

Affliction — Good Or Bad?

By Jim Golden

Why we seem to suffer affliction is partly a mystery. Jesus rejoiced over God revealing certain mysteries to his disciples because they were "babes" and hiding them from the "wise". Many of the mysteries that enshroud God's plans and purposes for a generation await a simple childlike people to unlock them. It's the "babes" that Jesus gave power to, over the enemy. Like never before we need power over the enemy. Jesus must have a Church that is truly fit for HIS use if he is to reach a lost and dying world, held captive by the deceptive power of Satan.

I want to take a moment at the outset of this writing to clarify one extremely important point and that would be the difference between affliction and sickness/disease. Today we see numbers of Christians suffering from cancer, diabetes and a host of other maladies. I do not believe in any way that God is glorified by our suffering these things. In fact, it is quite possible that the opposite is true. As one who has suffered from the effects of diabetes resulting in the amputation of half of my right foot and the big toe of my left, a quintuplet heart bypass and surgery to remove my gall bladder, I know somewhat of which I speak. Lately, I have been going through a personal crisis of faith and loosing quite a bit of sleep over it, trying to reconcile the goodness of our God with the events of my life.

Just the other night as I sat waiting on the Lord, mainly because I couldn't sleep, certain Scriptures came to my mind. *The thief comes only to kill, steal and destroy, but I have come that you might have life and have it abundantly.* I said to myself and the Lord, "This life that I am living is certainly not abundant." Then I recalled other Scriptures like John's inquiry in prison. *Are you the one we look for or is it another.* Jesus' reply was for John's disciples to go tell him how the blind received their sight, the deaf their hearing, the lame walked, the dead were raised and the Gospel was preached to the poor. One of the missions of Jesus was to redeem a misconception of his Father. To do this *he went about doing good and healing all that were oppressed of the devil, for God was with him!* He came to destroy the works of the devil.

As I continued in these thoughts, I went back to the words of Isaiah, how Jesus bore *our sickness and disease in his own body one the tree and by his stripes we were healed.* If he bore my sickness and disease in his own body how could me bearing my own sickness and disease in my body bring him glory? All one has to do is watch the movie the Passion by Mel Gibson to get a reminder of how brutal the beating was that Jesus took to secure our healing and I began to see how easily we can be duped by the deception of the devil into thinking that there is some value to our suffering sickness for his glory. I began to repent of a warped perception of our loving God and cry out for his forgiveness. As we will see, affliction is much different and should be distinguished from sickness and disease.

While the Word of God is perfect our interpretations often leave much to be desired. We may assume that most interpretation is on safe ground when it directs its reader to fix their gaze upon Jesus. The opposite is true when it causes us to turn our eyes from Jesus onto ourselves. That is not to say the we should never take a personal inventory, but morbid introspection does not benefit anyone.

One of the most subtle, and treacherous interpretations of God's Word suggests that we should develop "God-like" character. How can we develop what is already perfect

we should develop "Godly" character. How can we develop what is already perfect. We simply need to become partakers of his character through the indwelling Holy Spirit. This is not a new doctrine; in fact it predates Christianity, having its roots in Judaism. Mingled with the gospel of Jesus Christ it becomes an intoxicating, yet deadly potion, replacing God's righteousness with self-righteousness. Its greater danger lies in the distorted perspective of God it develops in its adherents. It portrays God as a stern and often unfeeling teacher. Never, through the words spoken, only through the subtle and haunting implications. He allows one trial after another to come upon us to somehow, through the affliction, make us better. Life seems to become one great exam that leads us "around the mountain" again and again, until we get it right. *We, not God, become the central theme of our existence.* Sometimes God redeems this understanding by allowing us to see what we are truly like. But he doesn't need to test us for the purpose of gaining knowledge about us. With the full knowledge of what we are and were he gave his life for us.

Our heavenly Father doesn't keep records of our failures to hold us back. It isn't our successful passing of one of his exams that moves us on to the next grade level. Jesus has already passed every exam that can be given. Jesus, not us, has already won the victory. Our task is to see through the trials that confront us into the riches of God's victory and provision.

In our desire to live lives that are problem free, many have assumed that a problem free life was a sign of God's blessing. I have come to believe that this is not true. Several years ago I heard a song that said, "... if I never had a problem I wouldn't know God could solve them..." If we didn't have to face the problems that exist in a fallen world we would pat ourselves on the back and take all the credit for our "care-free" existence. We would never know God or He would be all too easily forgotten.

The trials we encounter in this life give God the opportunity to reveal himself. I believe faith is simply spiritual vision. Faith not only allows us to see God, for who he truly is, but enables us to enter immediately, the shelter of his presence. Why we try to treat faith as some spiritual commodity is beyond me. We must remember that God is a Father. Unlike some earthly fathers he desires to be in a personal relationship with his children. Faith is a doorway into our loving heavenly Father's presence, which nothing can shut. So often, we try to use the "key" of faith to unlock the ministry doors of deliverance, healing, and evangelism. However, this key only fits the door to our Father's heart.

Smith Wigglesworth, a famous man of God, put it this way. Once he was asked to pray for a very wealthy and influential woman who was near to death. As he entered her home he felt the presence of Satan. When he went into the woman's room he found her surrounded by her servants. As Smith knelt at the foot of her bed the woman began to levitate above the bed. One of her servants asked Smith if he had the faith to deal with their master's (Satan) power. Smith's reply was humble and shocking. "No," he said, *"but I have faith to get into my Master's presence and there He will give me, everything I need to deal with your master!"*

"That's just fine and dandy Jim," you say. "Then why have trials at all?" James said that faith without works is dead. God will not allow our faith to remain in the realm of intellectual knowledge only. *"You believe in one God, you do well. The demons believe also and tremble!"* Trials and afflictions are opportunities for God to prove his powerful love and salvation to everyone. The convenient part about all this is, with an antagonist like Satan, God will never run out of opportunities, if only we will see through the eye of faith and hope.

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When David was a young Shepherd boy God allowed a lion and a bear to come into his life. I'm sure these encounters were not sought after experiences among the shepherding community. Nevertheless, they confronted David just as the "lions" and "bears" of our modern day confront us. They may dress in the clothing of homelessness or job layoff. Disguise themselves as a crippling injury or disease. But, they are not unlike the bear or lion of David's day. God is no less able or desirous of delivering us than he was David.

It was the lion and bear in David's life that prepared him for Goliath. Later when Saul pursued David, Ahimelech, the priest sought the Lord for him, gave him supplies and the sword of Goliath the Philistine. I believe when David looked at the sword he remembered the faithfulness of God and received the endurance he needed to hold out until God gave him the kingdom. God could have led David down a path with much less strife and tribulation, but God was preparing David to be King. To be an effective and benevolent King he had to know the power and love of God.

Ezekiel talks about a river coming out of the sanctuary and about wading in ankle deep then knee deep then up to the waist. As I thought of this I imagined how refreshing it is to wade in water. Then I envisioned myself going deeper and deeper into the water. Slowly I began to notice the power of the river. It was far stronger than I was. I soon realized I wanted to maintain control. Fear and apprehension began to set in, as I was just able to touch the bottom with my toes. The current was getting stronger and I knew I had come to a point of decision. Would I fight the river and try to make it back to the familiar territory of shallow water or go with its powerful flow?

Once I was swimming in the Rio Grande River along the border between Victoria, Texas and Mexico. I was overtaken by a similar experience and found myself trying to struggle to safety. I reached out and grabbed the overhanging roots of a tree and experienced a temporary moment of relief. As the water cleared from my eyes I was looking into the face of a thirsty Tarantula, which was probably the largest in existence. Whether my arachnophobia had anything to do with my size estimation meant little to me at that point and the river quickly became preferable. I quickly devoted all my strength to helping the river carry me along its chosen course. Soon, to my delight, the river brought me to a shallow part and I walked out onto a beautiful sandy shore.

Sometimes the greater test of faith can be surrendering yourself into the hands of the Lord rather than into the hands of the medical physician. Especially, when all your loved ones are telling you to make a wise choice and that wisdom would dictate that you should follow their advise. This is a very touchy subject so I would like to use another story to illustrate my point.

I will use the life of Smith Wigglesworth again. He had a very painful condition which required him to take a medication of the day called salts. He was challenged to stop taking them and to trust the Lord. Finally, after believing he had received a word from God, he announced that he would stop taking them. He said that by tomorrow this time he would be suffering greatly from the lack of his medication, but he would rather die in faith than to live in fear. Well, the outcome was his deliverance and healing and an incredible miracle ministry that followed him everywhere with the proclamation of the Gospel. If you are facing a similar choice, you too, need a word from God to release faith in you. You too must come to the point that Smith did when you can say honestly, "I would rather die in faith than live in fear any longer."

Trust is what Lordship is all about. Truly relinquishing control of your life. Allowing the

river to take you where it wants can be a terrifying experience to those who don't know the love of their Heavenly Father. We want desperately to hold the mastery of our future under our own control. We just don't want to admit it. It isn't until a situation comes along that is beyond our control that the truth comes out. As we squirm and wriggle to free ourselves from the "hook" of dependency on God our true spiritual state is revealed all too clearly.

"He always comes through," one person said, "I just wish he wouldn't wait so long." How many times I have thought I just can't continue to live like this. I'm a nervous wreck. If that sounds like you then you, as I did, desperately need the message of God's hope written on your heart. Our children never worried about their provision, they knew that mommy and daddy would take care of everything.

Not long ago I felt the Lord say to me that the next thing he wanted to teach us about was hope. The word hope appears over sixty times in the New Testament. Often it can be found in the company of faith and love. It is the Greek word *ELPIS* and means favorable and confident expectation — the happy anticipation of good.

It only makes sense that the devil would like to use the circumstances and situations of this life to steal hope. He comes to steal, kill and destroy. When we have no hope left we have no reason to continue to live. Like no other time in history the Church needs to nurse herself back to health on the hope of God. Then and only then can she proclaim his Gospel to the world!

I don't want to digress too much, however, I want to wed hope and faith, as the trials of life perfect them through a demonstration of God's love. The Word says that hope is the anchor of our soul. We have lived in the Chesapeake Bay area and have spent a lot of time on the water. One of the most important things on board a boat is the anchor. In cloudy weather you cannot tell which way you are going. Without a compass, it is better to throw your anchor overboard and wait for a break in the weather. Through all the storms of life, when we seem lost and don't know what is going on, hope in God will always see us through. *"Which hope we have as an anchor of the soul."*

In January of 1992 I was diagnosed with type 2 diabetes. I believed God said I would be healed. My hope was based on what I felt God was speaking to me during that period of time. The scripture says that Abraham, *"who against hope believed in hope, that he might become the father of many nations; according to that which was spoken,"* The KEY was hope in what God had said. To date I have still not received the manifestation of God's word, but remembering who our God is sustains my hope.

Believe means to cling to. Both Abraham and I clung to hope. We clung to what God said even though we couldn't see it that we might both become what God said we would become. Abraham the father of many nations and me healed. Praise the Lord, who is the God of all hope.

We all hope for a better life, a raise, a better job, and a job period. We hope it doesn't rain on Saturday. We hope we will catch our quota during rockfish season. Or we hope that next year we will be able to take a family vacation. As Christians, hope takes on a whole new meaning. The scripture says that God calls things that aren't as though they are. My children tried that from time to time and as parents we called it lying. One major difference between my children and our God is, it is impossible for God to lie. God sees the end from the beginning and when he says something is going to happen you can

take that to the bank!

Our challenge is to allow the hope that God **gives** us (*Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given [us] everlasting consolation and good hope through grace, Comfort your hearts, and establish you in every good word and work. 2 Thes. 2: 16, 17*) to become that needed anchor, when circumstance and situation would lie to us about the character of Christ. I believe God wants to change the way we view the daily circumstances and situations that confront us, radically.

Jesus wants us to begin to see every disaster as an opportunity for God's deliverance, and every handicap as an opportunity for God's healing. *"For this purpose the Son of God was manifested, that he might destroy the works of the devil."* Whenever we encounter the devil's "handiwork" hope declares, nay screams, LOOK, another chance for the Son of God to be manifested. Hope not only causes its owner to see life in a different way, but unlocks the life of another kingdom. It brings the power of the age to come to bear against the devil's kingdom of deception and allows faith to open the doorway to victory. Victory is what our beautiful Savior sealed with his precious blood and his resurrection from the dead. Hope stares insurmountable odds in the face and laughs out loud. Hope looks at "Goliath" and only sees how small and helpless he is next to Jehovah!

"And every one that has this hope in them purifies themselves, even as he is pure." Once when we were going through a real financial crisis it became almost impossible to believe that God could, would or wanted to do anything about it. After some soul searching we had a family discussion that revealed how much worry is the opposite of hope. By worrying we were really saying we had no hope that God could change our situation.

By saying that, we were thinking things about our loving heavenly Father that were utterly unworthy of him. We knew that repentance was in order. As the Holy Spirit began to convict us and we sought forgiveness we noticed hope begin to return. It was only a few days later that I began to work full time again. Hope in God has a guarding and purifying effect on the believer.

Whenever an overwhelming problem confronts us we should see it as one more chance for God to reveal his goodness. It is always the goodness of God that leads to change. Education changes and shapes our minds. I know of no better definition of repentance. Hope in who our God is and how he feels about us will not disappoint us. God's love (which is a demonstration of his care for his children) has been and will be poured out on us.

Name the problem "bear" or "Lion" that confronts you right now and the love of God will find expression in the answer to that problem. If it's a crippling illness His love will find expression in healing. If it is a lost job his care will find expression in provision. If it is deep emotional pain because of abuse of any kind his warmth and power will find an outlet as the One who restores your soul. If it's bondage to drugs, alcohol or pornography, his holiness will find expression as the One who sets the captives free.

I have talked about **faith** spiritual eyesight and being the doorway into the presence of our loving Heavenly Father. I said that **hope** is the way we look at trials and tribulation, seeing them as opportunities for the Son of God to show his love. I said that **love** is a demonstration of God's nature in power to overcome and bring us through the trials and tribulations of our lives. Our Father delights in showing himself strong on our

and tribulations of our lives. Our Father delights in showing himself strong on our behalf. **These are the true keys to the Kingdom!**

Many of us have allowed the events of life to speak evil of our loving heavenly Father. As a result the Church is in crisis. Some of us have thought we could make ourselves better or more acceptable to God if we stoically endured and suffered patiently through these circumstances, all the while secretly believing God took some mysterious pleasure in it. However, no people have ever been able to rise above their conception of God. The most important thing about us is what comes to mind when we think about our God.

Our challenge is to remember that God is good and there is NO hurtful way in him. He is light and in him there is NO darkness at all. Let's unclog the "conduit of our mind" with the truth of his Word, and allow the purity of his love and power to flow freely once again. Drink deeply of the sweetness of our God and use **the keys of the Kingdom** to unlock the gates to the age to come.

This is probably the greatest challenge facing the people of God — to reject the lies of the enemy and to take God at His word. And to dare to believe that He is truly as wonderful and merciful as His Word declares Him to be! Having done all to stand — **STAND!**

"Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers them from them all."