

Psalm 107 – Learning from troubles and afflictions

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When we are in the midst of troubles and afflictions we often don't see that God is with us, and we certainly don't think we can learn anything from the situation. We just want to get through, and our requests to God are mostly along the line of "God, please help me!" Yet most Christians find that after we get through our troubles and afflictions we somehow recognise that God truly was with us all of the time. If we take some time to reflect on what has happened we can also learn some "life lessons" that will help us when we go through troubles and afflictions later on. After we have come out the other side we can even end up with quite a different perspective on our troubles!

Psalm 107 illustrates this principle. The Psalmist (possibly David) had obviously been through a very difficult time, and he now reflects on what he has been through. As a result of his reflection he learns some valuable life lessons and his encouragement to us is to do likewise: *Let the one who is wise heed these things and ponder the loving deeds of the Lord.* v43.

Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good; His love endures forever. v1.

The Psalmist gives thanks to God and recognises that God has been consistently merciful towards him – even throughout his troubles. That's because God is *good* and His *love endures forever*. God doesn't change – even through all of our highs and lows.

Let the redeemed of the Lord tell their story - those He redeemed from the hand of the foe, those He gathered from the lands, from east and west, from north and south. v2,3

The Psalmist recognises that it was the hand of the Lord that brought him through his troubles. He now tells us what happened in the lives of some wise and foolish people and the lessons that can be learned from them. He wants us to reflect on our lives and tell "our story" so that we can learn some life lessons, just as he has.

The Psalmist gives examples of groups of people who had the opportunity to learn from their desperate situations. In each case they could reject the Lord and suffer the consequences, or look to the Lord for help.

Some wandered in desert wastelands, finding no way to a city where they could settle. They were hungry and thirsty, and their lives ebbed away. Then they cried out to the Lord in their trouble, and He delivered them from their distress. He led them by a straight way to a city where they could settle. Let them give thanks to the Lord for His unfailing love and His wonderful deeds for mankind, for He satisfies the thirsty and fills the hungry with good things. v4-9.

Some sat in darkness, in utter darkness, prisoners suffering in iron chains, because they rebelled against God's commands and despised the plans of the Most High. So He subjected them to bitter labour; they stumbled, and there was no one to help. Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and He saved them from their distress. He brought them out of darkness, the utter darkness, and broke away their chains.

Let them give thanks to the Lord for his unfailing love and his wonderful deeds for mankind, for He breaks down gates of bronze and cuts through bars of iron. v10-16.

Some became fools through their rebellious ways and suffered affliction because of their iniquities. They loathed all food and drew near the gates of death. Then they cried to the Lord in their trouble, and He saved them from their distress. He sent out His word and healed them; He rescued them from the grave. Let them give thanks to the Lord for His unfailing love and His wonderful deeds for mankind. Let them sacrifice thank offerings and tell of His works with songs of joy. v17-22.

Some went out on the sea in ships; they were merchants on the mighty waters. They saw the works of the Lord, His wonderful deeds in the deep. For He spoke and stirred up a tempest that lifted high the waves. They mounted up to the heavens and went down to the depths; in their peril their courage melted away. They reeled and staggered like drunkards; they were at their wits' end. Then they cried out to the Lord in their trouble, and He brought them out of their distress. He stilled the storm to a whisper; the waves of the sea were hushed. They were glad when it grew calm, and He guided them to their desired haven. Let them give thanks to the Lord for His unfailing love and His wonderful deeds for mankind. v23-31.

These groups of people had obviously been in some pretty desperate situations - wandering in desert wastelands; suffering in prison; rebelling against the Lord; or being tossed around on the high seas. In each case they had a choice: to reject the Lord, or to cry out to Him for help. The Psalmist shows that when each group *cried out to the Lord* in their troubles, God delivered them and brought them to the right place (but not necessarily the place they may have wanted!). He shows that they can now thank God because through their troubles they have learnt that God loved them all the way through; that He was working out His wonderful deeds in their lives and that He was continually bringing *goodness* to them - regardless of how bad their troubles seemed at the time.

The Psalmist shows that as we are going through troubles and afflictions we must move our focus from the troubles and afflictions to the unchanging goodness of God. If we do this our whole perspective on the situation will change. We will see that the unchanging ever-loving God is always with us; that He never stops loving us, and that even in our troubles He is working out His purposes in our lives, and that these purposes are good. (Romans 8:28).

Let them exalt him in the assembly of the people and praise him in the council of the elders. He turned rivers into a desert, flowing springs into thirsty ground, and fruitful land into a salt waste, because of the wickedness of those who lived there. He turned the desert into pools of water and the parched ground into flowing springs; there He brought the hungry to live, and they founded a city where they could settle. They sowed fields and planted vineyards that yielded a fruitful harvest; He blessed them, and their numbers greatly increased, and He did not let their herds diminish. Then their numbers decreased, and they were humbled by oppression, calamity and sorrow; He who pours contempt on nobles made them wander in a trackless waste. But He lifted the needy out of their affliction and increased their families like flocks. The upright see and rejoice, but all the wicked shut their mouths. v32-42.

The Psalmist recognises that not everyone will appreciate that God is still with them when they are going through troubles and afflictions. If someone doesn't recognise this they will stay in their distress and suffer the consequences of their rebellion against God. How foolish!

But then the Psalmist emphasises that God can and will help us no matter what the situation we find ourselves in. God has control over all circumstances, including natural forces. After all, He turns rivers into a desert, and deserts into pools of water! He is in all of our “bad” experiences just as much as He is in our “good” experiences. When we recognise this and call on Him He can and will save, heal and deliver. Nothing is too hard for the Lord!

Let the one who is wise heed these things and ponder the loving deeds of the Lord. v43.

Overall, troubles and afflictions are where we best learn the faithfulness of God and where we best develop our true love for God. Wise people recognise this and take the time after they have been through difficult situations to reflect on what has happened. From this comes a new understanding of the life lessons they have learnt during their troubles, and a new appreciation of the faithfulness and love of God. They know that every situation in life – the good and the bad – are part of *the loving deeds of the Lord* and for this they thank Him and rejoice!

- What troubles and afflictions have you been through recently?
- How did you react in these situations? Did you turn towards or away from the Lord? What was the result of your turning towards or away from the Lord?
- What can you thank God for, as a result of going through these troubles?
- What life lessons did you learn from going through these troubles?
- How can you make sure you learn from any troubles and afflictions you may have to go through in the future?

