

THE VICTORY LIFE

in

PSALM 119

by

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CHAPTER NINE

ADVANCEMENT THROUGH ADVERSITY

TETH

**“Thou hast dealt well with thy servant, O LORD, according unto thy word.
Teach me good judgment and knowledge: for I have believed thy commandments.
Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept thy word.
Thou art good, and doest good; teach me thy statutes.**

**The proud have forged a lie against me: but I will keep thy precepts with my whole heart.
Their heart is as fat as grease; but I delight in thy law.
It is good for me that I have been afflicted; that I might learn thy statutes.
The law of thy mouth is better unto me than thousands of gold and silver”**
(Psalms 119:65-72)

”It is good for me that I have been afflicted” (Psalm 119:71).

WITH THE PROPER PERSPECTIVE, life has but one pattern. It has but one outlook. It keeps **“looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith.”** As with the Greeks of old, it is constant in its appeal, **“Sir, we would see Jesus.”**

To see Jesus is a revolutionary experience. One can never be the same again.

- Stephen sank into martyrdom with the fragrance of forgiveness on his lips when he saw Jesus at the right hand of God.
- Saul of Tarsus unhesitatingly renounced both pedigree and purpose when he saw the Saviour.
- Isaiah burst into violent confessions of uncleanness when he saw the Lord high and lifted up. Then he volunteered his life.
- Ephraim discarded his idols with the declaration, **“I have heard him, and observed him.”**
- Job emerges from his crucible of trial, triumphant and hopeful, saying, **“I have heard of thee by the hearing of the ear; but now mine eye seeth thee.”**

The psalmist, we notice, has caught a similar vision. We would expect his manner of life to be different henceforth. At the moment, we are impressed with his finer discernment and willing confession. Continuing his inventory of spiritual assets, he can now set down in the credit column things which once he considered liabilities. He now marks off as loss things which once he counted gain. Here is one of his most revealing entries:

“It is good for me that I have been afflicted” (v. 71).

But what was the affliction? We do not know. Nor does it matter. Like Paul, he will rather glory in his infirmity. And he gives a concrete reason as to why it was good for him:

“That I might learn thy statutes” (v. 71), is his forthright explanation.

The loss of a function or a privilege in many a case has proved to be a boon to spiritual development.

With Moses, it was a voluntary choice. He chose **“rather to suffer affliction with the people of God, than to enjoy the pleasures of sin for a season.”**

Admittedly, this is a rare case. Few choose to suffer. Often, however, a trial may prove to be the chastening rod divinely exercised — a blessing in disguise. **“Behold, I have refined thee, but not with silver; I have chosen thee in the furnace of affliction.”** And note well the explanation which follows at once: **“For mine own sake, even for mine own sake, will I do it.”**

Perhaps this is one reason we are not to **“think it strange concerning the fiery trial.”** But rather rejoice, knowing that we are partakers of Christ’s sufferings. Oh, for that faith which rests every circumstance and every ordeal with the One who is touched with a feeling of our infirmities.

Have you ever witnessed mass inoculations among children? Some take it gracefully, like little soldiers. Others raise violent objection. Some sweet little faces remain calm and innocent, others are strained with fright. As the kindly physician explains to the child that the piercing needle will prick but slightly, that it will make him stronger and healthier, even so the Great Physician says, through His servant, **“For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory.”**

To applaud the psalmist for turning a handicap into a victory is quite beside the point. We might just as well sing the praises of General Moses for pushing back the water of the Red Sea and leading his armies ingeniously to victory against preponderant odds.

Take a look at his former way of life. Listen to his own honest confession:

“Before I was afflicted, I went astray” (v. 67).

Should we contradict him? Are we disposed to argue the matter? We cannot gainsay personal testimony.

Suppose the affliction, whatever its character, had not been imposed. Would he have continued in waywardness? Presumably, yes. Then the trial was after all a blessing. It arrested his wandering feet. It spared him more difficulty and loss than can be imagined. The lifeguard is never cruel in smiting the drowning victim whom he is rescuing. Surgery, though painful and inconvenient, is designed to bring health. The psalmist's affliction was a timely and necessary experience. We have his own word to support this thought.

The reason we hear his praise without complaint and his blessing without bitterness is due definitely to his present yielded spirit. Well does he remember how his troubled heart cried out in restlessness to God to **"deal bountifully"** (v. 17). But now his attitude is different, decidedly different. It is different because he is different. His outlook is different.

"Thou hast dealt well with thy servant" (v. 65), he now says in an about face.

A line from David's biography furnishes a parallel example: **"For by thee have I run through a troop; and by my God have I leaped over a wall."**

Running a gauntlet may be most exacting, but not so terrible when the One who is a present help in trouble is running by one's side. Having done with running the gauntlet of difficulty, David was confronted by a wall. He found himself out of the frying-pan and in the fire. But the One who was with him in the gauntlet is with him at the wall. By divine assistance, he surmounts his towering problem.

On the victory side, he reflects, **"As for God, His way is perfect."** And by implication, **"I would not now have had it any other way."** If it is God's way, it must necessarily be the best way. If it is God's way, it is the only way. True dedication can own no other course.

One of our close friends is a good disciplinarian. She had spanked her little son quite impressively for some disobedience, then moved to another part of the home to resume her household duties.

"Mummy," she heard a little later in a not-too-normal voice.

"What is it?" she inquired with a degree of firmness.

With a new supply of tears forcing their way to the surface, but with a steadfast gaze toward his mother, the repentant little fellow said with quivering lips, "Mummy, you're wonderful!"

The psalmist is humble enough to admit that he, too, had been disciplined, for **"whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth, and scourgeth every son whom he receiveth."** He likewise is standing at the door, a door leading into a new course so full of happy expectation. And what is he saying? **"Thou art good, and doest good"** (v. 68).

Parental discipline is the tempering of childhood and youth to withstand the trials and turmoils of maturity.

The chastening of the Lord is the guardrail of protection against the disastrous chasms into which disobedience would catapult those who swerve from the faith. It is the hand of love which tenderly turns wandering feet back into the course of willing obedience. It is the shepherd's staff taken in hand for the good of the sheep.

“Teach me good judgment and knowledge” (v. 66), he asks of the Lord as he remembers how very poor his discernment had been.

Poor judgment can be treacherous in the extreme. But where is it more consequential than in the spiritual realm?

“So foolish was I, and ignorant; I was as a beast before thee,” David once confessed.

- This was the result of poor judgment.
- He was unconcerned about the Lord and His love because he chose the way of the foolish.
- He was unenlightened because he closed his eyes to the truth.
- He was ungrateful because he was unaware of the goodness of the Lord.

Better judgment soon remedied this unfavorable condition.

“The proud have forged a lie against me” (v. 69) is one of the newest discoveries of the psalmist as the enemy strikes at him relentlessly.

What should he do in such a case? Yield to a fitful display of temper? Strike back at once? Threaten the offender vociferously? Or rest the case with a convincing vindictive defense?

Now, we see why he needed good judgment and knowledge. He must know, as well as we, that it really does not matter what others may say or do. We have but One to please. He knows every detail of our lives. He is our Advocate, our Representative. The battle is not ours, but His.

We must observe, in passing, the description which the psalmist gives of those who sought his undoing. They were both proud and prosperous people. Those who are proud know little or nothing of the working of the Holy Spirit, nor can they understand the path of simplicity which the spiritually humble unhesitatingly follow. The proud cannot be content with a plain path. They covet the glittering tinsel of this world's allurements. They often think it a mark of intellectual inferiority to be humbly and earnestly dedicated to God.

“Their heart is as fat as grease” (v. 70), he adds.

In this rather uncommon terminology he means to convey, we think, the prosperous estate of his oppressors. They knew no want. Whatever their hearts desired, they had the wherewithal to gratify themselves. They lived in luxury. They went where they pleased. To prove that there is no jealousy or covetousness in his comment, he contentedly testifies, **“But I delight in thy law”** (v. 70).

And let no one question such deep-seated satisfaction. The Word of Truth can bring the richest conceivable pleasure into any life. It has the potential to “**thoroughly furnish**” the believing heart. We have yet to see what a tremendous contribution it can make to the life of this man. It brings to him the greatest amount of enjoyment and blessing.

Instead of being disturbed because of the attempts of the proud and prosperous to dislodge him from his testimony, he turns to Scripture and finds his delight in it.

“**The law of thy mouth is better unto me than thousands of gold and silver**” (v. 72), he assures the Lord.

As one grows in grace and in the knowledge of the Lord, there is proportionately an increase of appreciation. The Word of God takes on a new meaning.

In this narrative, the psalmist becomes increasingly lavish with his descriptive words. They reflect his feeling toward the Book of God.

This Book is priceless!

It is a mine of wealth incomputable, an ocean of wisdom unfathomable, and a sphere of wonder incomparable.

The life it gives, the light it sheds, the love it reveals — all challenge the heart with an overwhelming sense of blessedness.

It is the manna of Heaven; it is the water of life. Only the growing believer enjoys its pervasive refreshment and the practical potency of its living qualities.

Think of it — our friend was going astray until he was afflicted!

Blessed be that storm which turns a drifting bark into such a placid harbor. Affliction is worthwhile, even to be welcomed, if through it one is promoted in spiritual development to the point where the Lord becomes his sole desire, and God’s Word his chief delight.

While affliction, as in this case, has proved to be the means to such a happy estate, it is not the only means. It is better by far to obey His precepts — to walk in the light of His revealed will. If willing submission is hindered by an unwilling heart, then any permitted agent which can curb waywardness and encourage faith is to be considered a favor of God.

~ end of chapter 9 ~

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