if there's any sick among you, let them call for the elders of the church, let them anoint them with oil in the name of the Lord, and the prayer of faith will save the sick and the Lord will raise them up.

The Bible does say if you're afflicted, then you should pray. So there is a difference between sickness and affliction. Afflictions seem to come from the Lord as instruments of teaching us, helping us to learn about ourselves and our relationship with God.

They are instructive, and so when afflicted, we should actually seek to learn the lesson that God is seeking to teach us through this particular affliction that we might be going through. Sickness is just a normal part of life. It happens to everyone, and there doesn't seem to be any spiritual significance to being sick, but just call for the elders of the church and let them pray for you.

Now God sometimes uses afflictions to keep us on the straight and narrow. There in verse 67, before I was afflicted, I went astray, but now I have kept thy word. You know, we have a tendency to sort of drift from the path.

There is a curiosity that we sometimes have that leads us into dangerous places. You've heard the old adage, curiosity killed the cat. Well, it kills a lot more than the cat.

It kills just a lot of people who are destroyed because of their curiosity. There's a strange fascination with evil things, and we are oftentimes fascinated with evil, just how it is that people can do certain things, and we have this curiosity that is a dangerous thing because it can lead us into some dangerous places. In the book of Romans, Paul wrote, be simple concerning evil.

You don't have to know all about evil. In fact, it's better to just be simple or to be ignorant about a lot of the evil that is going on in our world today. God could just let us go and let us be destroyed by the evil, but yet because he loves us, if we start dabbling in areas that are dangerous, God will send afflictions.

They are sort of wake-up calls. They're sort of saying, look, you don't want to go there. Stay clear of that because that can destroy you.

Satan has set traps for the believers, and oftentimes we are walking right into his trap. So God brings a little affliction along to awaken us to the danger that we are in. Now, does God do this because he hates us? Is that why afflictions come? No, it's because he loves us, and he's trying to keep us from danger, from hurting ourselves, from being destroyed, from disaster.

A little disappointment now can actually save you from a major catastrophe down the road a ways. In Psalm 124, the psalmist said, if it had not been that the Lord who was on our side when men rose up against us, then they would have swallowed us up quickly when their wrath was kindled against us, and the waters would have overwhelmed us, and the stream would have gone over our soul. But blessed be the Lord who has not given us prey to their teeth.

Our soul is escaped as a bird out of their trap. The trap is broken, and we have escaped. How did the Lord deliver us? Oftentimes through some affliction that took place in our life, and God was through that affliction seeking to turn us from the path because we were going astray.

But because of the affliction, the psalmist said, now I have kept thy word. Many times we accuse God in our blind folly for keeping us from fulfilling our plans or having a good time, a lot of fun, because some affliction befell us, and we couldn't carry out the plan. And so we get upset with God because he kept us from what we thought would be a great experience or a good time.

And I can remember when I was in high school, there on South Main Street in Santa Ana, there was this little 36, three-windowed Ford, black, twin spots, twin tailpipes, smitty mufflers, the skirts with Buick emblems. I mean, this was a classic, and I lusted after that little car. I mean, it was so beautiful, I would just drive by and look at it and just dream about that car.

In fact, more than dream, I started praying that God would help me get that little car. I made all kinds of promises, Lord, if I just had that car, I'd pick up kids and take them to church with me and all. You know, of course, that wasn't so wise because if I wanted to just get a car to take kids to church, better to get a bus or something, not a three-window Ford coupe.

But at any rate, I desired that car extremely. And I had, it was for \$400, I had \$200, had a friend in high school at that time, and he had sort of agreed with my lust for that car. And so we decided that maybe we could go into a partnership and split the price of it.

I had the \$200, and he said that he had some adding machines up in Glendale, and that he could go up to his dad's house and get them, and we could buy that beautiful little Ford car. And of course, you know, I was saying, Lord, I'll take it and pick kids up for church and so forth. But in my mind, I could picture myself driving by the front of the high school at noon, when the kids were all out there, and just sort of letting off on the gas and let those mufflers pop and all.

And, you know, just, I would be the envy of the high school if I just had that car. Well, we decided one night that we would drive up to Glendale to his dad's house and get these adding machines that he had that he said that he could sell and get the money for his half of the car. And of course, it was a crazy idea, but it never would have worked.

But yet, we were so enthused with that car that we were sure we had to have it. Well, as we were driving up on Manchester Boulevard, in those days, there wasn't very much traffic between Santa Ana and LA. But as we were traveling up Manchester, about Norwalk, the engine just quit.

And so we did our best to restart it. And finally, the battery was just getting low. It wasn't really turning it over anymore.

And so we were in a dilemma, and we decided, well, we'll just have to go some other time. And so we'll just push the car around and head it back towards Santa Ana. And then when a car would come along, we would flag it and see if they would give us a shove to help get the car started.

But we figured that we'd just let them push until they got tired. And we'd just leave it in neutral and let them, you know, push us until they got tired. And then we'd wait for the next car to come and figured that we could probably get home.

It would be late, but at least, you know, it would be getting home. As he got out, when we saw this headlights coming up the road, he got out to flag the car. And so I scooted over to the driver's seat and thought, well, just try it once more.

And I tried it, and the car started up. And so he, when the car started up, ran around, jumped in the passenger side, and we drove back to Santa Ana. And we stopped out there at Lee's Drive-In there on Manchester.

And we got a hamburger and a malt, and then headed down to my house on North Broadway in Santa Ana. And as we were getting close to my house, my friend said, you know, your parents are not expecting you to be home because you told them that you're going to spend the night there in Glendale. And my dad doesn't know that we're coming.

We were going to surprise him. And so why don't we just turn around and go back up to LA? And of course, by this time, he was driving. And I said, why not, you know? So he started to turn around, make a U-turn there on Greenleaf, and the engine died again, and two tires blew out.

And I was so upset with the Lord, you know, keeping me from this beautiful little car that I was lusting after, and all of my dreams of what could happen if I just had that car. And it wasn't to happen. And of course,

after that, I was just complaining to the Lord.

He didn't really love me and wasn't interested in my bringing the lost kids to church so they could get saved and all. And you know how unfair God was because of this affliction that I was experiencing. But what I didn't realize that God was really watching over me and preventing me from getting into real trouble.

I didn't realize this until about three months later. And my dad came in and said, there's a gentleman out in the front room that he wants to talk to you. And so I went out into the front room and this fellow introduced himself, showed me his credentials.

He was an FBI agent. And he asked me about some adding machines up in Glendale. And I said, well, I said, I have a friend that was going up to Glendale to get some adding machines that were at his dad's house so we could buy a car.

But I said, it just didn't work out. I said, we were trying to drive up there, but the car, you know, quit running. And so we had to come on home.

And he said, well, you can thank your lucky stars that that car quit running. Because actually, those adding machines were stolen out of a government facility. And this young guy sold them.

And he was in big trouble. And had you gone with him, you would have been an accomplice to the crime. But you can just thank your lucky stars that the car failed.

I said, well, I won't thank my lucky stars. I'll thank the Lord for causing that car to fail and blowing out the tires to ensure that we wouldn't try to go on up to Glendale that night. And so God was watching over me.

But I didn't realize it. And before I was afflicted, I would have gone astray. But God kept me from that.

And so how many times God does use affliction to get our attention, lest we go astray. If we only knew how many times God was protecting us, when we thought that God was mean or, you know, and not cooperating with us. But in reality, God was watching over us and protecting us, if we only realized it.

In Psalm 119, the psalmist said, it is good for me to have been afflicted, that I might learn thy statutes. God often uses afflictions to teach us important lessons in life. David said in Psalm 19, the statutes of the Lord are right, rejoicing the heart, and in keeping of them, there is great reward.

And one of the rewards of keeping his statutes is just good health. God promised to the nation of Israel in Exodus 15-26, if you will diligently hearken to the voice of the Lord your God, and do that which is right in his sight, and give ear to his commandments, and keep his statutes, I will put none of these diseases upon thee, which I have brought upon the Egyptians, for I am the Lord that healeth thee. And so sometimes God uses afflictions in order to help us to learn his statutes, in order to teach us to walk in his ways.

Many people who really do not have a true understanding of the law and the purpose of the law, speak of the law in a very negative way. They say, well, we're not under law, we're under grace, and just sort of, you know, smack of the lips kind of a thing, that I'm no longer under the law. But in reality, if you really understood the purpose for the law, David describes it there in Psalm 1, blessed is the man who walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the way with sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful, but his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in his law does he meditate day and night, and he'll be like a tree planted by the rivers of water that will bring forth fruit in his season.

His leaf also will not wither, and whatever he does will prosper. In other words, God is saying, I've given you the rules for a good, healthy life, that you might have a prosperous life, and that's the purpose of the laws. These are the rules for a good, healthy, prosperous life.

These are the things that I need to do in order to enjoy the blessings of God upon my life. And so, never look at the law as some kind of a negative thing that God is just trying to restrict you from positive experiences that will enhance your life, but God is keeping you from disaster that, if you just violate his law, you will experience really the tragedies and the disasters that God is warning you against. There are important statutes that I must follow if I'm to live the good life.

God loves me so much that he's determined to teach me his statutes, even if it takes affliction to do so. As the psalmist said, it was good for me that I was afflicted that I might learn thy statutes. There's an easy way to learn things, and there's a hard way to learn things.

God prefers that we would learn them the easy way, but sometimes because of my folly, I force God's hand, and he has to teach me the hard way. God said in Psalm 32 9, don't be like a horse or a mule whose mouth must be kept in with bit and bridle, bridle lest they step on you. God is saying, I don't want to use painful methods to teach you.

A bridle, they're in your lips, and when you want this horse to stop, you pull on the bridle, and he stops because of the pain and all. God said, no, I don't want to use that on you. I don't want to have to use painful means to guide and to keep your life, but don't be like a mule.

Don't be stubborn. I will guide you, he said, with my eye, and just be sensitive to the Lord and the things of the Lord. He'll lead you, but he'll lead you just a nod, and just that direction and all.

You get a horse that's really well trained, all you have to do is sort of lean the reins on the side of the neck, and he knows that, you know, to turn that direction. If, you know, you have to pull on one side of the rein to pull the bit in his mouth, he'll turn, but it's a painful way to go. And God is saying, I don't want to have to use painful methods to teach you.

God would rather not bring afflictions in order to get you in the right path, but just guide you. And so he's giving you his statutes, he's telling you this is the way for prosperity, the way to go. I go through afflictions, and I often rebel, and I often complain, but when I see the results, I declare it is good for me that I have been afflicted, because I might learn thy statutes.

Again, the statutes of the Lord are right, and they are rejoicing to the heart. In verse 75, I know, O Lord, that your judgments are right, and that you in faithfulness have afflicted me. So the afflictions that may come in our lives are only a sign of God's faithfulness to us.

He is faithful not to let us go into those places where we could destroy or be destroyed ourselves, but when I would do those foolish things, that if I would just continue in them, they would destroy me. In his faithfulness and in his love, he sends afflictions lest I go astray. We begin to know God's judgments, they are always right, and we begin to look at afflictions as a blessing, not a curse, because they testify to us, God is faithful.

He doesn't want you to do things that will lead to painful experiences down the road. James wrote, if there's any afflicted, let him pray, not let him curse the affliction, but pray that you might learn the lesson that God is trying to teach you, that you will avert the disaster that God is trying to keep you from. So

afflictions, oh yes, we all have them.

When we start to go astray, God will bring something along the path that will, you know, turn us around to get us on the right path. That's because he loves us, and he wants us to walk in that path that will be beneficial, and that will lead us in the right direction, serving him and living for him. So as the scripture says, my son despise not the chastening of the Lord, or it could read, despise not the afflictions of the Lord.

For whom the Lord loves, he chastens, and it is a sign of God's love for you, not God's anger or being upset, but it's just a sign God loves you. He's keeping you from things that could hurt and harm you if you persisted in them. Father, we thank you for the afflictions, for the lessons that we learn during the time of affliction, for the way, Lord, that you have kept us from destroying ourselves and hurting ourselves.

And so, Lord, we just pray that today, as some are here who are going through a particular time of afflictions, that they might learn, Lord, the lessons that you're seeking to teach them, and Lord, that you're teaching them to just turn away from the path they're on, and turn toward you, and walk in your ways, in order, Lord, that they might experience your help, and your love, and your strength. In Jesus' name, Father, work your work in each of our lives, and we will thank and praise you for it. Amen.

Shall we stand? The pastors are down here at the front to minister to you today. If you are on a path that is going to lead to pain and lead you away from the Lord, it could be that he's allowed some affliction to happen, and God is wanting to turn you back to his way. And so, if you're going through some problems, heavy things that you don't understand, why is this happening to me? Why did God allow this? I would encourage you to just, you know, the Bible said, if there's afflicted, let them pray.

And we have the opportunity for you to come today, and just to pray, and to seek the Lord. These men are here to pray with you, and it could be that while you are here, and while they are praying with you, that the Lord will really show you the thing that he is seeking to teach you, so that you can escape the affliction, and walk in perfect harmony with his will and plan for your life. So, we would encourage you, come on down as we are dismissed, and just let the Lord work these things out in your life, and you can go from here today, just experiencing God's strength, and God's help, and God's guidance, and you would be able to say, it was good for me that I was afflicted, because I learned his statutes.

And so, may that be the case. The Lord bless thee, the Lord bless thee, and keep thee, and keep thee, the Lord make his face to shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee, and be gracious unto thee, the Lord lift up, the Lord lift up, his countenance, his countenance, upon thee, and give thee peace. God bless you.

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