

How Long Is This Valley?

by Richard E. Bieber

The valley experience is a necessary part of vision formation, where we must commit ourselves to Jesus, face temptation and testing, and practice the presence of God in order to see the vision become reality.

Scripture: 1 Kings 19:1, Psalm 13:1, Psalm 23:4, Jeremiah 12:1, Habakkuk 1:2, Luke 18:7

Topics: "Faith And Perseverance", "Spiritual Formation"

Description

Richard E. Bieber preaches about the journey from receiving a vision from God to seeing that vision become a reality in our lives, emphasizing the necessity of passing through valleys where the vision is shaped and formed within us. He highlights the importance of not avoiding these valleys but rather committing ourselves to Jesus to allow Him to work in us. Using examples from the lives of biblical figures like Elijah, Jeremiah, and Habakkuk, he encourages believers to express their feelings to God, hold on to the vision, and practice God's presence in the midst of long valleys, ultimately turning them into places of glory.

Transcript

How long wilt thou forget me, O Lord forever? How long wilt thou hide thy face from me? How long shall I take counsel in my soul, having sorrow in my heart daily? How long shall mine enemy be exalted over me?

Consider and hear me, O Lord my God: lighten mine eyes lest I sleep the sleep of death; lest mine enemy say, I have prevailed against him; and those that trouble me rejoice when I am moved. But I have trusted in thy mercy; my heart shall rejoice in thy salvation. I will sing unto the Lord, because he hath dealt bountifully with me.

Psalm 13 KJV

To get from the place where God has given us vision, to the place where that vision becomes reality in our lives, we have to pass through a valley where the vision is formed in us...beaten into shape. Many of us have been trying to avoid this valley. The Spirit drives us toward the valley and we dig in our heels.

"Wait a minute Lord! I'm not ready to commit myself to that extent. I love this vision you gave me. Can't I just sit here and ponder it?"

But the vision will never amount to anything in our lives until we commit ourselves to Jesus seriously enough that we're willing to let him take us through a valley where the vision becomes real.

To those who don't want to walk through the valley, there's really nothing more to be said... they'll sit on their mountain top until the vision turns to stone. But for those who are willing to go down into the valley and let God deal with them there it's important to keep remembering that this is the only route that will ever bring vision to fulfillment...and it's worth it.

When Jesus came out of the waters of his baptism he had vision. He saw heaven opened and the Holy Spirit descending on him in the form of a dove. But before that vision could become substance in his life he first had to go through a valley...he was driven into the wilderness to be tempted by the devil. In that valley, that wilderness, the vision became reality. Then Jesus came out to Israel and,

proclaimed the kingdom,

healed the sick,

raised the dead,

laid down his life and conquered death for us.

Jesus' ministry followed that pattern again and again. Jesus has a vision that it was time to leave Judea for Galilee. To get to Galilee he must go through Samaria, - a valley - a place of rejection.

But in that valley the vision of the Father becomes life as he meets the woman at the well and lifts her into the Father's kingdom.

In the upper room Jesus gives his followers a vision of the glory of the Father's table. When supper is over he takes them into a horrendous valley and they,

- witness his arrest,

- his phony trial,

- his crucifixion.

But in this valley the vision of the kingdom is hammered into shape. Jesus comes forth alive from the dead and leads these followers out of the valley into a life of divine power.

We thank God for the vision that he gives us. Not only the blazing flashes of glory that have come in those rare moments of God's choosing, but also for the vision he gives us in daily life.

- Those insights which are more than insights.

- Those thoughts which suddenly answer our questions and get us moving ..and which we know came from the Lord.

But with every vision comes a valley. Some valleys are brief --- a day or two and we're through ---and the vision has become real in our life.

Some valleys are long -- so long that when we're going through them it seems that they'll never end. And in these long valleys we are often tempted,

- to give up hope,
- throw in the towel,
- to quit doing it God's way and take a short cut.

"Lord, how long do I have to travel this valley and not see your face."

"How long wilt thou forget me, O Lord? Forever? How long wilt thou hide thy face from me? How long shall I take counsel in my soul, having sorrow in my heart daily? How long shall mine enemy be exalted over me?"

Our reaction to these valleys, when they stretch out into years, when the darkness bears down on us with such heaviness we can hardly walk, is to start thinking that God is being unfair and to withdraw into ourselves and sulk. Of course, when we withdraw into ourselves and sulk and brood and flirt with despair, all we're doing is making the valley still longer.

1. When the valley gets long and we begin to feel that God is being unfair, the first thing we need to do is tell him how we feel... don't brood. Tell God and keep telling him.

Elijah told him...

Ahab told Jezebel all that Elijah had done, and how he had slain all the prophets with the sword. Then Jezebel sent a messenger to Elijah, saying, "So may the gods do to me and more also, if I do not make your life as the life of one of them by this time tomorrow." Then he was afraid, and he arose and went for his life, and came to Beersheba, which belongs to Judah, and left his servant there. But he himself went a day's journey into the wilderness, and came and sat down under a broom tree; and he asked that he might die, saying, "It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life; for I am no better than my fathers." I Kings 19:1-4

Elijah knew very well that his thoughts were twisted. But he was humble enough to open his heart and express these twisted thoughts to God.

He headed deeper into the wilderness and came to Mt. Sinai.

And there he came to a cave, and lodged there; and behold, the word of the Lord came to him, and he said to him, "What are you doing here, Elijah?" He said, "I have been very jealous for the Lord, the God of hosts; for the people of Israel have forsaken thy covenant, thrown down thy altars, and slain thy prophets with the sword; and I, only I am left; and they seek my life, to take it away. I Kings 19:9-10

Before Elijah left Mt Sinai God cleared his mind and restored his vision because Elijah wasn't afraid to speak his heart God.

Jeremiah knew what it was to walk through a long valley. Everything began to look absurd and unfair. But Jeremiah didn't withdraw into brooding self-pity. He took his complaint to God.

Righteous art thou O Lord, when I complain to thee; yet I would plead my case before thee. Why does the way of the wicked prosper? Why do all who are treacherous thrive? Thou plantest them, and they take root; they grow and bring forth fruit; thou art near in their mouth and far from their heart. . But thou, O Lord, knowest me; thou seest me, and triest my mind toward thee. Jeremiah 12:1-3a

The prophet Habakkuk found himself in a long valley and took his complaint to God.

O Lord, how long shall I cry for help, and thou wilt not hear? Or cry to thee, "Violence!" and thou wilt not save? Why dost thou make me see wrongs and look upon trouble? Destruction and violence are before me; strife and contention arise. Thou who art of purer eyes than to behold evil, and canst not look on wrong, why dost thou look on faithless men, and art silent when the wicked swallows up the man more righteous than he? Habakkuk 1:2,3,13

He didn't keep grieving in his heart and brooding about his complaint; he opened his mouth and spoke it to God! And we need to do the same.

The worst thing we can do when the valley gets long is to sit in the shadows and sulk.

- Draw near to God!

- Raise up a cry.

"Oh, but I've been crying to God and nothing's happened."

....keep crying!

"Will not God vindicate his elect, who cry to him day and night? Will he delay long over them? I tell you, he will vindicate them speedily." Luke 18:7,8

The second thing we need to do when the valley gets long is hang on to the vision. Don't let go of the vision you were given before you entered the valley.

- You saw God's glory...you will see it again.

- You saw God's mercy...you will see it again.

Habakkuk climbs up on the watchtower and says to God,

"I'm going to stand here until you give me some answer."

And the answer he gets is,

"Hold on to the vision."

I will stand upon my watch, and set me upon the tower, and will watch to see what he will say unto me, and what I shall answer when I am reprov'd. And the Lord answered me, and said, Write the vision, and make it plain upon tablets, that he may run that readeth it. For the vision is yet for an appointed time, but at the end it shall speak, and not lie; though it tarry, wait for it; because it will surely come, it will not tarry. Behold, his soul which is lifted up is not upright in him: but the just shall live by faith.

Habakkuk 2:1-4

"Write the vision, make it plain upon tablets"....in other words, "hold on to it, it's going to be fulfilled."

Meanwhile, the righteous shall live by faith by hanging onto the vision God has given...even when all hell breaks loose and you have no earthly evidence to support the vision, to still hang on.

"I know that my redeemer lives,"

says Job in the middle of his valley. He's hanging on to his vision.

And David walking through his valley says,

"Why art thou cast down O my soul. And why art thou disquieted within me. Hope thou in God! For I shall yet praise him who is the health of my countenance and my God."

3. Finally, when the valley is long, practice the presence of God right there in the valley. Know that God is there...not only is the vision still there, God is there!

The valley will end one day, but the real end of the valley is not when the sun comes out and everything gets rosy. The real end of the valley is when we learn to meet God and commit ourselves to God and walk with God there in the valley in the midst of the haphazard.

Jesus didn't sit there on the edge of the well in Samaria, chew his nails, and cry,

"Will we ever get out of this place?"

Jesus saw the purpose of God where he was. He received the woman who came to the well as sent by his Father, ministered life to her and turned the valley into a place of glory. Jesus turned the valley into a place of glory every time...he did it in Samaria, he did it at Calvary.

Don't sit there and cry in your beer. Turn the valley into a place of glory. Let the vision become substance in your life by holding on to God right there.

Psalms 13 begins with,

"How long wilt thou forget me, O Lord? Forever?

How long wilt thou hide thy face from me?"

It ends five verses later with,

"I will sing unto the Lord, because he hath dealt bountifully with me."

...he's practicing the presence of God in the valley.

Habakkuk begins his book with,

"O Lord, how long shall I cry, and thou wilt not hear! Even cry out unto thee of violence, and thou wilt not save! Why dost thou show me iniquity, and cause me to behold grievance? for spoiling and violence are before: and there are that raise up strife and contention."

but he turns his Valley into glory. Listen to how his book ends.

Although the fig tree shall not blossom, neither shall fruit be in the vines; the labor of the olive shall fail, and the fields shall yield no meat; the flock shall be out off from the fold, and there shall be no herd in the stalls; yet I will rejoice in the Lord, I will joy in the God of my salvation. The Lord God is my strength, and he will make my feet like hinds' feet, and he will make me to walk upon mine high places.

How long is this valley? It will be there as long as it's needed. It will be a valley until we turn it into a place of glory by meeting God in the midst of the haphazard, the confusion, the pain.

Whatever our valley is, that valley can be turned into the Banquet Table of God by seeing the Lord there.

Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; by cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.

Even if nothing has changed yet,

- the fig tree doesn't blossom,
- no fruit on the vines,
- the olive trees fail,
- the fields are barren,
- the flocks have gone,

"yet will I rejoice in the Lord. I will joy in the God of my salvation. The Lord God is my strength. He makes my feet like hinds' feet. He makes me to tread upon the high places."

And as we rejoice in God and fix our hearts on his Son Jesus, and on nothing else, we suddenly discover that we've come out into a broad place...the valley is past... the vision is fulfilled. And the life of God begins to pour forth from us for others as never before.

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