

God's Purpose for Afflictions

by Chuck Smith

The sermon explores God's purpose for afflictions, emphasizing that suffering can lead to spiritual growth and a deeper relationship with Him.

Duration: 41:46

Scripture: Psalm 90:1-6, Psalm 90:9-10, Psalm 90:12-15, Psalm 90:17, Hosea 6:1-2, Hebrews 11:35-38

Topics: "Afflictions"

Description

In this sermon, Pastor Skip leads the congregation in a study of the book of Hosea, specifically focusing on chapters five through seven. He encourages the audience to read these chapters beforehand to be prepared for the study. The sermon then shifts to a personal anecdote about the speaker's experience with a gang in Toledo, Ohio, where they gained favor and organized a beach party for them. The sermon concludes with a scripture reading from Psalm 90 and a reflection on the significance of God's protection and salvation from the flames of evil.

Transcript

Now let's turn in our Bibles to Psalm 90 for our scripture reading. Now read the first in the unnumbered verses, and Pastor Brian will lead the congregation in the reading of the even-numbered verses as we stand to read the Word of God. Lord, Thou hast been our dwelling place in all generations.

Before the mountains were brought forth, for ever Thou hast formed the earth and the world. Even from everlasting to everlasting, Thou art God. Thou turnest man to destruction, and sayest, Return, ye children of men.

For a thousand years in Thy sight are but as yesterday when it is past, and as a watch in the night. Thou carryest them away as with a flood. They are as a sleep.

In the morning they are like grass, which groweth up. In the morning it flourishes and groweth up. In the evening it is cut down and withereth.

For we are consumed by Thine anger, and by Thy wrath are we troubled. Thou hast set our iniquities before Thee, our secret sins, in the light of Thy countenance. For all of our days are passed away in wrath, as we spend our years as a tale that is told.

The days of our years are threescore and ten, and if by reason of strength they be fourscore years, yet their strength, labor, and sorrow, for it is soon cut off, and we fly away. Who knoweth the power of Thine anger? Even according to Thy fear so is Thy wrath. So teach us to number our days, that we may apply our hearts unto wisdom.

Return, O Lord, how long? And let it repent Thee concerning Thy servants. O, satisfy us early with Thy mercy, that we may rejoice and be glad all our days. Make us glad according to the days wherewith Thou hast afflicted us, and the years wherein we have been evil.

Let Thy work appear unto Thy servants, and Thy glory unto their children. And let the beauty of the Lord our God be upon us, and establish Thou the work of our hands upon us. Yea, the work of our hands establish Thou it.

Let's pray. Father, we do ask that You would teach us to number our days, that we might incline our hearts to wisdom. Knowing, Lord, that we have only one life, it will soon be passed, and only what we do for You is of any lasting value.

May we, Lord, be diligent in our work for You and for the kingdom of God. Realizing that our lives will soon be over, we spend them as a tale that is told. You have given us a limited number of days.

May we use them wisely, Lord, in living for You and for things that will count for eternal value. In Jesus' name we pray, amen. You may be seated.

As was announced, Pastor Skip will be leading us this evening in our study through the Bible this week, Hosea chapters 5 through 7. Short chapters, you can digest them very easily, and we would encourage you to read them over this afternoon that you might be prepared for the study tonight as Skip leads us through the Word of God. This morning we would like to draw your attention to the sixth chapter, the first couple of verses. There we read, and this is the nation of Israel speaking in the last days, Come, let us return unto the Lord, for He has torn, and He will heal us.

He has smitten, and He will bind us up. After two days will He revive us, and in the third day He will raise us up, and we shall live in His sight. The prophet Hosea had been warning the nation of Israel, because he was a prophet to the northern kingdom of Israel, and he had been warning them that they were going to be conquered by their enemies.

But in the last days, God would bring them back into their land, and that when they came back to the land, there would come a spiritual revival, and they would acknowledge that the evils that had befallen them through the centuries were the result of their turning their backs upon God. And in this spiritual revival, the nation will say, Come, let us return unto the Lord, because He has smitten, but He will heal, and He will bind us up. As a prophecy to the nation of Israel, it is very interesting.

Just as the Lord had warned them through the prophets, they did go into captivity unto the Assyrians. Later they returned through the Medo-Persian empire from that captivity. They dwelt again in the land for a few hundred years, but once again, because of their rebellion against God and their rejection of Jesus Christ, they were once more conquered and scattered by the Roman empire, and that scattering has lasted for almost two thousand years.

But as God promised in the last days, He would bring them back into their land again, and they would become a nation once more, and that there would come a spiritual revival in which they would say, Come,

let us return unto the Lord, for He has torn, and He will heal. He has smitten, and He will bind us up. In 2 Kings, chapter seventeen, we find the history of their being defeated and going into captivity to the Assyrians.

We read there in verse six, In the ninth year of the reign of Hoshea, the king of Assyria took Samaria and carried Israel away unto Assyria, because the children of Israel had sinned against the Lord their God. They had worshipped other gods. They had walked in the statutes of the heathen, for they secretly did things that were not right against the Lord their God, by building places of worship to false gods in all of their cities.

The Lord had sent his prophets to them, who warned them to turn from their evil ways, and to keep the commandments of the Lord. Actually, Hosea was one of those prophets. But they would not hear, and they did not believe the Lord their God, and they followed vanity and became vain.

They cast their sons and daughters into the fires of Molech, and they provoked the Lord to anger, so He removed them out of the land. Back in the third chapter of Hosea, Hosea declared, The children of Israel shall abide for many days without a king, without a prince, without a sacrifice. But in the latter days they will return and seek the Lord and David their king, and they shall worship the Lord in the last days.

So this prophecy is of these last days, after they had returned to the land, and because of the desperate conditions that they would be facing, that ultimately there will come a spiritual revival there among the Jews, and they will say, Come, let's return unto the Lord. For the most part today, Israel is a secular nation, but there's going to be a tremendous revival, no doubt prompted by the pressures that are upon them as a people that have been brought upon them because of the troubles that they have with the Palestinians and the surrounding Muslim nations. There is going to come a place where they're going to recognize our only hope of survival is by turning again to the Lord.

They will say, He has torn us, but He will heal us. He has smitten us, but He will bind us up. But then the interesting prophecy, after two days He will revive us, and in the third day He will raise us up, and we will live in His sight.

Just what does it mean, after two days He will revive us? Surely these are not literal days, because it didn't happen in two literal days. As we read in our psalm this morning, a day is as a thousand years unto the Lord. Peter wrote, Beloved, don't be ignorant of this fact.

He's talking about the coming of the Lord again, and our need for patience as we wait for our Lord to come. He said, one day is with the Lord as a thousand years, and a thousand years as one day. Now if we take here in chapter six, verse two, in two days He will revive us, and we will live the third day before Him.

If you take a day as a thousand years, it is quite interesting, isn't it? That it's been almost two thousand years from their defeat by the Roman Empire, and they're going into captivity, going and being dispersed throughout the world. But now after two thousand years, the nation has revived, according to so many of the prophecies of the scripture, where God promised in the last days He would bring them back into the land, and make them a nation once again. And two thousand years later, God fulfilled that promise.

The third day we shall live in His sight would be the thousand-year millennial reign of Christ upon the earth. You might say, what an amazing coincidence. However, in my opinion, the word coincidence is not in God's vocabulary.

It's God's plan revealed in advance of the timing for the rebirth of the nation of Israel after the two thousand years of being scattered throughout the world. But I would like to look at this text in a little different manner today. Not as it applied to the nation of Israel and is being fulfilled, but I would like to look at this text as it would apply to a person individually.

Before I get into it, I want to make a clarification that if you are going through a hardship or a difficult trial at the present time, you should not automatically think that God is punishing you or trying to correct some fault in you. For some of the most godly people who have ever lived have gone through great trials and afflictions. And God can have other purposes for trials and afflictions in our lives other than correction.

And I want to make that perfectly clear. Look at the way Jesus suffered and God had a purpose for His suffering, the purpose of the redemption of mankind. So because a person suffers doesn't necessarily mean that God is correcting some evil in their life.

But oftentimes God is bringing the suffering to bring us to a higher plan and purpose that God might have for us. Listen to what Paul the Apostle said about his life. He said, I often faced death.

Five times the Jews beat me with 39 stripes. Three times I was beaten with rods. Once I was stoned and three times I suffered shipwreck.

I was often weary and in pain. I was hungry and thirsty. I've been cold and naked.

And then he spoke of his constant infirmities that he experienced. But as we look at the life of Paul, it wasn't God correcting him for some evil, but it was that God might accomplish a higher purpose through his life. He said, because of the abundance of the revelations that were given to me, there also was that minister of Satan, my thorn in the flesh.

And he said, therefore, I will glory in my sicknesses, in my weaknesses, that I might experience the power of God in my life. And so a man of God, serving God, and yet experienced all kinds of difficulties and painful experiences through his life. In the book of Hebrews chapter 11, the chapter that gives us the heroes of faith from the Old Testament, it tells us of these men of God, men of faith.

They were tortured, not accepting deliverance, that they might obtain a better resurrection. Some had trials of cruel mockings, scourgings. They were bound and imprisoned.

They were stoned. They were sawn asunder. They were tempted and slain with a sword.

They wandered about in sheepskins and goatskins, being destitute, afflicted, tormented, of whom the world was not worthy. Yet they wandered in the deserts and mountains, and they escaped to dens and caves of the earth. Good people can often experience suffering in this world.

We do not always know why God allows the pain or the suffering in our lives. But we do know that the Bible says that all things work together for good to those who love the Lord and are called according to his purpose. Now that passage of Scripture is oftentimes tested.

Our faith in the Bible is tested in that passage of Scripture, because often as we are going through difficult experiences, we wonder, what good can God bring out of this? But if I love God, and if I am seeking to walk according to God's purpose for my life, I can be assured that no matter what kind of painful experience I might have in life, that God is working that for a good purpose in me, and that I'll come out

much better. But if I am straying from the Lord, if I am taking a self-governed path, I'm doing my own thing, I am ignoring God, then God oftentimes, like with the nation of Israel, will smite me. He will bring suffering into my path to correct me and to turn me away from the path that is leading to destruction.

And that's what I want to talk about today. Those whom God is chastening and is using these difficult experiences to turn you away from your self-destructive path, that you might get on the right path, the path that leads to eternal life. Now a wise parent knows that the future happiness of their child depends upon that child developing the right attitudes and the right actions.

We know that if our child does certain things, develops certain practices, that down the road it's going to bring them pain, it's going to bring them suffering. And wanting to avert the pain, we do our best to turn our child away from those things that we know will bring ultimate pain into their lives. I think that one of the hardest things as a parent, as when our children grow into those teenage rebellion years, and we see them taking a path that we know is going to bring them pain, and we do our best to persuade them not to take that path, but they insist on doing it.

And we know very well that they're going to rue the day that they took that path. They're going to go through all kinds of pain and sorrow because of it, but we were not able to avert them because they had come of age, and they had chosen their way they wanted to go, and we had to just wait until they experienced the disasters, and then they come back, and we do our best to alleviate the pain and to help them. But it's hard to see them going through the pain that we know could have been averted had they only had listened to us.

We know the potential danger of a child playing with matches, and so we seek to discourage our children from playing with matches because we know that they can set themselves on fire, they can set the house on fire, they could be destroyed by this dangerous practice, and so we take the means necessary to teach them don't play with matches. We know the potential danger of their becoming involved with promiscuous sex. We know of the many sexually transmitted diseases.

We know the pain and all that can come as a result of promiscuous sex, and so we teach our children moral purity because we know that the other path can lead to so many problems. My mother taught me never to smoke, never to drink. Her father-in-law would get drunk and beat her mother, and she saw that, and she knew the evil of alcohol.

My uncle died of emphysema. He was a chain smoker. He would light the new cigarette from the old cigarette all day long, a chain smoker.

He died a horrible death of emphysema, and so my mother said, son, never drink, never smoke, and I'm so glad that I followed the advice of my mother, and never in my life have I ever had a swallow of an alcoholic beverage, never have I had a cigarette to my lips, and I thank God for that today because of the strong, healthy body that he has given me through the years, the good health I've enjoyed because I kept my body pure and clean, and so we endeavor to teach our children, and we usually begin with what they call positive reinforcement. In other words, we deal with them very lovingly as we reward them for good behavior, the positive reinforcement. When they do that which is good, we reward them, we commend them, and we seek to train them through positive reinforcement.

We bless them and commend them when they make good decisions. This is how God was with the nation of Israel. We read, and as long as they sought the Lord, God made their ways to prosper.

God blessed them. He prospered them. He was reinforcing their good behavior.

The Lord said to Jeremiah, I have loved thee with an everlasting love. Therefore, with loving kindness have I drawn thee. And God would much rather train us with the positive reinforcement in a loving way, correct us in a very gentle way.

But as a parent and with parents, if the children do not respond to the positive reinforcement, but if they continue in a practice that we know can be harmful, we know can bring pain and suffering to them, then we find it necessary to train them with other means, sometimes painful means, because we love them and we know the potential danger of the things that they are doing, and thus we must take more stringent measures to see that they don't do those things, lest ultimately they are destroyed by continuing to do them. Such was the case with the nation of Israel. They had turned their backs on God.

They had begun to worship other gods. They had taken up practices that would lead ultimately to their destruction, and so God began to use harsher measures in correcting them to keep them and to avert the destruction that they were pursuing in the path that they had chosen. He tried first to cause them to see the blessings of walking in his ways, but they began to attribute those blessings to the other gods that they were worshiping, and so he was forced to use other means to get them on the right path.

And so there was the tearing. He is torn. There was the smiting, and the nation was smitten by other nations, and they were defeated.

And for a long period of time they would be in captivity, and they would be persecuted throughout the world. Maybe that's where some of you are today. You're going through some very difficult times, some very painful experiences, and it is quite possible that you've been straying from God's path, and God has sought to draw you back in love and in kind measures, but you haven't responded.

You haven't listened to God, and so God has been forced to use more stringent measures to get you on the right path. And now you're going through some suffering, and you're beginning to experience some of the calamity that awaits you if you continue the path that you're on. God has blessed you through your life with good health, but maybe now you are sick.

You're weak. You're unable to really function, and you are going through a time of real physical difficulty. Maybe you've never known financial hardship, but now suddenly you find yourself in a real financial pinch.

It may be that God is having to use more severe measures in order to wake you up, to realize that the path you are on is going to lead to destruction if you don't turn away. Now many people, because they don't know the love of God, and how much God does love them, and that his purpose for smiting is to turn them away from that path of destruction, when God begins his correction, they think, well, God doesn't love me. If God loved me, he wouldn't allow me to go through this hard experience that I'm having now, this misery that I'm going through.

Oh, it's because God does love you. You were going astray. You could have destroyed yourself completely.

The Bible tells us, whom God loves, he chastens. And this could be a very chastening process of God in your life to get you on the right path. Years ago, my brother and I decided to travel across the country and to visit other parts of the United States.

So in the summer, between our classes, we traveled across the United States, driving across the country. When we were in Toledo, Ohio, we were holding a meeting in a church there, and God opened up the door in a very interesting way where we were able to make contact with a gang in Toledo, the North Side Gang, who were known as a very vicious gang. But God gave us favor with this gang.

And so we called my dad and said, you know, we've got this gang, the North Side Gang in Toledo, and we've gained favor with them. We want to take them on a beach party. And so we need some money.

So dad wired us some money. We hired, rented a truck, and we trucked this gang on up to Monroe, Michigan, where we were going to have a big beach party there on the shores of Lake Erie. We had hot dogs and all of the trimmings for them and the cokes and all, and just showing them that we were Christians, but we could have a great time.

So as we got up there on the beach, and these kids came from more or less a ghetto area, we built this big bonfire. And as we built the bonfire, suddenly from just out of it seemed nowhere, hundreds of large moths attracted by the flame began to fly right into the flames and were being destroyed. These kids began to stand around the flame, and as these moths would fly towards the flame, they would bat them down on the ground.

And they would flop there on the ground for a little bit, but as soon as they could get their equilibrium, they would fly right on into the flame. It gave us an opportunity with a tremendous illustration to talk to those kids about the flames that await the evil and how God has done so much, tried so hard to keep us from that flame, even sending his only begotten son, whose name was Jesus, to die for our sins, to spare us from the destruction that awaits the wicked. God does love us enough that he's not going to just let us destroy ourselves without endeavoring to stop us.

Maybe this morning you're in despair because of your present condition, and you're listening to Satan's lie who says to you, there's no hope for you. Your sins are too great for God's grace to cover. You cannot expect anything other than the fierce judgment of God.

But note again our text. They said, come, let us return unto the Lord, for he has torn and he will heal. He has smitten and he will bind us up.

If you will turn to the Lord, you will find that he will heal. He will bind up your broken life. The whole secret of healing is just turning to the Lord.

If you will but turn, you can be assured that God will heal. The next book that we're going to study is the book of Joel. As soon as we finish Hosea in a couple more weeks, we'll be moving to the prophet Joel.

In chapter 2 verse 12 of Joel, God said through the prophet, turn to me with all of your heart, with weeping and mourning, and rend your heart and not your garments and turn unto Jehovah your God. For he is gracious, he's merciful, slow to anger and of great kindness. And he will restore to you the years that the locusts have eaten, the canker worm and the caterpillar and his great army, which he sent among you.

And you shall eat in plenty and be satisfied and praise the name of Jehovah your God that has dealt wondrously with you. And his people shall never be ashamed. Maybe the Lord is speaking to you today through the prophet again.

And God is saying, turn to the Lord. He will restore to you those wasted years, the years that the canker worm and caterpillar have eaten. God will restore you to that place of fellowship.

God will restore you to that place of blessing. You can find the forgiveness of God. Yes, he is smitten, but he will heal.

Yes, he has torn, but he will bind you up again. Turn to him. That's the challenge in the call of God.

Father, we realize that there are those here today who have turned from you and are experiencing some of the beginning consequences of taking the path that they have chosen as they experience some of the painful things that are going on in their lives. But Father, we pray that today, like Israel, we'll say, let's return to the Lord. And may the Lord return to you today and find your healing.

And you're binding up of the wounds and you're restoring to them, Lord, those wasted years. In Jesus name we pray. Amen.

Shall we stand? The pastors are down here at the front for the purpose of praying for you who would like to turn to the Lord today. God wants to bless you. God wants to work in your life, his wonderful work of love and grace, if you'll just give him the opportunity.

They're here to help you to discover that work that God wants to do in your life, to pray for you and to minister to you today and help you get on the right path. And so we would encourage you as we're dismissed, make your way forward, come on down and turn to the Lord. Let God lead you in his path of righteousness.

You'll never be sorry. May the Lord be with you. May the Lord bless you.

May he cause his love to abound in your life. May you experience his goodness and his hand upon your life this week in Jesus name. The Lord bless 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 his countenance upon thee and give thee peace.

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