

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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Truly, God is Good...

by: Kris Brewer

Truly God is good to Israel, To such as are pure in heart. (Psalm 73:1)

As I begin this article, I believe it is imperative to convey to you, dear reader, that this is a much more “personal” article than I would normally pen. However, the events of the last couple of weeks in the life of my family have spurred my thinking, and I am hopeful that the thoughts that I now put to paper will be of great encouragement to others.

Over the last few days, I must, unfortunately, admit that there were times in which I have felt more like the psalmist Asaph from verse 2 rather than from verse 1:

*But as for me, my feet had almost stumbled; My steps had nearly slipped.
(Psalm 73:2)*

Like Asaph, I had allowed the circumstances that had arisen in my own life to bring doubt, and struggles with faith. Let me give just a bit of background. Two weeks ago, my wife and I had the opportunity to share our great joy with friends and family: We were expecting our 4th child! That happiness quickly changed to sorrow when at a

routine checkup, my wife was told the baby had no heartbeat. We had, like so many other couples, lost our baby.

It is my hope, that by writing a bit about the spiritual process that I have traversed in the last few days, I can encourage others that have either gone through the same tragedy, or who have faced similar tragedies in their own lives. There are several ideas that have been a part of my thoughts over the last few days, which I believe fit together with the grieving process that you can read much more about through psychology books. I hope that as you read and study the thoughts of this article, it might help you in your struggles of life, either now or in the future, when some type of challenge is sure to face you in life!

Everyone Struggles...

No matter how strong we might believe ourselves to be, the time comes when everyone has doubts, and when everyone struggles with faith. In fact, we are warned that just when we think we are at our strongest, that may very well be when we are our most vulnerable:

Therefore let him who thinks he stands take heed lest he fall. (1 Corinthians 10:12)

Sometimes, as Christians, we do not realize that even those we think of as being “strong in the faith” have times of weakness. We think that elders and deacons and preachers (and their wives) are somehow protected from the struggles that others face. This is simply not true! Those who have made it their life’s ambition to serve others in their times of trouble have the same types of troubles that enter into their own lives.

As I thought about the circumstances that faced our family, I could not help but think of the many friends that I have that have lost their precious children. I know many who have lost their babies before they were born. I know some who have had to bury their children, a proposition that seems completely unfair. I know aunts and uncles, brothers and sisters, and grandparents that have mourned over these losses, with parents. Most of all, I know that going through these circumstances could not be easy for them all. I have always been able to sympathize with these dear friends...but now I can empathize.

Struggles Can Lead to Doubt...

Asaph, as he looked around him at the prosperity of the wicked and then considered his own circumstances, had a moment of doubt in his faith. The same thing can happen to us today as well. When it appears as if the wicked have everything their hearts desire, and that nothing bad ever happens to them, it is easy to begin to doubt. It becomes easy to question God, and it becomes easy to begin to lose faith.

Satan Attacks When We Are Most Vulnerable...

There is no doubt that when we are at our weakest, Satan is there doing all that he can to dissuade us from serving the Lord. He will, as he did in the garden of Eden, lie to us about what is really going on around us. I realize that the devil is not going to speak to us audibly like he did to Eve, but that is his influence that we hear in our ears when we feel our faith begin to falter. That is him telling us that “a loving God wouldn’t have let your baby die!” That is him whispering in the ear, “You prayed so hard, and God didn’t care!” That is him making you wonder if praying for something else now is of any value.

Perhaps, when we are suffering the most is when we think we deserve a break from the attacks of Satan. But, that is not how he works. He works to exploit every possibility.

Be sober, be vigilant; because your adversary the devil walks about like a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. (1 Peter 5:8)

This imagery depicts for us the nature of our adversary. He is stalking us. He is hunting us. He will take every opportunity to strike when we are at our most vulnerable.

Is It All God's Fault?

In our weakened state, it is tempting to think that the whisperings of the devil are the truth. We did pray earnestly for our child, and yet something tragic happened. Was God ignoring our prayers? Does He not hear? Does He not listen? Worse yet, did He hear, and respond with such a negative answer?

It is beyond the scope of this article to explore all of the philosophical arguments and issues that can come to light when addressing the idea of evil in the world. However, the bottom line is that such tragedies exist in the world not because God is uncaring, but because of sin. Once sin entered the world, the utopia that God had created was fractured. With that came weakness, disease, and death. Those things are not respecters of persons; they attack all people indiscriminately. God has not promised the righteous that they will be spared from all sickness and sorrows. The very nature of the world we live in brings these things into our lives, regardless of our standing before God.

Other Faithful People Suffer...

Sometimes, in the midst of suffering, we think that we are the only ones that have to endure such difficulty, such heartache. We begin to think of how unfair it is that our lives are so difficult.

When we have time to honestly step back and evaluate our circumstances, it is clear that we are not the only ones who suffer. Peter told us that such would be the case. After the above warning about the nature of our adversary, the devil, Peter wrote:

Resist him, steadfast in the faith, knowing that the same sufferings are experienced by your brotherhood in the world. (1 Peter 5:9)

There are other faithful brethren who are not only facing the same types of struggles, but they are overcoming! Peter's writing is not given so that we might take some sort of sick pleasure in the fact that our brethren face the same difficulties that we do, but rather so that we can gain encouragement from their successes.

After reflection, I was reminded of the many friends that I have that have suffered similar losses to ours. One dear couple lost their baby much later in the pregnancy than we did. They had such grand expectations and excitement. They responded to their loss with complete faith, determined, like King David, to work diligently in serving the Lord so that they would one day be reunited with their child. I will never be able to express just how much encouragement they provided for me, both during that difficult time many years ago, and in the recent weeks as I recalled their wonderful example.

Another family had their child born with a terminal and debilitating condition. He was not

destined for a long life, but the time he spent on this earth was impactful. As I watched how our friends dealt with such difficulty, I was amazed at the faith that was shown. I saw parents, aunts and uncles, and grandparents (all of whom I count very dear friends) deal with the situation with grace and faith.

As I have viewed these circumstances, I have often wondered how they managed. I know that I never had the opportunity see their actions or reactions behind closed doors, and I certainly have no idea what might have been a part of their private thoughts. But, I do know where they all ended up. They praise the Lord, and celebrate the blessings that He has provided. Whatever the circumstances we might face, this is our goal. We must respond like Asaph, praising the Lord!

These great examples provide strength for those who are having to face similar difficult times. I wonder if they ever think about how much encouragement their faith provides to those who are looking on?

Seeing the Big Picture...

Part of the problem with dealing with a difficult circumstance is that we often become quite myopic. We become consumed by what is happening to us! There is a need to step back, and see the bigger picture. Asaph's plan of action was based on this idea.

When I thought how to understand this, It was too painful for me— Until I went into the sanctuary of God; Then I understood their end. (Psalm 73:16–17)

Asaph was reacting to the prosperity of the wicked, and his own perceived injustices. However, his approach is one that we can take for dealing with any difficult circumstance, including personal tragedy. We can appeal to the word of God, and gain the faith and confidence to continue on in faithful service!

Sometimes, we also have to consider the bigger picture immediately around us. I cannot and will not minimize any personal tragedy by declaring that someone needs to just “get over it.” That is not reasonable, nor fair. However, we might need to have a bit of a different perspective. My wife, in the midst of some of the most difficult times of this process, said to me something along these lines:

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!

“This is hard. But we still have 3 wonderful kids. Think how hard this would be for our friends who have lost their first child...”

That made me think of others, instead of only myself and my family. It made me consider their suffering, and remember their examples. It made me see the bigger picture, and gain encouragement from both those examples, and that of my own wife who showed such strength.

God is Good...

Asaph began his psalm by reminding the reader, “Truly God is good to Israel...” Perhaps he did not want his reader to doubt his conclusion as he addressed his struggles with faith. Like Asaph, we may have those things that arise in life that cause us to doubt, that cause us to struggle with our faith. But, hopefully, we reach the same conclusion that Asaph reached. God is truly good!

All we have to do to come to this realization is to see the many blessings that are provided to us by God on a constant basis. One of the greatest blessings that God provides, especially in difficult times, is the family we have in Christ. When we were suffering the most, our local spiritual family was there immediately to provide comfort, and many of the physical needs that arise in such times. There was no hesitation or consideration of personal inconvenience. Dear friends and physical family reached out from far away with loving thoughts, words of encouragement, and physical provisions as tokens of their support and concern. Even though distance separates us, we can feel like our friends are with us. As a couple of dear friends communicated to us: “We are with you in every way but physically.” Such sentiment is both comforting and encouraging!

Having a spiritual family that responds so graciously does not take away the pain, but it does help to shoulder the pain that is present. And that is what I think God intended when He designed the church for us.

Bear one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ. (Galatians 6:2)

When things are difficult, we can help one another shoulder the burdens that we face. We can encourage one another. We can build one another up. And we can comfort those who struggle. We have certainly experienced all of that first hand, and are thankful for it.

I will close with a slightly altered version of Asaph's conclusion:

Truly God is good to [us], To such as are pure in heart. (Psalm 73:1)

God is good to us. Let us never forget it, even when times are difficult! When we struggle with faith, let this be our compass that brings us back to the right perspective!

Giving and Receiving

Ladies

Coiner

by: Cynthia Brewer

There is a line in the Bob Dylan song “Forever Young” that says, “May you always do for others and let others do for you.” These words reflect a good sentiment, and one that is found in scripture. Galatians 6:9-10 says:

And let us not grow weary while doing good, for in due season we shall reap if we do not lose heart. Therefore, as we have opportunity, let us do good to all, especially to those who are of the household of faith.

We should be taking opportunities to help other people, both Christians and those who are not Christians. Special attention is given to our brothers and sisters in Christ, but we should do good things for anyone who needs our help. We are told that we are “created in Christ Jesus for good works, which God prepared beforehand that we should walk in them” (Ephesians 2:10). Those who have riches are told to be generous with those things:

Let them do good, that they be rich in good works, ready to give, willing to share, storing up for themselves a good foundation for the time to come, that they may lay hold on eternal life. (1 Timothy 6:18-19)

Doing good works in this life is part of serving God and will help us reach eternal life. We can never do enough good works to merit our salvation, but it is clear that God expects us to do good things in service to Him and to other people. If we sit around and do nothing, He will not be pleased with us.

There are many things that we can do for others, and different situations allow for different actions. Giving money or gifts, preparing food, cleaning houses, babysitting, opening our homes to guests, sending cards, and taking time to pray are some things that we can do to help. We can give of our riches and of our time. Doing things for others is rewarding in many ways. Paul tells us that Jesus said, “It is more blessed to give than to receive” (Acts 20:35).

Though he talked a lot about giving and sharing, Paul also found himself on the receiving end sometimes! He and Silas accepted the hospitality of Lydia (Acts 16:15) and of the jailer in Philippi (Acts 16:33-34). It seems that Paul stayed with disciples in many places that he traveled (Acts 14:28, 20:6, 21:4, 21:16). While he was in prison, there were people who visited him, helped him in his work, and took care of his needs. Paul spends most of his writing focused on spiritual things, but he does express gratitude toward these good people who helped him through difficult times. A few examples follow:

Yet I considered it necessary to send to you Epaphroditus, my brother, fellow worker, and fellow soldier, but your messenger and the one who ministered to my need; since he was

longing for you all, and was distressed because you had heard that he was sick. For indeed he was sick almost unto death; but God had mercy on him, and not only on him but on me also, lest I should have sorrow upon sorrow. Therefore I sent him the more eagerly, that when you see him again you may rejoice, and I may be less sorrowful. Receive him therefore in the Lord with all gladness, and hold such men in esteem; because for the work of Christ he came close to death, not regarding his life, to supply what was lacking in your service toward me. (Philippians 2:25-30)

Tychicus, a beloved brother, faithful minister, and fellow servant in the Lord, will tell you all the news about me. (Colossians 4:7)

Paul was even willing to ask for help when he needed it:

Be diligent to come to me quickly; for Demas has forsaken me, having loved this present world, and has departed for Thessalonica—Crescens for Galatia, Titus for Dalmatia. Only Luke is with me. Get Mark and bring him with you, for he is useful to me for ministry. And Tychicus I have sent to Ephesus. Bring the cloak that I left with Carpus at Troas when you come—and the books, especially the parchments. (2 Timothy 4:9-13)

Jesus himself accepted hospitality and gifts:

And being in Bethany at the house of Simon the leper, as He sat at the table, a woman came having an alabaster flask of very costly oil of spikenard. Then she broke the flask and poured it on His head. But there were some who were indignant among themselves, and said, “Why was this fragrant oil wasted? For it might have been sold for more than three hundred denarii and given to the poor.” And they criticized her sharply. But Jesus said, “Let her alone. Why do you trouble her? She has done a good work for Me. For you have the poor with you always, and whenever you wish you may do them good; but Me you do not have always. She has done what she could. She has come beforehand to anoint My body for burial. Assuredly, I say to you, wherever this gospel is preached in the whole world, what this woman has done will also be told as a memorial to her.” (Mark 14:3-9)

It is hard for some people to accept help from others. But, we need to realize that sometimes we are the ones who need to be receiving. God has given us families, both physical and spiritual, to help us and support us. We help each other. That means sometimes we give the help and sometimes we receive the help. Jesus would not deny the woman with the costly oil the opportunity to serve him. We should not let stubbornness or pride deny our brothers and sisters in Christ the opportunity to serve us! How can good works be done if no one will receive them?

The song referenced earlier says, “May you always do for others and let others do for you.” Galatians 6:2 tells us to “bear one another’s burdens...” The bearing of burdens, both spiritual and physical, goes both ways in our relationships. We give when we are able to give, and we receive when we need to receive. It is an arrangement that results in blessings for all of us and “fruit that abounds to your account” (Philippians 4:17).

Daily Bible Reading

August 2016

August 1	Psalms 73–75	August 17	Psalms 107
August 2	Psalms 76–77	August 18	Psalms 108–110
August 3	Psalms 78–79	August 19	Psalms 111–115
August 4	Psalms 80–82	August 22	Psalms 116–118
August 5	Psalms 83–86	August 23	Psalms 119:1–48
August 8	Psalms 87–89	August 24	Psalms 119:49–112
August 9	Psalms 90–91	August 25	Psalms 119:113–176
August 10	Psalms 92–95	August 26	Psalms 120–128
August 11	Psalms 96–101	August 29	Psalms 129–133
August 12	Psalms 102–103	August 30	Psalms 134–137
August 15	Psalms 104–105	August 31	Psalms 138–141
August 16	Psalms 106		

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