

## Don't Waste Your Afflictions



David Wilkerson (1931-2011) March 15, 2021

### Know that He is Completing a Good Work in You

"But I want you to know, brethren, that the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel" (*Philippians 1:12, NKJV*). In this verse, Paul tells the Christians in Philippi not to worry about all the things they'd heard had befallen him. All those "things" he refers to included great afflictions and infirmities.

Paul wrote this epistle while bound in a Roman prison. By then he was a seasoned warrior of the gospel, having endured every conceivable hardship and human affliction. If you've studied Paul's life, you know the kinds of things he had endured: shipwrecks, beatings, buffetings, reviling, mocking, persecutions, hunger, thirst, nakedness and defamation of character.

We rarely consider that some of Paul's worst afflictions came at the hands of those who called themselves born-again believers. Some opponents were envious church leaders who turned entire congregations against him. They ridiculed his lifestyle, criticized his preaching, questioned his authority and misrepresented his message. Everywhere Paul went, it seemed, he was met by affliction, trouble and sorrow. The Holy Spirit frequently told him that "chains and tribulations await(ed)" him in his travels (*Acts 20:23*).

However, Paul declared, "None of these things move me" (*20:24*). He added that "no one should be shaken by these afflictions; for you yourselves know that we are appointed to this. For, in fact, we told you before when we were with you that we would suffer tribulation, just as it happened, and you know" (*1 Thessalonians 3:3-4*).

### A certain theology in the American church says that if you have your faith worked out correctly, you won't suffer.

Nothing like this appears in the Bible. On the contrary, Paul says we have been "appointed" to suffer for the sake of Christ. Moreover, Paul said he woke up every day "not knowing the things that will happen to me there, except that the Holy Spirit testifies in every city, saying that chains and tribulations await me" (*Acts 20:22-23*).

Try to get this picture in your mind. Here was a holy man called by God to take the gospel to the nations, and on every assignment the Holy Spirit whispered to him, "Paul, the next stop isn't going to be easy. You're going to face opposition again. You'll find more afflictions, testing and suffering."

You may object, "Wait a minute, you're talking about Paul's life, not mine. He was appointed by God to suffer afflictions. I haven't been called to such a life." The Bible plainly says, "Many are the afflictions of the righteous, but the Lord delivers him out of them all" (*Psalms 34:19*).

If the Lord did not permit troubles in our life, that would represent the worst form of rejection. It would mean God is saying, "I have no special work for this believer, no plans for their life being set apart as a testimony. Therefore, I

don't need to produce anything in them. Let them remain untrained, untutored, an adult with a child's mind. Let them not abound in grace. Let them not learn through affliction so that they might teach others. Let them just exist and die in their childishness."

I have a question for you. No matter how long you've walked with Jesus, you surely have known pains, trials and afflictions. So, how have you behaved in them? What has been the outcome, the result of your experiences? Have your afflictions all been in vain? Or have you learned of God's love and faithfulness in the midst of them?

## **How we respond in our times of affliction has everything to do with the results we see.**

Maybe you're a dedicated Christian who has laid down your life for Jesus. How would you react if all you had to show for your dedication, labors and sacrifice was utter failure? How would you respond if God shut you down, bound your hands and left you helpless?

Some Christians would doubt God's word to them. They would question the Spirit's leading in their lives. The whole trial of their faith, the affliction meant to throw them into Jesus' arms, would be wasted.

Other Christians, however, would respond as Paul did, rejoicing that they had been counted worthy to suffer for Christ's sake. Paul didn't try to figure out his afflictions. He responded with faith, hope and joy because he knew he was in training as God's witness. He wrote to his friends from jail, "I'm in jail for Jesus. I've been able to witness to so many people in Rome. I've even seen some people in Caesar's household come to salvation" (See Philippians 4:22). He must have been quite a sight in that prison cell, a scrawny man encouraging everyone around him, "Rejoice in your afflictions. God is faithful!"

Paul didn't waste any of his afflictions. He knew each of them had a divine purpose. Likewise, the Lord watches how we behave during our trials today. I want to talk to you about three ways our afflictions may be wasted.

**1. We waste afflictions with murmuring, complaining behavior.** This kind of behavior disturbs the Lord. It was the reason every test and affliction that Israel experienced in the wilderness was lost on them.

I know many Christians who have become more bitter and grumpy with every new affliction. You would think their God is dead. They even look sour. The very afflictions meant to train and sweeten them, trials designed by God to reveal his faithfulness, instead turn them into habitual complainers. I wonder as I see them, "Where is their faith, their trust in the Lord? What must their children think?"

Don't waste your afflictions. Let them produce in you the sweet aroma of trust and faith in your Lord. All your trials are intended to throw you into his arms, to cause you to say, "I am his, and he is mine. He will bring me through this affliction."

**2. We waste afflictions when we face new ones without remembering our deliverances from old ones.** We have a tendency to forget every good thing God has done for us. Moses reminded Israel of all their past deliverances. Then he warned them, "Only take heed to yourself, and diligently keep yourself, lest you forget the things your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life. And teach them to your children and your grandchildren" (*Deuteronomy 4:9*).

Sadly, the Bible says of that generation, "They did not keep the covenant of God; they refused to walk in His law, and forgot His works and His wonders that He had shown them" (*Psalms 78:10-11*). Like the Israelites, we have the same tendency whenever we face a new trial or affliction. We say, "Oh, God, this trial is too much for me to face." God answers, "Simply look back and remember my faithfulness to you."

If need be, keep a journal to remind yourself of God's great deliverances in your life. Jot down a few notes at night before going to bed. Do whatever it takes to remind yourself of all the things he has done for you, all the heartaches you've been through from which he has delivered you. Then, when your next affliction arises, open your notebook and say to the devil, "You're not going to deceive me this time. My God brought me out before, and he will do it again."

**3. We waste our afflictions when we refuse to see that God brings us through them in order to teach and encourage others.** We are to share our experiences with our brothers and sisters to prove God's faithfulness to

them. We are to stand and say, "Thank God, I'm a veteran. I can tell you by experience that he is faithful."

Paul actually boasted of his afflictions, "From now on let no one trouble me, for I bear in my body the marks of the Lord Jesus" (*Galatians 6:17*). He knew each scar bore an eternal purpose.

## Why do you think God has delivered you from all your past afflictions?

David testified of his afflictions, "In my distress I called upon the Lord, and cried out to my God; He heard my voice from His temple, and my cry came before Him, even to His ears.... He sent from above, He took me; He drew me out of many waters. He delivered me from my strong enemy, from those who hated me, for they were too strong for me. They confronted me in the day of my calamity, but the Lord was my support. He also brought me out into a broad place; He delivered me because He delighted in me" (*Psalms 18:6, 16-19*).

You must remember that whatever you're going through will pass. Recently, I read a passage in one of my journals, which I wrote while going through a great trial. Three months' worth of entries all ended with the same phrase: "Oh, God, when will this nightmare end?" Then, finally, these words appeared across a page in huge letters: "IT'S OVER. HE HAS DELIVERED!"

I can honestly say I have learned more in my afflictions than I ever did in good times. Prosperity doesn't teach us; afflictions do (see Hebrews 12:3-8). I ask you again, how are you reacting to your afflictions? Are you wasting them, becoming a doubter and complainer? Or are you building up your faith, knowing that your God delivers?

There is only one way to endure your present troubles, by remembering that your heavenly Father delights in you. He has a plan at work, a great investment in you, for his eternal purpose. "He who has begun a good work in you will complete it until the day of Jesus Christ" (*Philippians 1:6*). Your father is preparing you to be a veteran of spiritual warfare, an example of faith and trust to this generation. Amen!

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