

A Light in the Valley

Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven. (Matthew 5:16)

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A Hedge of Protection...

by: Kris Brewer

Comedian Tim Hawkins has a bit that he does in which he talks about how many Christians pray. In the midst of that comedy piece, Hawkins talks about how many will pray for a “hedge of protection” around a person or family. This is an idea that many people in the religious world use to talk about how God is protecting them from something. This is also an idea that King David expressed as he was writing the 139th Psalm. Consider his thought:

*You have hedged me behind and before, And laid Your hand upon me.
(Psalm 139:5)*

When David wrote this, he had a completely different idea in mind than most of the people who would ask God for such a “hedge” today. With this brief study, we want to consider the difference between how the typical religious person prays for this “hedge” and how David (and therefore others who would be servants like him) would view this idea.

David's Approach...

When David wrote concerning the hedge that was laid behind him and before him, he had faced many trials. While this particular Psalm does not give us a specific instance that brought about David's thoughts, we do know how difficult his life had been. David, after slaying Goliath, would serve King Saul faithfully for some time. It would not, however, be long until he had fallen out of favor with Saul. In fact, it was not long before God declared that Saul was going to lose his kingdom, and that it would go to a man who was better than he was. That man was David! (1 Samuel 13:14, 15:27-29)

David, it would seem, had things going his way. However, that was not to be the case for some time. David ended up being anointed by Samuel to be the next king, but would have to wait several years until he could ascend to the throne. During the interim period of time, David had to flee from Saul. His

life was very difficult, spending much of his time hiding in caves. At one point, he had the opportunity to kill Saul, but declared that he was not willing to raise his hand against God's anointed (1 Samuel 24:2-7).

During his time of fleeing, David fought against the Philistines. He grew stronger and gathered men to him that would be his "mighty men." These men would be dedicated to David, and would fight for him through thick and thin. In all of this, David never had an easy time. He faced difficulties, he faced hunger, he faced enemies that sought to take his life. He was forced to be on the run constantly. His life was threatened constantly.

It was in this type of environment that David could write about God placing a hedge in front of him and behind him. He was happy for the protection of God, but that protection was not something that would keep any harm at all from coming to him. God's protection did not keep every bad thing from coming upon David. There were many things that he suffered, but was still under that protection from God!

Modern Christian Approach...

Many who identify themselves as preachers in the religious world today work at selling an idea that is simply not biblical. They speak of praying a "hedge of protection" around people to protect them from anything negative that might come upon them. Their idea is that this "hedge of protection" will insulate them from anything bad that could possibly happen. They are never going to have to worry about having a well paying job. They are never going to have to worry about getting sick. They are never going to have to worry about an accident happening to them. That is the basis of Tim Hawkins' comedy sketch, and it is humorous because there is a seed of truth to it. It reflects the very idea that many people have in mind when they ask for God's "hedge of protection."

God has never promised that He will shield His people from anything bad ever happening to them. Just the opposite is true. An examination of the situation at the time of the book of Revelation shows that God told His people that they would soon suffer greatly:

Do not fear any of those things which you are about to suffer. Indeed, the devil is about to throw some of you into prison, that you may be tested, and you will have tribulation ten days. Be faithful until death, and I will give you the crown of life. (Revelation 2:10)

Peter also warned his readers that they may have to suffer for the cause of Christ:

Beloved, do not think it strange concerning the fiery trial which is to try you, as though some strange thing happened to you; 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. 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. But let none of you suffer as a murderer, a thief, an evildoer, or as a busybody in other people's matters. Yet if anyone suffers as a Christian, let him not be ashamed, but let him glorify God in this matter. (1 Peter 4:12–16)

Instead of having an idea in our minds that God's protection means that nothing bad could ever happen to us, we should view His protection more like David. David could praise God for His "hedge of protection" even knowing all of the bad things that he had gone through. He was able to be strengthened by all that he went through!

Jesus, as He prayed for His followers shortly before His death, asked the Father to care for His disciples:

I do not pray that You should take them out of the world, but that You should keep them from the evil one. (John 17:15)

He was not asking for God to keep His disciples from all bad things that could happen to them, but rather to protect them from Satan, that roaring lion who would be stalking around seeking someone to devour (1 Peter 5:8). God has no problem keeping His faithful children protected from Satan. There is nothing that can break the bond of protection that God has given to His children:

For I am persuaded that neither death nor life, nor angels nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come, nor height nor depth, nor any other created thing, shall be able to separate us from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord. (Romans 8:38–39)

We have the same type of "hedge of protection" that David had from God. He would watch over David and provide what was needed for Him, and He will watch over us and provide what is needed for us. We may not be granted physical protection from the bad things that can happen in life, but we can have confidence in the spiritual protection that we have in Him when we remain faithful:

For this reason I also suffer these things; nevertheless I am not ashamed, for I know whom I have believed and am persuaded that He is able to keep what I have committed to Him until that Day. (2 Timothy 1:12)

Using Our Influence for Good

by: Gilbert Alexander

A pressing need exists in the body of Christ today that the members of the body have a good influence on each other and on the world. Far too often, we allow the world to influence us rather than resisting those appeals and pressures. We need to set our course in the way of righteousness and thus exert an influence on the world. We must be swayed by good influences rather than evil ones (I Thes.5:15; Heb.13:7; II Thes.3:7-9). How can we be a good influence? What must we do?

First we must observe God's law of love and consideration of others (Matt. 7:12; Rom.13:9,10). That means that we will be treating others as we would like to be treated. It means that we do nothing to harm others, but that we do good, even in the face of evil. The question is: are we doing this and doing it well?

Second, we must give no occasion to the enemy to speak reproachfully. David's sin with Bathsheba gave great occasion to the enemies of the Lord to blaspheme (II Sam.12:7-14). Idlers, busybodies, and others who are careless of their ways give occasion to the enemy to speak reproachfully (I Timothy 5:13,14). It is so easy for us to get out of place that we must be very careful. We must do the right thing in the right way so that our good may not be evil spoken of (Rom.14:16). Paul was very careful in the handling of the relief of the saints to avoid any occasion for people to find fault (II Cor.8:16-24).

Third, a good influence is a positive influence in its effect. We are to be the salt of the earth (Matt.5:13). We are to be lights, having an en-light-ening influence (Matt.5:14-26). We are to show to others the wisdom of God in our lives (Co1.4:5). If we do this, the fruit of our conduct will be in stark contrast to the fruit that comes from ignoring and neglecting God's wisdom - in speech, in

Study Opportunities

Sunday Bible Study: 10:00 AM
Sunday Worship Assembly: 11:00 AM

Meeting At

Homewood Suites of Bozeman
1023 E Baxter Ln,
Bozeman, MT 59715

Everyone Welcome!

behavior, in our honesty and fairness, in our families, in our dress, and in all other particulars of our lives. We will also be an example to the believers and thus an encouragement to them (I Tim.4:12). Our influence will be toward good works in all things (Titus 2:7,8).

Fourth, if we would be a good influence, we must exercise care and caution that no occasion of stumbling be seen in our behavior. We don't want our lives of service to be blamed (II Cor.6:3); hence, we must be careful even in things that are right in themselves (I Cor.8:9; 10:32,33; Matt.18:6,7). We must be mindful of those whose understanding is weak, and be careful not to trample upon their consciences. We must seek always the good of all.

Is our manner of life such in all things that our influence is for good-making better, encouraging and strengthening others? Can it be said of us: To know him is to love him and to appreciate his good manner of life? Or does knowing us bring embarrassment, disappointment, and shame? Let us be an influence for good.

Various Trials

by: Chadwick Brewer

“Count it all joy, my brothers, when you meet trials of various kinds, for you know that the testing of your faith produces steadfastness. And let steadfastness have its full effect, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.” - James 1:2-4

Trials are called trials because they try us. They are hard, ever changing, and frankly, no fun. Our trials can come from so many unlikely sources and can make us feel like we are being stretched to our breaking point.

Through all of this, James tells us to count it all joy. This seems to be an odd statement since trials seem to be the exact opposite of a joyous time. James wrote to the twelve tribes of the dispersion. Those who had lost their homes, jobs, and friends due to persecution.

Part of what James is asking his reader to do, is have a positive attitude when facing their sufferings/trials by looking at the good God is working in their lives. God, through our trials, tests our faith and makes us steadfast. When we allow steadfastness to have its full effect, we will become perfect and complete, lacking in nothing.

With a positive attitude and our eyes on the work God is doing in us, we can count trials as joy.

Being Discreet

by: Cynthia Brewer

***Ladies
Corner***

In Titus 2:5, one of the things we are told that older women are to admonish younger women to do is “be discreet.” Often we think of being discreet as being secretive, or not easily noticed. The word that is used by Paul here, though, is one that means, “of sound mind, self-controlled” according to Vine’s Expository Dictionary. The first definition of the word “discreet” in the Merriam-Webster online dictionary is “having or showing discernment or good judgment in conduct and especially in speech: prudent.” There is a woman described in the Bible whose attitude, speech, and actions reflect this characteristic of being discreet. Her name is Abigail.

We are told about a man named Nabal and his wife Abigail in 1 Samuel 25 (I encourage you to read the full account there). Nabal was a rich man who is described as “harsh and evil in all his doings,” while Abigail is said to be a “woman of good understanding and beautiful appearance” (1 Samuel 25:3). David, who had been anointed by God to be Israel’s next king, was hiding from King Saul who was trying to kill him. David sent ten of his young men to peacefully ask Nabal for provisions for the coming feast day, because they had been protecting Nabal’s shepherds while they were in that area. Nabal refused, acting like he did not know who David was or who these servants really were. When David’s men reported to him, he told them to get their swords ready and took 400 men with him to attack Nabal (1 Samuel 25:4-13).

One of Nabal’s servants told Abigail what had happened, and attested to the fact that David’s men had been good to them and protected them. He asked Abigail to “know and consider what you will do, for harm is determined against our master and against all his household. For he is such a scoundrel that one cannot speak to him.” Nabal’s own men realized that he was not a man with whom one could reason. He pleaded with Abigail to find a way to stop the coming attack (1 Samuel 25:14-17).

At this point, consider what Abigail’s reaction might have been. More importantly, consider what your reaction might have been. Fear? Panic? Hysteria? It is easy for emotions to take over when we receive news that shocks and scares us. We may “lose our minds,” as the saying goes, instead of maintaining a sound mind. We may lose control of our emotions instead of being self-controlled. Those reactions, however, will not result in good decisions. When we are of sound mind and self-controlled—discreet—we can make good decisions. We can implement calm, wise, thoughtful action.

Abigail was of sound mind and self-controlled. She did not panic and become hysterical. She quickly organized the provisions needed by David and his men, gathering food and wine and having it loaded onto donkeys. She sent servants ahead with the food, and she came along behind them. We are told that David had said he would kill Nabal and all the men in his household, so Abigail was setting off to meet a very angry group of fighting men (1 Samuel 25:18-22)!

When she saw David, she dismounted from the donkey and bowed down before him (1 Samuel 25:23). Do you see the courage this action required? In his anger David was ready to kill, but Abigail went to meet him instead of running the other way. When we are of sound mind and self-controlled, we can have the courage to act, not flee.

Abigail then spoke to David, asking him to listen to her and disregard Nabal. She asked him to accept the provisions from her for his men. She acknowledged that he was fighting for God and showed that she had faith that God would protect him from Saul and make him king. She continued to point out that when he became king, he should not have guilt over unnecessary bloodshed (1 Samuel 25:24-31).

Do you see the wisdom in Abigail's actions and words? When we are of sound mind and self-controlled, we can speak words that are beneficial and wise. Abigail showed respect to David in the way she approached him and in the way she spoke to him. She reasoned with him. Her words were sincere, but not based on emotions. They were based on her ability to think clearly about what needed to be said. Notice that she essentially told David that what he intended to do was wrong, but she did it in a respectful and logical way. Can you imagine some women screaming out, "Please take the food and don't kill us!" while crying hysterically? Discreet does not describe that type of behavior.

David was grateful for Abigail. He praised God for sending her to meet him. He said that she had kept him from bloodshed and from avenging himself. He accepted her gifts and told Abigail, "Go up in peace to your house. See, I have heeded your voice and respected your person" (1 Samuel 25:32-35). When we are of sound mind and self-controlled, we can accomplish important work and gain the respect of others. Obviously not all people will listen and do the right thing as David did, especially if it means admitting they were wrong. However, we have a much better chance of convincing people of what is right if we approach them as Abigail approached David—with respect and reason.

When Abigail returned home, Nabal was having a big feast and was drunk, so she did not tell him anything until the next morning. When she told him what had happened, "he became like a stone" and after ten days God struck him dead (1 Samuel 25:36-38). God was clearly not pleased with Nabal's behavior! When we are of sound mind and self-controlled, we can do what is right even in hard circumstances. Abigail lived with a harsh, wicked husband. She maintained her faith and obedience to God despite her difficult situation. Do you think she feared what Nabal might do to her when he found out she had helped David? She did the right thing anyway (by providing for God's anointed and saving her own household from his anger), then told him what she had done. Again we see her calm, courageous disposition. When David heard that Nabal was dead, he sent a proposal to Abigail and she became his wife (1 Samuel 25:39-42).

Christian women are taught to be discreet. When we are of sound mind and self-controlled, we can make good decisions, have courage to act, speak wise reasonable words, accomplish important work, gain the respect of others, and be obedient to God even in difficult circumstances. Let us learn from Abigail's example and develop in ourselves a greater ability to be discreet.

Daily Bible Reading

April 2016

April 1 Psalms 1-6
April 4 Psalms 7-10
April 5 Psalms 11-16
April 6 Psalms 17-18
April 7 Psalms 19-22
April 8 Psalms 23-25
April 11 Psalms 26-29
April 12 Psalms 30-32
April 13 Psalms 33-35
April 14 Psalms 36-37
April 15 Psalms 38-40

April 18 Psalms 41-44
April 19 Psalms 45-48
April 20 Psalms 49-51
April 21 Psalms 52-55
April 22 Psalms 56-59
April 25 Psalms 60-63
April 26 Psalms 64-67
April 27 Psalms 68-69
April 28 Psalms 70-72
April 29 Psalms 73-74

Gallatin Valley Church of Christ
C/O Kris Brewer
PO Box 11111
Bozeman, MT 59719

Mail To:

www.gallatinvalleycoc.com