

Lesson 22

A Theology of Suffering

We have been looking at God's Standards for Life in our lives as believers. That standard God has for us is clearly explained in His Word. We operate best by sticking as closely as possible to His operating instructions. Those are His standards for life found in God's Word the Bible.

We have already seen two of these standards for life. The first is that we are to constantly be aware of Christ's presence in our lives by the evident "fruit" that surrender to Christ produces. When I am surrendered to Christ's leadership of my life, His character starts to grow in my life. Each of the "fruit" of the Spirit is a facet of how Jesus Christ's personality is reflected through me. That was our first week:

EXHIBITING THE _____ OF JESUS CHRIST = THE FRUIT OF THE SPIRIT (APRIL 16)

Principle 100: The key to **fruitfulness** in your life is to fear (have reverence for) God (Psalm 111:10, 145:19; Proverbs 1:7, 3:8, 9:10, 14:27, 19:23; Ecclesiastes 8:12-13, 12:13-14) and consistently keep His commandments in every aspect of your life (be a doer of the Word) (based on Exodus 20:1-17; Deuteronomy 11:26-28; Matthew 7:24-27; John 14:21, 23; 15:10-11; James 1:25; 1 John 3:22).

Page 403: In every relationship and in every situation, you are to **exhibit the character of Jesus Christ** through your obedience to God's Word (based on Matthew 5:13-16; John 15:1-10; 2 Corinthians 2:14-17; Colossians 2:6-7; Titus 2:11-14; 2 Peter 1:2-10).

Then last week we looked at the continuation of God's Standards for our lives as we saw how we are to process the events of our lives. We all have many unchangeable parts of our lives that we are faced with every day, such as: the family we became a part of, our features and physical attributes that just came with us by birth, plus the leaders and supervisors that are above and over us in life.

How do we go on when we have so many things about life we have no control over and can't change? That was lesson two, as we delved into the very amazing truths about how great, powerful, knowing, and present is our God. That was a very special insight into how we are to live:

TRUSTING CHANGELESS _____ ABOUT GOD (APRIL 23)

Principle 98: God's standards are always consistent and are never subject to the whim of the moment. **His commands are changeless** (Isaiah 40:8; 1 Peter 1:25); they do not fluctuate with the age in which you live (based on Psalm 19:7-11, 119:89, 160; Proverbs 30:5-6) **because God Himself is changeless** (based on Exodus 3:14-15; Malachi 3:6; John 8:57-58; Hebrews 1:10-12, 13:8).

That brings us to this final week.

First we seek to surrender to Christ and allow Him to live out through us producing His character in us that we see as the fruit of His Spirit unhindered within us.

Second we seek to trust more and more of our lives each day to our *Changeless God: Who Sees All* of our past, present, and future; and *Who is All-Powerfully* at work; and *Who Omni-Presently* walks beside us through every part of every day.

Finally, with that amazing God in us and all around us, the last piece we need to see is WHY. Why doesn't He just fix everything now? Why doesn't He just get rid of all the troubles in our lives? Why doesn't He just fix all our pains, sorrows, struggles, and fears? All of those and countless other questions become our focus as we begin this evening a study of God's Word for:

UNDERSTANDING THE THEOLOGY OF _____ (APRIL 30)

Principle 104: **Do not be surprised at trials**, even if they seem fiery; instead, rejoice in them because God uses them to develop Christlike maturity in your life (based on Romans 5:3-5; 2 Corinthians 4:7-18; James 1:2-4; 1 Peter 4:12-13). Be prepared to be reviled **and to suffer** persecution because of your commitment to Jesus Christ and your faithfulness in being obedient to God's Word (based on Matthew 5:10-12, 10:16-28; 2 Timothy 3:12; 1 Peter 4:12-19). If you should **endure suffering** for the sake of righteousness, you are blessed of the Lord (based on Matthew 5:10-12; Luke 6:22-23; James 5:10-11; 1 Peter 3:13-17, esp. verse 14, 5:6-10).

LIVING FOR JESUS THROUGH HIS _____ OF SUFFERING PSALM 119:71

As we open to Psalm 119:71, we as a nation are in the midst of one of the most challenging times American's have faced for over a generation. But as bad as it may seem, think about how hard life was here in the USA in 1917.

That year, World War I was sapping the finances, wearing down the resolve, and destroying the young men of this nation. In the midst of all that, there was no government security for the sick or unemployed.

People only lived on what they could make and scrape out on their farms or in the cities. Even the churches were struggling. So much so, that one church in Kentucky couldn't afford to keep their pastor as a paid staff member any longer.

I wonder what Pastor Thomas Obadiah Chisholm thought of Psalm 119:71, after he got word that because of his failing health, he would no longer get any financial support from his church congregation he had served as pastor for many years? We'll find out a bit later, because every one of us here this evening have heard his testimony many times.

But now, listen to these strong, confident words from Ezra's pen, guided by the Infinite, Omnipotent, Omniscient, and Omnipresent Spirit of God:

Psalm 119:71 It is good for me that I have been afflicted, That I may learn Your statutes

In our darkest hour, deepest pain, hardest times, most hopeless situations—we know that our God who is faithful is **CLOSER** at those moments, than any other time.

In 1917 that 51 year-old pastor named Thomas Obadiah Chisholm had to leave the paid, vocational ministry for health reasons. Life was hard, and jobs were so scarce he had to support his family selling door-to-door in Kentucky. But he did so humming the words of a personal resolve he had written.

What was his plan for facing physical and emotional afflictions in a cold and cruel world with the harsh realities of dashed hopes, failing health, declining finances, and limited strength? His testimony is in front of you in the hymnbook, number 372 “Living for Jesus”.

We find in our hymnbooks this lesson. Note his words with me. These are the words of the hymn ***Living for Jesus***, written by Thomas Chisholm:

Living for Jesus a life that is true, striving to please Him in all that I do;

Yielding allegiance glad hearted and free, this is the pathway of blessing for me.

Oh Jesus Lord and Savior, I give myself to Thee, for Thou in Thine atonement
didst give Thyself for me; I own no other Master, my heart shall be Thy Throne;
my life I give henceforth to live—Oh Christ for Thee alone!

Like Thomas Chisholm learned, as he trudged out into dark mornings, and through long wearying days, *God didn't take away the troubles, He went through them with us.*

God was with him all during his long days, short nights, empty cupboards, non-existent savings. All those troubles were his, but one thing never changed—*God was always faithfully the same.* Tonight we all need to learn:

HOW GOD WANTS TO _____ AFFLICTION IN OUR LIVES TODAY

God wants us not to flee our troubles, but to find Him right in the midst of every storm that blows through our lives. And just as these words says so clearly, He wants us to learn to lean upon His Arm of grace and mercy extended from His Throne to live each day for Jesus a life that truly reflects the God we serve—in all that we do.

God inspired His Word to include in Psalm 119, two very descriptive words for the struggles of life.

The first Hebrew word is *onee* (Strong's word number 6040): which seems to portray according to the Dictionary of Biblical Languages, an emotional state of misery as an affliction. It is more the emotional pains that continues following physical pain. So emotional pain is more in focus with this word.

The second Hebrew word is *anah* (Strong's word number 6031): which seems to portray a scene of actual physical affliction, and of being bowed down or squished beneath a physical load. So this word would more seem to describe the actual event of physical pain not just the emotional pain that follows. So physical pain is more in focus with this word.

As we look at these seven passages, the words (*onee*/emotional pain) or (*anah*/physical pain) will help to guide us into the slight differences of meaning in these two words.

GOD'S _____ PLAN

First, review with me the lesson plan from Psalm 119's course on: *How to please God through every affliction He allows to come our way.* Do you have them marked yet in your Bible? We each should take the time to do this.

I already have them marked because there are so many times that I have to turn to this very place to explain to saints why so many troubles seem to never go away. In fact, for many saints, troubles just seem to multiply.

God wants to refine us, transform us, and use us through overflowing troubles: *if we will just understand, surrender, and co-operate with His plan.*

If not, if we resist and refuse to believe the truths about our changeless God: *we can get bitter, troubled, distant from God, and cold.*

It comes down to a choice: trust God or not. We are never really very far from storms in life. Each of these seven verses God's Word offers a lesson on how AFFLICTION¹ is used by our Faithful God, because it:

PUSHES US INTO GOD'S WORD: Psalm 119:50 *This is my comfort in my affliction, For Your word has given me life.*

PULLS US BACK ONTO THE PATH: Psalm 119:67 *Before I was afflicted I went astray, But now I keep Your word.*

CHISELS GOD'S PLAN INTO OUR LIFE: Psalm 119:71 *It is good for me that I have been afflicted, That I may learn Your statutes*

TEACHES US THAT GOD IS FAITHFUL: Psalm 119:75 *I know, O LORD, that Your judgments are right, And that in faithfulness You have afflicted me.*

KEEPS US FOCUSED ON OUR TEACHER: Psalm 119:92 *Unless Your law had been my delight, I would then have perished in my affliction.*

FORCES US TO TEST HIS PROMISES: Psalm 119:107 *I am afflicted very much; Revive me, O LORD, according to Your word.*

BRINGS GOD TO OUR DOORSTEP: Psalm 119:153 *Consider my affliction and deliver me, For I do not forget Your law.*

Secondly we need to remember:

WHAT QUALIFIES AS AN AFFLICTION GOD CAN USE?

Have you ever asked yourself: *What qualifies in God's eyes as an affliction?*² Do you know how to find an answer to such questions? Simply trace a topic as it unfolds in the Scriptures from its first occurrence onward.

¹ AFFLICTION: is described in Psalm 119 by two words; the first *onec* (6040) seems to portray an emotional state of misery as an affliction; the second word *anah* (6031) seems to portray a physical affliction of being bowed down or squished beneath a physical load.

For example, to find where “affliction” occurs in the Scriptures, you can look the word up in a Bible study tool such as *Strong’s Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible* and then read each reference in your Bible, along with any surrounding verses that affect its context.

When I did this with the word “affliction,” I found thirty-seven occurrences in the Old Testament, and the Scripture usages describe at least seven different forms of troubles that God says qualify as an affliction that He wants to use in our lives.

In Genesis 16 God says, **ill treatment** by others qualifies as an affliction.

In Genesis 29 God says a **lack of love** qualifies as an affliction.

In Genesis 31 God says, **lost wages and broken promises** qualify as an affliction.

In Genesis 41 God says, **hatred, jealousy, and betrayal** qualify as an affliction.

In Exodus 3 God says, **underpayment and overwork** qualifies as an affliction.

In I Samuel 1 God says, **the inability to have children** qualifies as an affliction.

In II Samuel 16 God says, **unkind words, slander, accusations, and insults** qualify as an affliction.

If you are struggling emotionally or physically right now, stop and reflect upon the lives of these Old Testament saints and what they faced: hatred, jealousy, and betrayal; a bad job situation; family disharmony; infertility; and verbal insults, accusations, and unkind words.

Now look with me at each of these situations God gives us as lessons, and by His grace, let’s learn a lesson from each.

1. Ill treatment by others _____ in life qualifies as an affliction that God wants to use in our lives:

The Angel of the LORD said to [Hagar]: “Behold, you are with child, and you shall bear a son. You shall call his name Ishmael, because the LORD has heard **your affliction**” (Genesis 16:11).

In God’s sight, being ill treated by jealous and vengeful bosses is an affliction.

Hagar’s boss—her mistress, Abram’s wife Sarai—was jealous when Hagar became with child by Abram, and Sarai held Hagar in contempt. But God said, “I am the

God who sees your affliction, Hagar, and it is not right for Sarai to mistreat you this way, so I will bless you.”

If you are mistreated by someone who has authority over you and it is making life hard at home, at work, or at school, God says, “I want you to learn from Me in that situation; I know about it and will work good for you through it.” (See Romans 8:28.)

2. _____ of love from others around us in life qualifies as an affliction that God wants to use in our lives:

Leah conceived and bore a son, and she called his name Reuben; for she said, “The LORD has surely looked on **my affliction**. Now therefore, my husband will love me” (Genesis 29:32).

God considered Jacob’s lack of love for Leah to be her affliction. After Jacob labored for seven years to earn Laban’s permission to marry Rachel, the pretty and well-favored daughter, he was tricked by Laban who gave him Leah instead—the older and less-favored daughter. Jacob never wanted Leah as his wife, so when he had to work another seven years to marry the one whom he really loved, that carried over into the marriage.

Just as it wasn’t right for Hagar to be mistreated by her mistress, it wasn’t right for Leah to be unloved by her husband. God said, “I see your affliction, Leah. Your husband should love and cleave to you, and I want you to know I care about your suffering.” Can you relate to that? Do you have a lack of love in some relationship? Are you experiencing an undeserved lack of love simply because of not being liked? That’s an affliction, and God wants to teach you some great things through suffering.

3. Lost _____ at work and broken promises from our employers qualifies as an affliction that God wants to use in our lives:

Jacob was angry and rebuked Laban, and Jacob answered and said to Laban: “What is my trespass? What is my sin, that you have so hotly pursued me? ... Thus I have been in your house twenty years; I served you fourteen years for your two daughters, and six years for your flock, and you have changed my wages ten times. Unless the God of my father, the God of Abraham and the Fear of Isaac, had been with me, surely now you would have sent me away empty-handed. God has **seen my affliction** and the labor of my hands, and rebuked you last night” (Genesis 31:36, 41-42).

God viewed Jacob's lost wages and Laban's broken promises to him as an affliction. A modern-day example of such a trial is the plight of many American workers who suffer because of the downsizing of the large companies to which they'd given the best years of their lives. In an effort to save money, the oldest employees are let go first so the companies don't have to pay retirement benefits.

God says to those enduring such a hardship, "I know about your lost wages and the company's broken promises, and I intend to work out My perfect plan for your life through that affliction." Your job situation is part of the afflictions God promises to use for your good—no matter how it may look at the time.

4. Hatred, jealousy, and _____ by those around us in life qualifies as an affliction that God wants to use in our lives:

The name of the second he called Ephraim: "For God has caused me to be fruitful in the **land of my affliction**" (Genesis 41:52).

The hatred, jealousy, and betrayal Joseph suffered at the hands of his family and employers, plus the neglect and broken promises of his friends, was seen by God as "affliction" (Psalm 105:17-19). Yet, his trials were not removed for a long time; instead, the Lord worked behind the scenes to make Joseph fruitful in the midst of it all. After Joseph's character had been thoroughly proven, so he had unshakable confidence in the Lord, He took him from rags to riches by making him second in command in all of Egypt. Then God used him to save His people, Israel!

What is the lesson from Joseph's life? If you are experiencing any suffering, God says to you, "I am aware of every situation, but you need to go through the furnace of affliction to become more fruitful for Me. Do you remember when Shadrach, Meshach, and Abed-Nego were thrown into the fiery furnace because they refused to worship King Nebuchadnezzar's golden image? (See Daniel 3) The fire was so strong it burned up the soldiers who threw them in!

But the only thing God allowed to burn on the three Hebrews was the ropes binding their hands and feet. Then they were set free to walk with God in that fiery furnace! And He will walk with you through your own afflictions.

5. Underpayment and overwork _____ upon us by our jobs qualifies as an affliction that God wants to use in our lives:

The LORD said: “I have surely seen the **oppression** [affliction] of My people who are in Egypt, and have heard their cry because of their taskmasters, for I know their sorrows” (Exodus 3:7).

The word “oppression” means “affliction.” The underpayment and overwork of the Hebrews by unkind and evil masters was an affliction, and happens all the time to American workers. Many are underpaid and practically kill themselves overworking just to make ends meet.

But God says, “I see that affliction of yours, but instead of fighting, I want to strengthen and teach you some valuable lessons as you go through it.”

6. The inability to have _____ that some go through in life also qualifies as an affliction that God wants to use in our lives:

[Hannah] was in bitterness of soul, and prayed to the LORD and wept in **anguish** [affliction] (1 Samuel 1:10).

Anguish is “affliction”—a squashing—which is the depth of emotion Hannah displayed as she wept. Her inability to have children caused her great suffering, but the cruelty of her “fellow wife” and the insensitivity to Hannah’s pain compounded the problem.

Are there things you are unable to do and have no control over it? Perhaps you have limitations or disabilities for which people afflict you and give you pain. God says to you, “I know all about your struggles; I am not blind to them, and through your furnace of affliction I am going to teach you something valuable you can never learn any other way.” That is always the lesson of affliction.

7. Unkind words, slander, accusations, and _____ from those we go through life with at home and at work, qualifies as an affliction that God wants to use in our lives:

“It may be that the LORD will look on my **affliction**, and that the LORD will repay me with good for his cursing this day” (2 Samuel 16:12).

This was a real low point in David's life. His adversary, Shimei, hurled unkind words, slander, accusations, and insults at him when David's son, Absalom, won the heart of the people and ran his father out of town. On top of that, Shimei, a descendant of King Saul, screamed venomous words and cursed David, and threw dirt and kicked rocks at him.

But David responded well in spite of his heartache, "Maybe You, oh Lord, will repay me with good for the cursings I've endured today. I want to walk with You through this fiery furnace of affliction so You can burn away anything from my life keeping me from serving You more fully." This is the attitude God wants to see in us as well.

So, if you are struggling emotionally or physically right now, stop and reflect upon the lives of these Old Testament saints and what they faced: hatred, jealousy, and betrayal; a bad job situation; family disharmony; infertility; and verbal insults, accusations, and unkind words.

Which leads us to the next part of this study, what are the actual:

LESSONS IN THE SCHOOL OF AFFLICTION

Because seven is the number of divine completion, it seems God has engineered a complete set of messages on affliction in these seven verses in Psalm 119. The primary lesson is affliction is purposed to drive us to God and His Word:

to find comfort (v. 50); to obtain the will of God (v. 67); to follow His divine plan (v. 71); to learn of God's faithfulness (v. 75); to find restoration and transformation (v. 92); to hear His voice walking with us in our affliction (v. 107); and to get special deliverance (v. 153).

With these verses the Lord as our Ultimate Teacher has traced how He uses afflictions as a part of His divine plan to build our lives into a masterpiece for His glory!

1. God uses affliction because it: PUSHES US INTO GOD'S WORD: Only God's Word can really help us in afflictions – cards, visits, gifts, activities all can only offer temporary relief through distraction or amusement.

Psalm 119:50: *This is my comfort in my affliction* [#6040—emotional], *for Your word* [#565—reading the divine Word to obtain the will of God]² *has given me life.*

Only God's Word can really help us in afflictions. Cards, visits, gifts, and activities only offer temporary relief through distractions or amusement. Suffering through emotional affliction ought to drive us to read the Word of God to find comfort. Affliction can deaden us, but the Word gives us life.

The Blessing: Affliction causes us to see God's perfect Word more clearly.

2. God uses affliction because it: PULLS US BACK ONTO THE PATH: A consistent life is built by afflictions. God uses afflictions to pull us back and keep us on His path for our lives. Often we only call when we need something – so He gives us reason to call.

Psalm 119:67: *Before I was afflicted* [#6031—physical] *I went astray, but now I keep Your word* [#565—reading the divine Word to obtain the will of God].

A consistent life is built by afflictions. God uses physical afflictions to pull us back and keep our lives on His path. It's common to hear someone who has gone through physical affliction say, "I was going my own way before I had this problem (car accident, illness, disability), but I am once more following God's path!"

Affliction can stop us from straying away from God, so "now I keep". Have you ever been driving late at night and slowly drifted to the side of the road? Remember when you hit those rumble strips and the way you jerked the wheel -- so that you got back on the road quickly? Afflictions are the rumble strips God uses to make us jerk our wheel of life to get us back on the road and to keep us from heading into the ditch!

The Blessing: Affliction causes us to see God's path of holiness more clearly.

3. God uses affliction because it: CHISELS GOD'S PLAN INTO OUR LIFE: There are truths and lessons we only can learn in the furnace of trouble. And remember in the fiery furnace of Daniel 3, only the things that kept them from walking properly

² As discussed in past lessons, there are ten synonyms for the Bible in Psalm 119; verses 50, 67, 71, 75, 92, 107, and 153 contain four of these synonyms. Their number designations are from *Strong's Exhaustive Concordance of the Bible*; their descriptions are from the "Psalm 119's Ten Synonyms for the Bible" list from past lessons.

were burned away! So affliction scrapes away what is not part of God’s plans for our lives – people, possessions, positions, and securities...

Psalm 119:71: *It is good for me that I have been **afflicted** [#6031—physical], that I may learn Your statutes [#2706—using the divine plans, or specifications, to build the ultimate life].*

The Hebrew word behind the English word “statutes” means “God’s divine plans.” God has plans, similar to a schematic or blueprint. They are like engineering drawings for how He designed life to be lived.

Verse 71 says to understand or learn those plans, it’s good that we be afflicted, because there are truths and lessons we can only learn in God’s School of Affliction. Affliction scrapes away what is not part of His plan for our lives—people, possessions, positions, and so forth. Physical problems teach us to follow the Lord’s plan.

The Blessing: Affliction causes us to see God’s plan for our lives more clearly.

4. God uses affliction because it: TEACHES US THAT GOD IS FAITHFUL: God’s unchanging faithfulness is learned best in affliction. Afflictions remind us that everything the Lord does is good, right, and the best thing there could be for us.

Psalm 119:75: *I know, O LORD, that Your judgments [#4941—building life upon the divine decisions—judgments that are always true and vindicate] are right, and that in faithfulness You have **afflicted** [#6031—physical] me.*

Afflictions are very personal “me”. God’s unchanging faithfulness is learned best in affliction; everything He does is good, right, and the most loving choice possible for His children. Isn’t it a great blessing to realize He knows us, and is monitoring our entire lives.

The Blessing: Affliction causes us to see God’s pruning of our lives more clearly.

5. God uses affliction because it: KEEPS US FOCUSED ON OUR TEACHER: The onset of troubles marks the beginning of a personal tutorial with our Divine Teacher. Affliction is an opportunity to “delight” in Him or for us to “perish” in our troubles.

Psalm 119:92: *Unless Your law* [#8451—receiving the divine instructions from the Ultimate Teacher who gives perfect instructions that restore and transform] *had been my delight, I would then have perished in my affliction* [#6040—emotional].

Affliction “perishes” us or squishes our lives under its weight. The onset of troubles marks the beginning of our Divine Teacher’s personal tutorial. Afflictions are opportunities to either *delight* in Him or *perish* in our troubles. Many people go through life without knowing the reviving power of God’s Word. As a result, they become buried in an emotional avalanche when tribulation comes—and some even give up. So Ezra was saying in verse 92: “Unless You instruct me as my Divine Teacher, I will perish by becoming smothered or buried in my emotional affliction!”

When Americans have emotional afflictions, many seek escape through medication, alcohol, or a variety of amusements. Do you know the meaning of “amusement”? The alpha primitive “a” means “not”; “muse” means “to think.” In other words, they look for distractions to divert thinking so their minds can go into neutral.

But God says, “What you need is My Law; you need to get My Divine Instructions in you to restore and transform you so you don’t perish when you feel buried emotionally.” The Lord will bring us back with His Word (Psalm 119:25-32), restore our soul (Psalm 23:3), and make us whole again (Psalm 19:7-14).

The Blessing: Affliction causes us to see God’s source of hope more clearly.

6. God uses affliction because it: FORCES US TO TEST HIS PROMISES: Affliction usually increases, as we get older. But God's Word will always renew, refresh, and revive.

Psalm 119:107: *I am afflicted* [#6031—physical] *very much* [all kinds of physical afflictions]; *revive me, O LORD, according to Your word* [#1697—hearing the Divine Voice walking us all the way through life].

Often we know so much more than we experience. Affliction is a reality check. Afflictions seem to grow through life to be more and more. After disasters people often listen better.

The word for “very much” is the same Hebrew word used of the waters of the Flood covering the earth (Genesis 7,18-19) and of the plagues covering Egypt (Exodus 9.3 on cattle; Exodus 9.18 the hail; Exodus 10.14 the locusts).

The word for “revive” is actually save my life and is the same Hebrew word as used for the rescue of Rahab from Jericho as the walls crumbled and everyone else was destroyed and she and her family alone were rescued (Joshua 2.13; 6.17, 25). Afflictions allow us to experientially test God’s promises.

As we age, it’s common to think life will get easier because we won’t have to face as many struggles just to survive. But that’s not really true. Going through afflictions is a lifelong process. As we get older, the nature of the afflictions simply changes. But one thing will never change: God's Word will always renew, refresh, and revive.

Having witnessed many of God’s children at the final stages of their life, I’ve found what has comforted them most is the reading of God’s Word because they hear the Divine Voice walking with them in their afflictions.

The Blessing: Affliction causes us to see God’s offer of personal revival more clearly.

7. God uses affliction because it: BRINGS GOD TO OUR DOORSTEP: When Ezra said deliver me – he was asking the Lord to come to him with what he needed. Isn’t that what a deliveryman does? He brings exactly what we need? And that is the final blessing of affliction. Affliction comes with a promise from God for a special delivery. He comes right to us – with everything we need.

Psalm 119:153: *Consider my **affliction** [#6040—emotional] and deliver me, for I do not forget **Your law** [#8451—receiving the divine instructions from the Ultimate Teacher who gives perfect instructions that restore and transform].*

Afflictions will continue for our entire lifetime, “consider” as You watch me. Affliction comes with a promise from God for a special deliverance once we’ve learned the lessons He’s designed for us. In the meantime, through His Word He draws near to us and provides everything we need to bear up under the trials.

The Blessing: Affliction causes us to see God’s ability to rescue us more clearly.

Finally, so that we aren’t merely hearers of God's Word, let me ask you, “Are you”:

LEARNING PERSONAL LESSONS IN THE SCHOOL OF AFFLICTIONS

What do you sense is the most important lesson that our Faithful God, the Ultimate Teacher, wants you to personally learn from these seven beautiful portraits of affliction?

1. If you are struggling emotionally or physically right now, stop and reflect upon the lives of these Old Testament saints and what they faced: hatred, jealousy, and betrayal; a bad job situation; family disharmony; infertility; and verbal insults, accusations, and unkind words.

How did they survive such afflictions? They turned to God and His Word and found comfort, strength, and deliverance in His perfect timing.

So instead of opting to escape afflictions through distractions, or getting even with those who are mistreating you, pray: “Oh Lord, my Divine Teacher, what do You want me to learn in this situation? Is there anything keeping me from walking more closely with You? If so, reveal what it is and then remove it. As I go through this furnace of affliction, teach me to find comfort through Your Word and to follow Your will for my life.”

2. Next, to deepen these truths, remember Jeremiah’s hard life, and the conclusion he came to that gave him fresh, daily hope and a new start in every low point of life? It is in Lamentation 3:22-24.

Through the LORD’s mercies we are not consumed, Because His compassions fail not. ²³ They are new every morning; Great is Your faithfulness. ²⁴ “ The LORD is my portion,” says my soul, “ Therefore I hope in Him!”

In our darkest hour, deepest pain, hardest times, most hopeless situations—Someone is CLOSER at those moments than any other time. Remember how in 1917 a 51 year-old pastor had to leave the ministry for health reasons? His life was hard, jobs were so scarce he supported his family selling door-to-door in Kentucky; but he did so humming these words as his plan for facing physical and emotional afflictions (#372 Living for Jesus). Let’s use those words from our hymnbooks to see this lesson. Take turns reading aloud around your table the words of two of Chisholm’s most well-known hymns:

Living for Jesus a life that is true, striving to please Him in all that I do; Yielding allegiance glad hearted and free, this is the pathway of blessing for me.

Oh Jesus Lord and Savior, I give myself to Thee, for Thou in Thine atonement didst give Thyself for me; I own no other Master, my heart shall be Thy Throne; my life I give henceforth to live—Oh Christ for Thee alone!

And what was the result just 6 years later? Thomas Chisholm wrote out his findings in the way of a song: #43 Great is Thy Faithfulness.

“Great is Thy faithfulness,” O God my Father, There is no shadow of turning with Thee; Thou changest not, Thy compassions, they fail not As Thou hast been Thou forever wilt be.

Summer and winter, and springtime and harvest, Sun, moon and stars in their courses above, Join with all nature in manifold witness To Thy great faithfulness, mercy and love.

Pardon for sin and a peace that endureth, Thine own dear presence to cheer and to guide; Strength for today and bright hope for tomorrow, Blessings all mine, with ten thousand beside!

Chorus: “Great is Thy faithfulness!” “Great is Thy faithfulness!” Morning by morning new mercies I see; All I have needed Thy hand hath provided— “Great is Thy faithfulness,” Lord, unto me!

Why not use Chisholm’s words as a tool given by God to minister to your heart each time emotional and physical adversities come your way?

APPENDIX:

A BIBLICAL PERSPECTIVE ON SUFFERING AS BELIEVERS

First, God's Word tells us that enduring lifelong struggles is inevitable for us as believers³:

1 Thessalonians 3:2-4 and sent Timothy, our brother and minister of God, and our fellow laborer in the gospel of Christ, to establish you and encourage you concerning your faith, 3 that no one should be shaken by these afflictions; for you yourselves know **that we are appointed to this**. 4 For, in fact, we told you before when we were with you that we would suffer tribulation, just as it happened, and you know. NKJV

2 Timothy 3:12 Yes, and **all** who desire to live godly in Christ Jesus **will suffer** persecution. NKJV

Second, we are called to participate in the sufferings of Christ⁴:

³ See also Mat. 5:11-12; Mark 10:29-30; I Peter 4:12.

⁴ See also Phil. 1:29; 3:10-11.

1 Peter 2:20-23 For what credit is it if, when you are beaten for your faults, you take it patiently? **But when you do good and suffer, if you take it patiently, this is commendable before God. 21 For to this you were called**, because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow His steps: 22 “Who committed no sin, Nor was deceit found in His mouth”; 23 who, when He was reviled, did not revile in return; when He suffered, He did not threaten, but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously; NKJV

1 Peter 4:12-16 Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; 13 **but rejoice to the extent that you partake of Christ’s sufferings**, that when His glory is revealed, you may also be glad with exceeding joy. 14 If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you. On their part He is blasphemed, but on your part He is glorified. 15 But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people’s matters. 16 Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter. NKJV

Third, God's Word promises wonderful treasures for those who endure all forms of afflictions for Christ's sake:

All of life’s pains, struggles, and hardships are so small compared to what they can produce in eternal terms: 2 Corinthians 4:16-18 (NKJV) Therefore we **do not lose heart**. Even though our **outward man is perishing**, yet the inward man is being **renewed day by day**. 17 For our **light affliction**, which is **but for a moment**, is **working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory**, 18 while we do not look at the things which are seen, but at the things which are not seen. For the **things which are seen are temporary**, but the things which are not seen are eternal.

Death brings the ultimate blessing of actually being with Jesus: Philippians 1:21, 23 For to me, to live is Christ, and **to die is gain**. 23 For I am hard pressed between the two, having a desire to depart and be with Christ, which is far better. NKJV

God will finally bring justice to all unjustly harmed when Jesus returns: 2 Thessalonians 1:5-7 which is manifest evidence of the righteous judgment of God, that you may be counted worthy of the kingdom of God, for which you also suffer; 6 since **it is a righteous thing with God to repay with tribulation those who trouble you**, 7 and to give you who are troubled rest with us when the Lord Jesus is revealed from heaven with His mighty angels, NKJV

Struggles and afflictions mature us spiritually. James 1:2-4 My brethren, count it all joy when you **fall into various trials**, 3 knowing that the **testing of your faith**

produces patience.⁴ But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing. NKJV

Affliction brings us Heavenly rewards. James 1:12 Blessed is the man who endures temptation; for when he has been approved, he will receive the crown of life which the Lord has promised to those who love Him. NKJV

Fourth, God always is using our suffering, trails, and afflictions for His purposes:

Persecution often helps us spread the gospel to other places. Acts 8:1, 4 Now Saul was consenting to his death. At that time a great persecution arose against the church which was at Jerusalem; and they were all scattered throughout the regions of Judea and Samaria, except the apostles. 4 Therefore those who were scattered went everywhere preaching the word. NKJV

Persecution and other afflictions help to reveal Christ in us. 2 Corinthians 4:7-11 But we have this **treasure in earthen vessels**, that the excellence of the power may be of God and not of us. 8 We are **hard pressed** on every side, yet not crushed; we are **perplexed**, but not in despair; 9 **persecuted**, but not forsaken; **struck down**, but not destroyed—10 always carrying about in the body the dying of the Lord Jesus, that the **life of Jesus also may be manifested in our body**. 11 For we who live are always delivered to death for Jesus' sake, that the life of Jesus also may be manifested in our mortal flesh. NKJV

Persecution and trials help to encourage others to be bold in their testimony. Philippians 1:12-14 But I want you to know, brethren, that the things which happened to me have actually turned out for the furtherance of the gospel, 13 so that it has become evident to the whole palace guard, and to all the rest, that my chains are in Christ; 14 and most of the brethren in the Lord, having become confident by my chains, are much more bold to speak the word without fear. NKJV

The sufferings of Christ's saints always glorifies Him. I Peter 1:7 These [all kinds of trials] have come so that your faith -- of greater worth than gold, which perishes even though refined by fire -- may be proved genuine and may result in praise, glory and honor when Jesus Christ is revealed. (NIV)