

The Delighted Heart
Psalm 119:65-72

Intro: As we come to the ninth stanza of Psalm 119, the *teth stanza*, we are faced with the age-old issue of suffering. It seems like we just cannot get away from suffering . . . and we can't. It is part of life in a broken world but the psalmist helps us see it is not out of God's control.

The problem of evil and suffering is a hard one for Christians. The common argument is that if God were good then He would make His creatures happy by removing all suffering and evil they experience. Since God does not do that then He must not be powerful enough to remove all suffering. Therefore, God is not good or powerful or both. This objection to evil and suffering within the Christian faith is based on the assumption that our ultimate good in life is to be happy and never suffer. The argument is actually a superficial one but it is inescapable argument for Christians because there is no one on earth who does not suffer or experience evil at some point in their lives.

The psalmist perspective on suffering in the *teth* stanza almost makes us do a double take. He is grateful to God for his suffering because it caused him to return to God and love His word.

Here is what to keep in mind as we look at vv. 65-72. These verses are not an apologetic for suffering but he does not shy away from suffer. Nor does he apologize for God allowing suffering. The psalmist actually sees God's divine hand in his affliction.

The psalmist's prayer teaches us that God's design for affliction, suffering and hardships are good. What the psalmist has to say about affliction, suffering and hardship is counter intuitive to how the world thinks about evil and pain. He is teaching us that God has a design for affliction in our lives and it ultimately leads us to God and His word. His gratitude for his suffering challenges us to not run from suffering but to learn to lean into the hand of our God who is doing good to us in it. **Here is his main point:** God ordains afflictions in your life to train your heart to delight in God and His word.

- I. God designs suffering for the good of His people (vv. 65-68)
- II. God designs suffering to test the hearts of His people (vv. 69-70)
- III. God designs suffering to teach His people what is truly valuable (vv. 71-72)

Transition: Let's go ahead and dig into our text and see what God is teaching us about Himself and His designs for pain and suffering in our lives.

I. God designs suffering for the good of His people (vv. 65-68)

Like I said, vv. 65-72 are not an apologetic for suffering. Neither are they a comprehensive dissertation on the issue of suffering but they do call us to examine our hearts as we endure suffering. Poetically they extol the virtues of God in our suffering.

Listen to vv. 65-68 one more time. There are two things we need to see in these verses that will help us understand that God designs suffering for the good of His people.

First we need to understand that God's design in our suffering is to show us His goodness. In vv. 65-68, in these four verses, the psalmist uses the Hebrew word for *good* four times. He says: *God had dealt well with him, that God's judgments were good, God was good and that what he did was good.* His point is that God is good, His word is good, and all His designs for His life even in affliction were good. While the psalmist emphasizes the virtues of suffering in vv. 65-72 the word most often repeated in this stanza is the Hebrew word for *good*. *The psalmist surrounds the experience of affliction with the goodness of God in this poetic*

stanza. Even the structure of the psalm is teaching us how God deals with His people in suffering. He surrounds us with His goodness. The question is do we see it?

In addition to God's goodness in our suffering, we also see God's design of affliction was good. The Hebrew word for *dealt* means *to make* or *to manufacture*. In other words, the psalmist is saying that God designed specific circumstances to lead him back to God, to God's word, and to grow his faith. The psalmist had drifted from God and God used his afflictions to bring him back. God is our greatest good and who we are created to have fellowship with and when we leave Him we leave what is best for us.

As I prepared this message, I read where a popular Christian author had said, "I have never read a poem extolling the virtues of pain . . ."² I am guessing he had never read **Psalm 119:65-72** for the psalmist extols God's good design in his suffering. This author does go on to say that God does bring good out of our pain and suffering but to say he has never read a poem extolling suffering means he missed these verses in **Psalm 119**. Never the less, the perspective that pain and suffering have no virtue is all too common in contemporary western Christianity. Often people believe God has made a mistake when affliction and hardships come into their lives instead of seeing them as God's good design for their lives. This is the reason we hear the argument I introduced at the beginning of the sermon: either God is not good or He is not all-powerful or He is neither good nor all-powerful.

We need to believe what v. 68 says, "God is good and He does good." This verse made me think about the exercise preachers have done with congregations during a sermon. The preacher will say, "God is good" and the people respond: "all the time." Then he will say, "All the time" and the people respond: "God is good." Sometimes we just need the simple messages to get through to us because v. 68 says, "God is good" and we need to respond: "all the time." This exercise might seem trite when the heat of affliction has been turned up. Yes we can lament our suffering but we must also be able to confess that God is good when we are in the heart of affliction.

Evil and suffering are like smoke in our eyes that keeps us from seeing the goodness of God. When our eyes are burning with the pain of affliction we are weakened and blinded and we cry out to God—"Why?" **Why** has this affliction come at this time? **Why** have the insolent smeared me with lies? **Why** do they prosper and I am suffering? **Why** can't I find a job? **Why** do I continue to struggle with the same old sin? **Why** am I trapped in this awful marriage? **Why** can't I find someone to date and then get married? **Why** does my mom, dad, husband, wife or child have cancer? **Why** can't we have children? **Why** do I have no friends? **Why** am I lonely? **Why** does no one love me? **Why** is nothing working in my life? On and on the questions are asked of God. It is okay to ask God *why*.

These are the kinds of laments that are good because we should be able to be honest with God about how we feel. We should be able to pour out our hearts to God. However, we must not allow them to cloud God goodness or His good purposes in our suffering. In these moments we need to be reminded that God does not delight in our pain and suffering. He is not celebrating that we are hurting. He hurts with us. He is near the broken hearted Scripture says.

At this point we should ask the question: how do we learn to see God is good in our suffering? Verse 66 helps us here. Verse 66 says, "Teach me good judgment and knowledge, for I believe in your commandments." The Hebrew word for *judgment* in v. 66 literally means *taste*. **Verse 66** reminds us of **Psalm 34:8**, "Oh, taste and see that the LORD is good! Blessed is the man who takes refuge in him!"

² Philip Yancey quoted by Nancy Guthrie, *Be Still, My Soul: Embracing God's Purpose and Provision in Suffering*, 23. Yancey's original quote was from a devotion written in *Open Windows* in 1982. Yancey goes on to challenge the negative assumption that Christians have about pain and suffering. His conclusion is that God did not make a mistake but has given you a gift.

The point is, we must have our taste buds trained to interpret life so that we are able to see God's goodness even when the smoke of affliction has blinded our eyes. The last part of **v. 66** says *for I believe in your commandments*. It is his faith in God that helps him taste and see the goodness of God through the word of God even when the heat in the furnace of suffering has been turned up.

The psalmist goes on to say in v. 67, "*Before I was afflicted I went astray but now I keep your word.*" Affliction coupled with the word of God trained the psalmist in righteousness. He repented and returned to God and his faith was strengthened.

Affliction alone does not train us in righteousness. Suffering must find its grounding in the word of God to train us. Paul told Timothy in **2 Timothy 3:16**, "*All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness.*" The goal is to be trained in righteousness by the word of God so that we grow in holiness and therefore grow in depth of relationship with God.

God will use our affliction to awaken our taste buds for His word. He will use it to strengthen our faith and makes us more holy. To interpret suffering through the lens of the goodness of God is food for the mature says **Hebrews 5:14**, "*But solid food is for the mature, for those who have their powers of discernment trained by constant practice to distinguish good from evil.*"

Transition: Let's keep going. Look at **vv. 69-70**.

II. God designs suffering to test the hearts of His people (vv. 69-70)

God was not only training but He was also testing the heart of the psalmist. God was using the insolent to test the psalmist's heart. The psalmist said the *insolent had smeared him with lies*. The affliction he endured were the lies of the insolent. He was being slandered and not only privately but publically. Those who were lying about him were not in the least bit convicted that they were sinning. They did not care they had sinned against God or him. Their hearts were *unfeeling* or dead to the conviction of their sin. They were calloused toward their sin.

On the other hand, when the psalmist *went astray* he did not feel the conviction of his sin either but when the affliction began it tenderized his heart. His afflictions awakened his conscience to his sin. It was painful for him for as he felt the blows as he felt the affliction he began to feel the conviction of his sin and he returned to God.

Application: The test of our hearts in **vv. 69-70** is to determine if your heart is dead to the conviction of your sin or does it delight in the word of God.

So let's think through these two verses. The fact is that none of us can escape being in the group with the *insolent*. At some point in time we have all been in that group whether intentionally or because we stumbled into sin. The question is is your heart dead to the conviction of God for your sin or is it sensitive to sin?

The Apostle Paul reminds us in Ephesians 2:1-3 that we were all dead in our sin, "*And you were dead in the trespasses and sins² in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience—³ among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.*"

Friend if you are here and you do not sense the conviction of God in your heart toward your sin then your heart is dead and you are a child of wrath. The wrath of God is upon you and you need to cry out to Jesus to save you from the wrath to come. If you die in this state of being separated from God by your sin then you will spend eternity in Hell under the wrath of God. Call out to God to change your heart and make your heart alive to Him.

On the cross Christ died for the insolent by taking their place. It was the lies of the insolent that sent Him to the cross. Jesus knows what it feels like to be lied about and have His reputation trashed. The lies about Him cost Him His life but it was the design of God that sent Him to the cross to pay for your sin. You see Jesus delighted in God and delighted to obey God so that you may have a way to escape the wrath to come by trusting in His death on the cross for you. As your substitute He paid for your sin. He was buried and rose from the dead on the third day and is alive in Heaven. If you will repent of your sin He will save you and give you a home in heaven.

Brother and sister in Christ, the question is simple: When the evil and suffering come into your life, do you flee to the word of God for hope, help and refuge in God? Can you say what the psalmist says in **vv. 71-72**? This leads us to the last two verses for application.

III. God designs suffering to teach His people what is truly valuable (vv. 71-72)

These verses really speak for themselves. I am not sure what kinds of trials, afflictions and suffering you have gone through but we have all gone through them and will continue to go through them. The world is broken and sin reigns but God has good purposes. He works our afflictions for our good and His glory (which is also for our good).

When we think about our afflictions, the psalmist is not saying it is okay for the wicked to sin against us. He is not giving the wicked a pass on sin. He is, however, helping us to interpret life in light of our afflictions.

You see we live in a culture that loves to play the victim card. I am not saying there are no victims, however, if that is the only way you interpret life then you will be stuck there. There is more to life than being a victim. That is not our identity. God has greater purposes than for us to see ourselves as victims.

Romans 8:28-30 reminds us, *"And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose. ²⁹ For those whom he foreknew he also predestined to be conformed to the image of his Son, in order that he might be the firstborn among many brothers. ³⁰ And those whom he predestined he also called, and those whom he called he also justified, and those whom he justified he also glorified."* When you begin to interpret your afflictions through this lens then you begin to understand suffering from Heaven's vantage point. You have a cosmic understanding of affliction, one that is out of this world and resides in another. God has good purposes for our afflictions. God has called us to be more than victims of affliction.

The question is how do you interpret your afflictions? Can you see God's good purposes in them? Does it cause you to press into God's word and trust Christ? As you think about your affliction or look back on your afflictions, can you say with the psalmist: *it was good for me that I was afflicted?*

Let me also say that there is no time line on learning how to interpret our afflictions. Do not hear me say that you must immediately come to the psalmist's conclusion. You might be a mature enough Christian to quickly interpret life through this lens. If this is you then praise God but for most of us we are slow learners.

Our aim in life should be grow in our faith so that God and His word become more precious to us than any treasure on earth. Even if you lose everything, if you have Jesus you have it all.

You see on the day of your death it will not matter what is in your bank account. Money is useless on the day of death. Affliction that has led us to the cross to trust in Christ is worth more than all the riches in the world.

If you go through horrendous suffering and you find Christ through it then you are most blessed. He is worth it all. It is better to have 80 years of suffering and find Jesus and be in eternity with Him than to have a life of ease and spend eternity in Hell separated from God.

Conclusion

As we come to the end of this stanza the question is are you able to interpret the afflictions of life through the lens Psalm 119:65-72? Can you say with the psalmist and with **Romans 8:28** God has called me to Himself and the suffering I am going through has come from Him and He is good and working all things together for my good?

Friends we are not stoics in our suffering. We don't bury our emotions. We should never deny when we are sad or grieving or weary from the affliction or angry or confused. We take all of our sorrows to Christ, *the Man of Sorrows* who bore our sins to the cross. Then we understand what Charles Spurgeon said, "*The commands of God are best read with eyes wet with tears.*"

In time we learn to see the afflictions of God from the perspective of the gospel. Over time the gospel shapes us we are able to say with the psalmist, *it was good that I was afflicted. Lord You are good and You do good.*

Yet what do we do when we are in the middle of furnace of affliction? What do we hold on to when the smoke of suffering has our eyes blinded? I am not trying to be funny here but the old advice for when a person is on fire is good: *Stop, drop and roll.* We should stop right where we are in life, drop to our knees and roll the burden off on to Jesus, who is the yes to all of God's promises. Jesus is the Man of Sorrows who bore the weight of the sorrows of the world. He has big shoulders and has carried our sins to the cross and paid for them. On the cross He paid our debt and purchased grace to freely give to His people. He will take from us the weight of the affliction from so you can bear up under it. He does this because He loves you.