

# Letting Affliction Ground Us Deeply in God's word sermonaudio.com

*Psalm 119*

By Various Speakers

**Bible Text:** Psalm 119:65-72  
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If you have a copy of God's word, please turn to Psalm 119. Psalm 119. We'll be in the section following what Jeff preached this morning, verses 65 through 72. But before I read that passage for us, I appreciate Jeff giving me the opportunity to preach tonight. If you don't know who I am, I'm Cade Farris. I'm one of the pastors here at First Baptist Opelika.

There is a certain man named Mr. Bailey and he went to visit an orange grove. That orange grove had an irrigation pump and that irrigation pump had broken down. Now, this was a very dry season, unusually dry. In fact, it was so dry that many of the orange trees were starting to wither and even begin to die and so the man who was giving the tour to Mr. Bailey invited Mr. Bailey to come to his own personal orchard and there at that man's orchard, he said, "These trees of mine could go without rain for almost two more weeks. The reason is because when they were young trees, I would often withhold water from them and in doing so, it caused their roots to grow down deep into the earth. Now, mine are the deepest rooted trees in the area. While others are being scorched by the sun, these are finding moisture at even greater depth." Now, imagine if those young trees could have talked back to their master. Imagine how much they would have complained about their hardship. If you've had young children, you know how sometimes they will complain when things don't go the way that they want it to go. Even we as older adults will complain sometimes when things don't go the way that we want them to go. But you see, though those trees might have been groaning from the hardship of not having enough water or so they thought, their owner knew what he was doing. He knew a greater purpose would come from those trees going without water. He knew that those deep roots would go into the earth to enable them to weather the future droughts to come.

So I've entitled this message, "Letting Affliction Ground Us Deeply in God's Word." Our section of Psalm 119:65 through 72 is a section within this longest chapter of the Bible, and as Jeff said this morning, this chapter is a chapter on the primacy of God's word in our lives. But Psalm 119:65 through 72 adds the element of the affliction to the life of the follower of the Lord and how that affliction is an important part of our maturation. Look with me now, Psalm 119:65 through 72. I'll be reading from the New King James Version. The Bible says,

65 You have dealt well with Your servant, O LORD, according to Your word. 66 Teach me good judgment and knowledge, For I believe Your commandments. 67 Before I was afflicted I went astray, But now I keep Your word. 68 You are good, and do good; Teach me Your statutes. 69 The proud have forged a lie against me, But I will keep Your precepts with my whole heart. 70 Their heart is as fat as grease, But I delight in Your law. 71 It is good for me that I have been afflicted, That I may learn Your statutes. 72 The law of Your mouth is better to me Than thousands of coins of gold and silver.

This is God's holy, inerrant, inspired word.

I have four truths to bring out of these verses for us to apply to our lives and here's the first one, it's this, that affliction will test whether we believe God is dealing well with us. Affliction will test whether we believe that God is dealing well with us. When the psalmist is writing about God's word, you know, when we think about God's word, we're right to think of God's word as the Bible, because it is the word of God, but as the psalmist is thinking about God's word, he is thinking about God's very commands, God's very thoughts and words communicated into his life. That's what the Bible is for us today, it's God's actions, God's plans, God's purposes for his life, and as he thinks about the way that God's word has functioned in his life, the way that God has dealt toward him, he sees God's dealings in a positive state.

He begins this section, verse 65, "You have dealt well with Your servant, O LORD, according to Your word." A few months ago, Pastor Jeff took us through the book of Job on Sunday morning and when Job experienced the terrible affliction, hardship, even calamity in his life, Job had some friends who came to comfort him and those friends assumed that God was not dealing well with Job. And it's common to think that God is dealing well with us when things are going well in our life, and when things are going bad in our lives, then God must not be dealing well with us. That's pretty much probably universal understanding from anybody who even believes in God. Life goes well. God's blessing me. God's dealing well with me. Life goes bad. God's not dealing well with me.

Now, anytime the Bible, especially the Old Testament, when I took Hebrew in seminary, my professor said, anytime there's repetition, especially in Hebrew, it's given for emphasis for us. Emphasis. So I noticed in these verses, there's quite a bit of repetition. The psalmist's love for the word of God, his desire to obey the word of God, that's evident all throughout Psalm 119, but this specific section talks about affliction twice, first in verse 67 and then in verse 71. This psalmist has been afflicted. I'll talk to you more about the specific affliction he experienced later in the message but he's experienced hardship, suffering, pain, and hurt.

Now he had two ways that he might respond to God in light of his life, the affliction. Biblically, he could respond like Naomi in the book of Ruth, or like Joseph in the book of Genesis. How did Naomi respond? Well, Naomi, we were introduced to her in the first chapter of Ruth, the book of Ruth, and she has a husband named Elimelech and she has

two sons, Mahlon and Kilion. Now there's famine in the land of Israel and they travel down to the region of Moab, foreign country, and actually the enemy of Israel many times in the Old Testament, and here is Naomi and Elimelech with their two sons down in Moab and their two sons, Mahlon and Killion, marry two Moabite women, Ruth and Orpah. But then affliction, even tragedy, strikes Naomi's family. First her husband Elimelech dies and then her two sons die, and it leaves Naomi with her two daughters-in-law, Naomi was an Israelite, Ruth and Orpah were Moabites, and Ruth speaks to, Naomi speaks to them and says, "Hey, go back to your family, your own people. You have time to raise a family of your own." And Orpah, she weeps and cries, but she listens to her mother-in-law and goes back to her people. But Ruth, what, she clings to her, right? "Wherever you go, I will go. Wherever you stay, I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God will be my God." And so Ruth, she's stuck with Ruth, Ruth's not going anywhere, right?

So Naomi and Ruth go back to Israel and when they arrive, everyone's glad to see Naomi. They greet her, "Oh, we're so glad you are back." But look at Ruth chapter 1, verses 20 through 21. Turn there. Keep your finger on Psalm 119, but look at the way that Naomi responds when they're like, "Naomi," right? Doesn't it feel good when someone calls you by name? You're like, yeah, "Naomi, welcome back. We're so glad to see you." This is her response, verse 20 and 21, Ruth 1, "But she said to them, 'Do not call me Naomi; call me Mara, for the Almighty has dealt very bitterly with me. I went out full,' full being she had a husband and two sons, right, "I went out full and the LORD has brought me home again empty. Why do you call me Naomi, since the LORD has testified against me, and the Almighty has afflicted me?" Naomi, she's like, "I'm not even gonna try to act like I'm doing fine. I'm not fine, I'm bitter. I've been afflicted by God. God has not dealt well with me." That is her testimony. That's straight from scripture.

But then we have the story of Joseph. You know the story of Joseph in the Old Testament book of Genesis, right? The young man who was the favored son of Jacob. There's a long line of favoritism from that family and so here you have Joseph and he has this gift, this ability to dream dreams and later he'll interpret dreams and what happens? Well, he has a dream about his brothers and later his parents bowing down to him and his brothers are not happy about that, and they're also not happy about this nice little coat that dad has made him, a special garment with all these colors on it. And so one day his brothers are out doing their thing being shepherds in the field, and Jacob says, "Hey, Joseph, go check on my sons," and so Joseph is coming to check on them they're like, "Oh here comes that dreamer," and they devise a terrible plot. Well, first, they can't figure out what to do with him. Some of them want to kill him. So they decided to just take the robe off of him and they throw him down into a pit and we're told later in Hebrews that later in Genesis that he's crying out while they're eating and they're talking, and different brothers have different agendas about what to do with Joseph in the pit. But finally they decide to sell him to these Ishmaelites who are on the way down to Egypt.

So Joseph goes down to Egypt. Of course they take his garment They rip it. They kill one of their animals. They put blood on it. They go back to their dad. I mean, they're heartless. He's like, "Where's Joseph? Well, doesn't this belong to Joseph, his garment?"

And their dad's like, goes down to his grave grieving over Joseph being dead. It's a terrible story, right? And so it just keeps spiraling down. Joseph goes down to Egypt. He's away from the Promised Land. He's away from his family. He's sold to a guy named Potiphar. He's the captain of the guard of the Egyptians. But everywhere Joseph is, God blesses him. It's like he just prospers him and it's amazing. So as bad as things are for Joseph, God is like dealing good with him even in a tough place. And so, of course, he's handsome, he's well built, and Potiphar's wife wants to sleep with him, and he refuses, and she frames him, and then he gets put into prison. But while he's in prison, the prison warden was like, this guy has so much integrity and leadership ability. He puts him in charge of the prison, and these two guys from Pharaoh's court are put in jail. There's the cup bearer and the baker and they both have dreams and Joseph interprets their dreams. He tells the cupbearer that, you know, you're going to live. And he tells the baker, you're going to die. And sure enough, it happens. And then Joseph says, "Hey y'all, don't forget about me." Well, guess what? Well, the baker totally forgot, he died, but the cup bearer forgot until Pharaoh years later had a dream of his own that nobody could interpret. Joseph, he's like, "Oh yeah, there's a guy in prison." He goes and gets Joseph. Joseph shaves, he cleans himself up. He goes before the most powerful man on earth at that time, and he interprets the dream rightly, seven years of blessing, and then seven years of famine. And the Pharaoh's like, "What should we do?" And he gives him, "Well, seven years store up," and he's like, "Who can do this? You do it, Joseph." He makes him second in command. And so this story is unfolding, guess what happens? Seven years of plenty all over that region and then there's seven years of famine and guess who comes down to Egypt to buy food? His brothers. And so it's rather, Joseph doesn't really trust them at first and rightly so, they tried to kill him, right? So he kind of tests them some, but finally there's time as they talk and the Lord works in such a way to rescue his people and they come down to Egypt. That's why the Israelites are in Egypt and have to be brought out of Egypt by Moses, because of Joseph.

So they're down there in Egypt And Jacob the father comes down, he sees his son Joseph, he weeps, they embrace. But then when Joseph's father, when Jacob dies, that's when the brother's like, "Uh-oh, now he's gonna pay us back." And then we have this incredible verse in Genesis chapter 50, verse 20, where Joseph says, "As for you, you meant evil against me but God meant it for good to bring it about that many people should be kept alive as they are today." And so if you were to ask Joseph in that moment, "Has God dealt well with me?" He would say, "Absolutely, yes." We have it in scripture, Genesis 50:20. Now I'm not throwing Naomi under the bus because by the end of the book, she too sees that God has been good to her. When Ruth and Boaz marry and then the child is born that will be in the line of Jesus, his lineage, those same villagers who were like, "Naomi, you're back." They're like, "You have Ruth. Her love for you is better than seven sons." So God has worked it together for good even for Naomi, even though she was very bitter.

And so when we experience affliction and hardship, we're tested. It's a test for us to wrestle with, is God dealing well with me or is God not dealing well with me? Do not say God is dealing poorly with me when I face affliction. The Bible tells us not to do that or believe that. The psalmist demonstrates for us, "God, You have dealt well with me

according to Your word." But number two, we learn this from our passage, affliction, if properly received, can cause us to obey God better. Affliction if properly received can cause us to obey God better. Now It can do that because the Bible tells us that in this chapter, but it can certainly do the opposite in our lives. I'll illustrate. I did summer missions as a college student through the Baptist Campus Ministries, and they would always send us out in teams. And so there was two guys and two young ladies from different universities and I was paired up with a guy who was a missionary kid. He grew up overseas, great young man, and his father was a pastor in the United States. They came back from the field, his dad was pastoring, great young man, and we were serving together overseas. Some years later, after we served together on missions, his younger sister went on mission. It's a very mission-minded family. She went on mission, but tragically drowned doing summer missions. And so I, I went to the funeral of that young, godly young woman, his younger sister, and I didn't get to talk to my friend, but I saw him as they were driving away from the church with tears in his eyes, and it was a terrible tragedy, terrible calamity. And so years later, I'm at a Baptist convention, and I bump into his dad, who's pastoring, and his dad was just heartbroken, and he's like, "You know, my son, you know, is agnostic. He's walked away, you know, from faith, from church, from God." And so, this is a guy that, like, I served with, you know, we shared Jesus together and was a friend.

So yes, affliction and calamity can certainly cause us to obey God better, but it also can cause a person to turn away from the Lord. And so this is real stuff here today, so I just want to make sure I make that clear. If it's properly received and properly processed, it can cause us to obey God better. And by the way, the death of a loved one, I lead grief share for our church, and so I walk with men and women who go through losing loved ones, and the death of a loved one is, if not, the most difficult affliction you'll ever experience.

So how are we gonna respond when that happens to us? How does the psalmist respond? Look at verses 66 and 67. Specifically, 67 is his response, but let's look at 66 too. He says, "Teach me good judgment and knowledge, For I believe Your commandments." I was taught in seminary, when the word "for" is there, it grounds the phrase. He says, "God, teach me good judgment, teach me knowledge, because I believe Your commandments." Without believing the commandments of God, all you have is worldly wisdom. It's all you have. And so it's good judgment, good knowledge is grounded in God's commandments. But look at 67, "Before I was afflicted I went astray, But now I keep Your word." Pretty remarkable verse. He talks about the way affliction has impacted the way that he obeys God. "Before I was afflicted, I was wild. I was rebellious. I was reckless. I was not obeying God. But now that I have been afflicted, now I keep your word."

Let's go back to Job for a moment. And so we often forget about Job's wife. Now she does show up in the story early on, but both Job and his wife experienced terrible affliction, calamity, hardship, trials, tribulations. You get to chapter 2, and she encourages her husband to curse God and die. Affliction was not producing any kind of obedience in her life. But Job rebukes her, refuses to curse God, and says in essence,

"Should we accept only good things from the hand of God and never anything bad?" All throughout the book of Job it says Job did not sin. Now Job had to get humbled by the end of the book. He kind of was like kind of bowing his chest a little bit and God had to kind of, "Where were you, Job? Sit down," right? So he had some pride, we all do. But Job, I mean Job, thank God for that book. It helps us so much when we experience hardship.

Now listen, nobody wants to have affliction. I don't want to have it. We all want God to take it away from us. Even the great Apostle Paul did this in 2 Corinthians chapter 12. He has this thorn in his flesh. Scholars have debated for centuries what was his thorn. Most would say some kind of physical ailment, but he's got this thorn and affliction. He even says, "Satan has come. He's come to attack my flesh. It's a thorn in my side. It's something that I wish God would take away. And three times I asked God, take it away. And God says, no." But you know what the Lord did for Paul? He gives him something far better. 2 Corinthians chapter 12, verse 9, "And He said to me," you know it, "My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness." And as we look at the life of the Apostle Paul, he continues in his life, in his ministry, he talks about all the hardship he experiences, getting shipwrecked, getting stoned, getting attacked, getting beaten by rods, that through it all, Paul seems to be obeying God even more, keeping God's word even more.

Affliction does not have to ruin our faith. It doesn't have to, nor should it. When properly received, affliction will humble us, make us rely on grace and obey God even better. But there's a third principle. I think this is really foundational too, this psalmist, his theology of who God is. Number three, affliction must always be understood from the bedrock conviction of the goodness of God. The challenge of any kind of suffering, pain in our lives is that it can cause a person to make the assumption that God is not good. Let's go back to the first point of the sermon, hardship, suffering, affliction will test whether we believe God is dealing well with us. How do we come to the place of believing God is good when bad things happen to us? One word really, and that's conviction. We must have a biblical conviction about who God is. The psalmist declares that in verse 68 of Psalm 119. Look there, he says, "You are good, and do good; Teach me Your statutes." "God, I want You to teach me because You and Your character are good and what You do is good, Your character and Your conduct. Who You are, God, and what You do is good. Teach me Your word, Your statutes." All we can say is, "God, I know You're good. Because of Your righteous character, You're all-wise, all-powerful, all-knowing, all present, holy, loving, merciful, just, and so on."

Now, how do we learn about these attributes of God? By reading the Bible. Psalm 119, the definitive chapter on the priority and promise of God's word, we know God is good because the Bible tells us that God is good. We also see the goodness of God through the pages of scripture, the way that he works throughout history in the Bible, through church history, the goodness and mercy and greatness of God. But you know it's possible to know mentally about the goodness of God and his character from scripture, "God, You are good. I know You're good because Your word tells me." And it's also possible to know that God is good in scripture and his actions throughout history but when affliction

comes, look, when it comes knocking at your door, it can shake the very foundation of your life. You better have a bedrock foundation that's strong enough to handle when calamity comes.

One of my favorite stories is the story of Daniel, how Daniel and his three friends, right, they're known as Shadrach, Meshach, Abednego, their Babylonian names, but Hananiah and Mishael, Azariah are their Hebrew names. And they're brought to Babylon. They're taking, they're the best, the brightest, the smartest that Israel has to offer and they're being taken to Babylon to be deprogrammed, to be turned into utter pagans. That's the goal. You're gonna learn the king's language, the king's wisdom, eat the king's food. But I love Daniel chapter 1. It says Daniel resolved or Daniel made up his mind that he was not gonna defile himself with the king's food. I mean, what if Daniel had not made up his mind before he was taken captive? What if he just got to Babylon and said, "I'll figure it out when I'm there. Hm, that pork sure smells good. Ah, shrimp." No, I mean, he made up his mind. It was a conviction, a bedrock in his life.

So we have to have those convictions and dare I say, one of those convictions is this, God is good all the time, all the time, God is good. No matter how I feel, no matter what I think. Now feelings are important, they are. I mean, God gives us emotions, we shouldn't discard them, but the foundation has got to be God is good all the time. All the time God is good. That's got to be there. But this goodness of God, it can't just be a mantra that we say, God's goodness has to get pressed like deep into us. And you're not going to get it from just one sermon from me but it gets pressed into us through worship as we open our hearts and sing to the Lord and surrender ourselves before God in our prayer lives, through meditating upon the word of God and being in close relationship with other believers and hearing their stories of how they've experienced terrible trials, yet here they are giving God glory and praise. That does something for us, doesn't it?

It builds our confidence and the power of God and the goodness of God because when we are in a relationship with God, then we get to know his heart. We know this from human relationships. How many times has someone been misunderstood because you don't know their heart? They say something, they act a certain way. We misinterpret it. It happens in parenting and marriage all the time, right? It does. But when you get to know someone on an intimate level, you get to know their heart and there's an element of trust and even belief in that person. You know, parents, I'm not sure what your upbringing was like, how you were raised. Maybe you had a hard kind of discipline parent. I don't know how your childhood was, but when there's that love and that honor and that respect for that parent, even though as a child is hurting when they're putting discipline in your life, they're pruning you as a father and mother should, but you trust their heart. You know they love you. You know they have what's best for you. Because of that relationship, you get through that affliction because you know their hearts. You follow me?

That's what we have to have with God because years ago, the great Babbie Mason wrote a song.

"All things work for our good  
Though sometimes we don't see  
How they could  
Struggles that break our hearts in two  
Sometimes blind us to the truth

Our Father knows what's best for us  
His ways are not our own  
So when your pathway grows dim  
And you just don't see Him,  
Remember you're never alone.

God is too wise to be mistaken  
God is too good to be unkind  
So when you don't understand  
When don't see His plan  
When you can't trace His hand  
Trust His Heart."

You have to trust the heart of God and believe that he is good and let his heart infuse into us with the power of the Holy Spirit who lives in us, reveal to us that God is good and it's a bedrock foundation that will let you say God is dealing well with me even when things are bad because when things are bad and there's affliction, I'm obeying God more. There's a conviction in my life. It's bedrock that God is good. Then affliction comes. It's not going to shake that conviction. It's a heartfelt trust in the character of God.

But lastly, affliction teaches us God's truths in ways we cannot learn in the easy times. It just does. Affliction is a teacher that none of us want to go to his class. None of us want to sign up for Affliction 101, but it will teach us the truths of God in ways we just cannot learn when things are easy. I mean, John 15, the great analogy where the Father is the gardener and Jesus is the vine and we are the branches. Going back to the sermon introduction with the orchard owner, let those young trees go without water to make the roots go deep. The Lord God, our gardener, lets us suffer. John 15 says, God prunes us that we might bear more fruit.

I love this quote. I heard this years ago by a pastor. He says, "We often long dreamily for days without difficulty, but God knows better. The easier our life, the weaker our spiritual fiber for strength of any kind grows only by exertion." You want to get strong? Get in that gym, start pumping iron. Exertion, that's how the fiber of our muscles grow. God uses affliction. We want days without any kind of difficulty, but God knows better for us. The easier our life, the weaker our spiritual fiber for strength of any kind grows only by exertion.

Look at verses 69 through 71. We finally get to the affliction that he's experiencing and it's a tough one that he has to deal with. "The proud have forged a lie against me, But I will keep Your precepts with my whole heart. Their heart is as fat as grease, But I delight



in Your law. It is good for me that I have been afflicted, That I may learn Your statutes." He's been smeared with lies. His character has been called into question. He's been lied about. His motives, his deeds are being discussed. He has no control over it. But instead of trying to make his case and answer for himself and challenge all the lies said about him, he does not make his case in the court of public opinion. No. He says, "But I will keep Your precepts with all my heart. I'm just going to keep Your word. I'm going to keep trusting You, God, even when people are lying about me."

In verse 70, he does speak of those who are smearing him. This metaphor of hearts being as fat as grease, it means that the heart is unfeeling like fat. Some translations, they're heartless. They don't care about him. They don't love him. They slander him. And when we slander others and gossip and run our mouths, we reveal we don't really care about those folks that we're talking about. The psalmist isn't trying to defend himself. He says, "They're unfeeling. They're unfeeling in their words. They don't care about me." He speaks the truth. He knows that about them. But instead of focusing all his attention, like we often do, on those who are hurting us, he turns his attention to the only one who can help him. "I will keep Your precepts, O Lord. With my whole heart, I delight in Your law".

And then in verse 71, remarkable, he says, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted. It's good that I may learn your statutes." It sounds very strange, but when we have been brought through the fire of affliction and see the results in our lives, we too can say and will say, "This affliction has been good for me. It is teaching me about God's word and God's character and God's ways that I never knew before."

How can we know that God revealed to us in the Old Testament in Hosea who reaches down to nurture us like a mother nursing a child, how can we experience God in that way unless we are broken, helpless, afflicted, and God reveals that that's the kind of God that he is. How can we experience God being the righteous judge unless we are afflicted through lies and slander and gossip, yet we can see God defend us and take us through the smearing and the lies and we come out on the other side and we're stronger and we're wiser and we're humbler. We're humble. We experience so many things about the character and the word of God and the promises of God. Scriptures will jump out at you in ways you never saw them before when you're being afflicted. I don't want to be afflicted but I have been, and I will be, and you and I can learn about God in ways we never thought possible.

And the Psalm ends this way, at least this section, "The law of Your mouth is better to me Than thousands of coins of gold and silver." And I see in that verse, just the allure of a comfortable life without affliction, just give me a bunch of coins of silver and gold, but the psalmist says that does not compare to the glorious beauty of the word of God in our lives. Warren Wiersbe says a faith that can't be tested can't be trusted. Let us let affliction ground us deeply into the word of God, because it will test whether we believe God is dealing well with us or not. If properly received, it can cause us to obey God better. It must always be understood, affliction that is, from the bedrock conviction of the

goodness of God deep within our hearts and then affliction will teach us God's truths in ways we cannot learn in the easy times.

Would you pray with me?

*Father, as we come to sing our final song of the evening, this has been a message that's been directed, Lord, to believers in Jesus. Lord, help us to receive all that comes into our lives. Help us to trust that God, You are sovereign and that You can truly work all things together for good. Help us not to defend ourselves, to prop ourselves up and try to make a name for ourselves, but help us to keep responding to every trial and tribulation and trouble the way this psalmist does and that's, but I will go to Your word, but I will delight in Your law. O God, just teach me. Oh, I'm learning more about You, God. Keep teaching me, God. It's been good that I've been afflicted. God, what is this kind of living? What is this kind of mindset? Lord, it's a picture of grace. It's a picture of Holy Spirit empowered living in the Old Testament. And God, we have the full benefit of the cross, of the resurrection, of the completed Old and New Testament, and we have the Spirit of God in us to help us appropriate this truth through our lives to be victorious, to be people who know the goodness of God despite any affliction we face. God, help us to live out the truths we've heard from Your powerful word tonight, O God, we pray. And let us be like the psalmist and say, Lord, I will take Your word, I will take Your truth over thousands of coins of gold and silver. It's as if he was saying, I'd rather have Jesus than silver or gold. Help us to have that kind of heart as well, Jesus, I pray, in Your mighty name, amen.*

I'm gonna invite you to stand and sing and respond today to the message, to give your heart to Jesus afresh and anew, and just tell him how much you love him. If you have a decision to make, I'll be here at the front.