

God's Word & Our Affliction

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[0:00] Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

Thank you.

[2:30] He brings about challenge in our life. So this morning, whether you're a Christian or not a Christian, you've got to know that you're going to face hardship.

You're going to face challenges. It's what Psalm 119 calls afflictions. So let me ask you a question out of the gate here.

What do you do when life gets hard? When things, when the heat gets turned up by God, what do you do? What do you do when you don't get what you want?

What happens inside of you? What happens inside of you? When you feel desperate? When you feel trapped? When you feel cornered? When you feel out of control?

What do you do? Do you give up? Do you give up? Gloss over and check out? Do you get mad, take charge and fight back? Are you looking for someone or something to blame?

[3:33] Do you reach for the closest, cheapest pleasure to dull the hardship? To forget about the hardship? Whether you're a Christian or not a Christian, we will all be afflicted with hardship.

To be human on this side of heaven is to experience affliction. Affliction is a required class in God's school that everyone goes through.

As Christians, when the heat of hardship gets turned up, we turn to and trust in God's word.

When God turns up the heat, we turn to his word. In fact, this morning what you're going to see is, God turns up the heat so that we would turn to his word and trust in his goodness.

God uses affliction for our good. And this morning, I want you to see that by two main points out of Psalm 119.

[4:44] It's a bit of a survey of Psalm 119. The first point is this, God's word on affliction. And the second point is, God's word in affliction.

What does God's word have to say about affliction? And how does God's word function in affliction? Anybody facing hardship? God wants to address your heart this morning.

When God turns up the heat, we turn to his word. Point number one, God's word on affliction. If you would open up your Bibles to Psalm 119, I'm going to read seven verses.

Now, these seven verses out of Psalm 119 all have the word affliction in it. And so this is all of what Psalm 119 has to say. And it says some very important things about affliction.

So Psalm 119 verse 50 says this. This is my comfort in my affliction. That your promise gives me life.

[5:50] Verse 67. Before I was afflicted, I went astray. But now I keep your word. Verse 71. It is good for me that I was afflicted.

That I might learn your statutes. Verse 75. I know, O Lord, that your rules are righteous in that in faithfulness you have afflicted me.

Verse 92. If your law had not been my delight, I would have perished in my affliction. Verse 107.

I am severely afflicted. Give me life, O Lord, according to your word. And then Psalm 119, 153.

Look on my affliction and deliver me.

For I do not forget your law. Psalm 119 has some things to say about affliction. Wouldn't you agree?
So what does the psalmist mean by affliction?

[6:46] Well, what he's talking about is he's talking about hardship. Trials. Suffering. What's interesting is that the same Hebrew word translated affliction.

And Psalm 119 is translated in other places as poor. So flip back to Psalm 86, verse 1. David writes, Incline your ear, O Lord, and answer me. For I am poor and needy. For I am afflicted and needy.

I'm suffering hardship and needy. So what this is getting at is this. Affliction, in Psalm 119, is a kind of being in want.

Lacking something. Lacking fullness. Lacking completion. Experiencing hardship and pain. Lacking shalom. Lacking peace.

[7:46] It's a kind of poverty. And what we see in our Bibles throughout it and what our experience tells us is that there are different kinds of poverty. Different kinds of affliction.

Different kinds of trials. There's the easy and quick trials. And then there's the hard and long trials. And then there's everything in between. This morning, I'm going to be talking about hardship, affliction in general.

In a couple weeks, Samir is going to come back up here and preach on a specific kind of affliction. Unique to Christians. It's called persecution. It's called suffering for Jesus. I'm not going to address that this morning.

What I'm going to be addressing is kind of the general hardships of life that we all face. Affliction in God's school is not an elective.

It's a required class. That's implied in Psalm 119. But it's made explicit in a passage like James 1.2. James says, Consider it all joy when you meet trials of various kinds.

[8:55] In God's school, affliction is a required subject matter that's taught in a variety of classrooms. I'm guessing you're in the classroom of affliction right now.

At least one of them. Let me list some out. Maybe you can identify with this. There's the classroom of societal hardship. Maybe you've done time.

Maybe you're on a list. Maybe you're homeless. You feel as though you've been pushed to the fringes of society. Maybe you feel like you're living in the shadows. That's a hard place to be. That's an affliction. That's a difficulty. Maybe it's the classroom of financial hardship. Maybe you have a bad credit score. Maybe you've racked up medical debt because there was no way else to pay for it and needed care.

Maybe you've been sued. Maybe you had to declare bankruptcy. Maybe it's every month you fall deeper, deeper into debt. Maybe you're just overextended and vulnerable. Maybe it's just every month goes by and the ends don't meet.

[10:02] That's a hard place to be. There's some suffering there. There's some difficulty there. Maybe you're in the classroom of vocational hardship. Maybe your boss is demanding.

Maybe your boss is demoralizing. Maybe the problem is you don't have a boss because you're unemployed or you're underemployed. And maybe you're underemployed or unemployed because you're overqualified or underqualified.

Maybe your skills are out of date. Maybe you feel like you're out of date. Maybe you feel adrift in your job. Maybe you feel trapped in your job. It can raise all sorts of questions, can't it?

What's my worth? That's a hard place to be. There's some affliction there. There's some hardship there. And then, of course, there's the classroom of relational hardship.

Strained friendships because of misunderstanding. Understandings, strained friendships because of sinning against one another. If you're a mom or dad of an infant or toddler, you're living a life of affliction.

[11:10] Constantly on, sleep deprived, oftentimes isolated. You ask yourself the questions, how many times do I have to say no to this child? Does this child have a hearing problem? Maybe you're a parent of a grown child, but a wayward child.

Maybe throughout the day you're asking, you're wondering, where's my child now? What are they doing? I wish they would call me. That's a hard place to be. Maybe your marriage is experiencing strain and difficulty.

Maybe there was a breaking of trust in the past. And over time, walls have been built up in between you. And now you find yourself, after years, distant from one another.

Hard place to be. Maybe you're single. Maybe you were divorced without biblical grounds. And now you don't have the freedom to remarry. That's a hard place to be.

Or maybe you are free to remarry, but there are no prospects out there. It was God who said, it's not good for man to be alone. You're experiencing a not good.

[12:20] That's a tough place to be. When you have someone in your life that's dying. Or someone who's recently died.

That's a hard place to be. There's some difficulty there. There's physical hardships. That's a tough class. I was thinking about you all this past week.

And I was just trying to list out some of the physical hardships that we're dealing with as a church. Here's a list. We've got multiple types of cancers. Arthritis.

Multiple sclerosis. Parkinson's. Diabetes. Some of us have pinched nerves. Some of us have wrenched backs. Some of us have torn rotator cuffs. Varying degrees of blindness.

Mental illness. Body parts that aren't doing what they're supposed to be doing. We're experiencing the outer man wasting away, aren't we? As long as you're in that tent on this side of heaven, you're going to have hardship with your body.

[13:19] It's going to be difficult. It's a classroom. Spiritual hardship. Tough class here. Because you don't think God can forgive you for something.

You don't think God can forgive you for your infidelity. Or maybe that you had an abortion. Or you had someone have an abortion. You don't think God can forgive you for that.

Skimming from your employer. Lying. Feasting on pornography. Stealing. For some reason, you don't think God likes you. That's not what the gospel says.

God in the gospel makes forgiveness available to all. We're all experiencing some kind of affliction, aren't we?

Some kind of hardship. It's not if, but when. And it's just not a one-time when. It's when's the next one.

[14:20] I was thinking about asking for a show of hands as I walked through those classrooms of affliction. And my guess is everybody would be able to raise their hands at least one of them. Probably two of them.

Maybe three of them. How about all of them? All of us can experience. You know what that means? Affliction is common among us.

We're all experiencing it to some degree or another. God's school of affliction makes us desperate. Would you look at Psalm 119, 153?

Look on my affliction and deliver me. Look on my affliction and deliver me. For I do not forget your law.

Affliction makes you desperate. I know you've tasted that. I know you know what desperation is. Overwhelmed. Trapped.

[15:25] Backed into a corner. Isolated. Powerless. Helpless. Hopeless. Don't know when this is going to end. Desperation. The desperate place is a very uncomfortable place to be.

Isn't it? I experienced a really hard time three years ago. I couldn't get out of it. I was trying everything I could do to get out of the hard place.

But I was surrounded. And God used it to bring me to an end to myself. It was very revealing. It revealed.

God was revealing to me through this hard time. What was at work in my heart. You see when you are in a desperate place. When you are under the pressure of affliction.

What's on the inside comes out. This past week. I was in my kitchen. And I was by myself. In this jumbo fly.

[16:27] Just cruised on by. I knew it was coming around again. So I grabbed the closest weapon I could find. A Better Homes and Gardens

magazine.

I wasn't reading it. I picked it up as a weapon. And that jumbo fly came around again. And I reached back. And I swatted that fly.

I honestly thought. That was great follow through self-hiding. I whacked that thing. And it flew across the kitchen.

Hit the cabinet. Hit the wall. And fell down. I grabbed a napkin. And I pounced on that thing. And you know what I did? I popped it. You know what I'm talking about?

Pressure. You know why I'm telling you this? When you're experiencing pressure. What's on the inside comes out. What's on the inside comes out.

[17:37] Have you ever been under pressure? And you start asking questions like this? Where are you God? Why are you doing this to me? When's it going to end?

Anybody been there? The prophet Habakkuk was there. Habakkuk won. He was experiencing pressure. The Chaldeans have come down. They're starting to rock Judah's world.

And he's saying, God, where are you? Why are you letting them do this to us? Why? Affliction makes you desperate.

It reveals your heart. And that's exactly what God is going for. You see, affliction is a very effective tool in God's sovereign, faithful hand.

He doesn't use affliction like a better homes and garden magazine that's rolled up trying to swatch you because he's looking to beat you. Affliction in God's sovereign, faithful hand is a good thing.

[18:41] Look at Psalm 119, verse 75. I know, O Lord, that your rules are righteous and that in faithfulness you have afflicted me.

The key word there is faithfulness. God in his faithfulness afflicts those who are his own for our good.

God's school of affliction is God's school of faithfulness. He makes us desperate for a reason. To expose us in order to transform us.

He wants all of your heart to be exclusively devoted to him. And he is willing to afflict you in order to refine your heart. He exposes our heart because he's being faithful to us.

It's heat. He turns up the heat on us to expose us. To reveal our hearts so that he can attend to our hearts.

[19:49] The great preacher C.H. Spurgeon said this about heat. Speaking of the heat of the sun. The heat that melts the wax hardens the clay.

And so God's affliction of people will either humble them or harden them. God uses affliction to expose people's hearts.

Affliction not only exposes our hearts, but exposes God's faithfulness to his own. It was William Kuyper who was a member of John Newton's church.

He was a desperate, depressed poet. And he wrote this line. Behind a frowning providence is the smiling face of God.

Behind affliction is a faithful God who loves you. He's seeking to expose your heart. To want to get something done. To transform you over time.

[20:58] Look at Psalm 119 verse 67. There's this before and after. Before I was afflicted, I went astray.

But now I keep your word. You see what happened right there? Before I was going astray, your affliction attended my heart.

It changed me. I responded in faith and now I walk according to your ways. And so verse 67 is a corrective discipline of God. But God's not always seeking to get us in terms of his discipline.

Sometimes he disciplines us because just he loves us. We're not doing anything wrong. Think of Job. God is seeking to conform us to the image of his beloved son.

And he's willing to use affliction and hardship to that end. And so for Christians, for those of us who are in Christ, we can be confident of this.

[22:01] Affliction is always for our good. Always for our good. Look at Psalm 119 verse 71. This is an amazing statement.

It is good for me that I was afflicted. It is good for me that I was afflicted that I might learn your statutes. It is good for me that I was afflicted.

Remember Romans 8.28. God works all things out for the good of those who love God and been called according to his purpose. He's in it for our good.

He's in it for our good. What is that good? Romans 8.29. We were predestined to be conformed to the image of Jesus Christ, his son. He's conforming us to that.

James 1.2-4. Consider it all joys whenever you face trials of many different kinds because they produce steadfastness in you.

[23:00] That's good in God's economy of things. Do you remember Joseph? Genesis chapter 50. His brothers come up to him and say, hey, what are you going to do to us? Joseph says in verse 20, What you meant for evil for me, God meant for good.

God uses affliction for our good. The affliction that you're experiencing right now, whatever classroom that you're in, it's not random.

God in his faithfulness is working in and through your affliction for your good. He has turned up the heat in order to turn you to his word.

Are you turning to his word? Let's see how God's word functions when the heat's on. So we've looked at what does God's word say about affliction.

Now let's see what God's word says in affliction. There's three things I want you to see here. God's word comforts us in our affliction. God's word gives us life in our affliction.

[24:15] And God's word is our delight in our affliction. God's word comforts us. Look back to Psalm 119 verse 50. We read this.

This is my comfort in my affliction. That your promise gives me life. This is my comfort in my affliction. That your promise gives me life.

What was the psalmist's comfort in the midst of his affliction? God's promises was his comfort.

Now Psalm 119 verse 50 doesn't tell us specific promises of God. So let me just do that right now.

Three promises of God that will comfort you in the midst of your affliction.

Ready? God is sovereign. He exercises his power over all creation. The book of Daniel teaches that God rules over the kingdom of men.

[25:13] God rules over all of creation. Nothing happens in all of creation outside of God's sovereign reign. Nothing takes God by surprise. Nothing at all. In fact, God is sovereignly orchestrating each of our lives according to his grand and glorious plan.

God has a plan for you. You're in his plan. And your afflictions are a part of his plan.

God is seeking to do something good in your life through your hardship that he's brought on you.

God is sovereign over our affliction.

Are you anxious about what you're going to eat? Are you anxious about what you're going to wear? Look to Matthew chapter 6. Jesus speaks specifically. Makes a connection between God's sovereignty and meeting every need that we have.

God is sovereign over our afflictions. God is also good. Let God's sovereignty comfort you. Let God's goodness comfort you as well.

[26:26] Psalm 119 verse 67 and 68. Before I was afflicted. I went astray. But now I keep your word. You are good and do good. 71. It is good for me that I was afflicted.

Even in the hardness of affliction. God exercises his sovereignty for our good. It's as though God is saying to us this morning.

Hey, I promise not only am I sovereign. But I'm exercising my sovereignty for your good. Do you believe that God has your greatest good in mind as you experience the hardships you're facing?

That God is good for you. That God is sovereign. He loves you. He gave his only son for you. And if he's willing to give his son for you.

How much also along with him, Jesus, will he give you everything you need? God has good for you. Now, I realize that some of us are in situations that we don't see the good.

[27:43] Not right now. We're in a hard place. We can't see around the corner. It's tough. So what I want to point you to is this.

Two things. God is good. You don't need to know what's going to happen in your circumstances to believe that God is good. He has revealed that.

And secondly, you can be assured of this. Goodness is coming. Do you know why? Jesus is coming back. And when he comes back, he's going to make all wrongs right.

We who are his are going to experience an eternity of goodness in God's presence. He's going to make all things right. Let God's goodness comfort you.

He's sovereign. He's good. And he is present. God is present. It's promise. Let me read you some. Hebrews 13.5.

[28:46] I will never leave you nor forsake you. I will never leave you in your sufferings nor forsake you in your sufferings. It's promise. Fear not for I am with you.

Be not dismayed for I'm your God. Isaiah 41.10. I'm with you. Even in the midst of your hardship. Psalm 23.4. Even though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, there's some hardship. I will fear no evil for you are with me. Psalm 16.8 is one of my favorite verses in the scriptures. I probably quote it to myself and other people 20 times a week. I have set the Lord always before me. Because he is at my right hand.

He's with me. I will not be shaken. I will not be shaken by these hardships. Because God is with me. Brothers and sisters, God promises us.

[29:47] I will always be with you. When times are good, when times are hard. We're just called to trust him. To believe his word.

To trust that he's sovereign. That he's good. That he's here. That he's present. It comforts us even in affliction. So, are you feeling out of control?

Call to mind that God is sovereign over all things. Are you feeling like your circumstances are for evil? Call to mind that God is good. And is working all things out for your good.

If you are feeling as though that you are alone in your hardship. Call to mind you're not alone. God is with you. And brothers and sisters, when we see other people going through hardship.

We can speak these things to them. It will help them. God's word comforts us. In affliction. His promises do our hearts good.

[30:50] But God's word also gives us life in affliction. So, Psalm 119.50 says this. This is my comfort in my affliction. That your promise gives me life.

Look at verse 107. I am severely afflicted. Give me life, O Lord, according to your word. Has anybody been on an airplane? Raise your hand. Has anybody been?

Remember the pre-flight deal? Flight attendants talking at the front of the plane. They're saying, welcome. Thank you so much for flying Christ the King Airways. Glad you are with us. If we get up to 32,000 feet and there's a sudden loss of cabin pressure.

There will be oxygen masks that drop from the bins above your head. And so, would you please put the oxygen mask above your face? And if you're traveling with a small companion, would you put then the oxygen mask over their face?

Do you know what I'm talking about? Our trials, our hardships, our afflictions, it's like a sudden loss of cabin pressure. Things can go crazy all quick, can't they?

[31:54] Things start flying around. God's word is the O2 mask. It's life for us. It's vitality for us.

It helps us keep our sanity in the face of hardship. We're able to endure. Press through difficulties. If you want a picture of that, turn to Jeremiah chapter 17, 5 through 8.

It doesn't use an oxygen mask. It uses a different picture. But you'll get the point. When the heat is on, not only do we survive, but we thrive.

Because God's word is our life in the midst of affliction. Jesus lived this out day after day. He suffered hardship all throughout his 33 years of living.

He walked this out. He trusted God's word over and over and over again. So God's word is our comfort in affliction.

[33:00] God's word is our life in our affliction. And God's word is our delight in our affliction. Psalm 119 verse 92 reads this. If your law had not been my delight, I would have perished in my affliction.

There's a bit of caution here, isn't there? The psalmist is very aware that if God's word had not been on his heart, he would have been swept away by his hardship.

He would have been overwhelmed. He would have perished in his affliction. We don't have to do that.

We can take delight in the midst of our affliction by trusting in God's word. We know that God has good for us in the midst of our afflictions.

We know that God is sovereign. We know that God is good and loving. We know that God is present with us. And that confidence is a source of joy when we have the heat being turned up, when we have the pressure coming down.

[34:10] Those promises not only give us life, but they give us joy in the midst of affliction. That's why James can say, hey, whenever you face trials of various kinds, consider it all joy.

Because you know the testing of your faith is going to develop steadfastness. It's for your good. God's growing you. It's for your good. We value something greater than comfort.

To become more like Jesus. And we realize that affliction is necessary to that. So we can say along with James, we consider it all joy when we face afflictions of various kinds.

The prophet Habakkuk wrapped up the book of Habakkuk with some amazing words. He went from being a complaining prophet to a rejoicing prophet in chapter 3.

And he reflected on God's deliverance of his people. And it resulted in him being joyful for his salvation. It's very instructive for us who are facing afflictions.

[35:20] We delight in God's word. We delight in our salvation. And it becomes a source of joy in the midst of hardship. When God turns up the heat, He does so in order to make us desperate.

So that we would turn to and trust in God's word. God has good for us through afflictions. So you know what the call is this morning? We, when affliction comes, We take hold of God's word.

And we press into affliction. And through affliction, With hearts full of faith, That God is good in the midst of affliction.

So here's how we're going to close this morning. The worship team is going to come up. And as they're coming up, I'm going to encourage you, Just take a moment in the quietness of your heart. To cry out to God in your affliction. Ask Him to help you to trust His promises. So that you could be comforted.

[36:27] And strengthened. And experience joy in the face of hardship. And after we sing, Jeff Slater is going to come up and close. I'm going to ask the elders, Samir, Daniel, Jeff.

We're just going to be up here in front. And if you would like us to pray with you In the midst of your afflictions, We would love to do that. So now let's pray. Well, let's pray in our pews, And then we'll sing.

Thank you. So agora let's pray. Well, let's pray. And we'll sing. Bye bye.