

When I Am Afflicted  
November 1, 2009  
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They say, “There is nothing sure in life but...CHANGE!”

We don't have to go any further back than Friday for an example:

*October 30, 2009*

*Colorado Springs, Colo. – Focus on the Family Founder and Chairman Emeritus James C. Dobson, Ph.D., will leave the ministry as its primary radio voice at the end of February, the ministry announced today.*

They say, “There is nothing sure in life but...CHANGE!”

Think about what has changed just in your lifetime. Think about what has been invented and introduced in your lifetime. If someone that died 50 years ago came back to life what would be NEW to them? Any examples?

Valium; audio cassettes; pop-top cans; permanent-press materials; Astroturf; soft contact lenses; the handheld calculator; the ATM machine; Bar code scanners; floppy disks; VCRs; video games; BIC disposable lighters; Post-it Notes; liposuction; MRIs; Personal Computers; CD-ROMs; Microsoft Windows; disposable contact lenses digital answering machines and voicemail; Camcorders; the DVD; Viagra; Google; email; The mapping of human DNA; MP3s and IPODs; text messaging; Facebook; Twitter.

If someone died 50 years ago it's likely they'd never heard of John F. Kennedy unless they lived in Massachusetts or Martin Luther King, Jr. unless they lived in Atlanta. And Ronald Reagan...oh you mean the ACTOR?

Land a man on the moon? Put a letter into a machine and it comes out around the world? A phone in your pocket? A phone in a **12 year old's** pocket? And what's a Beatle? Is it a car or a bug? Surely not a member of a musical group!

Ever try to explain what a Blackberry is to an 80 year old and why you keep looking at it and typing on it because you get 100 of these things every day we call email?

Change can be positive...what are some examples of POSITIVE CHANGE?:

- Graduation
- Getting married
- Having a baby
- Starting a new job

Change can be negative...what are some examples of NEGATIVE CHANGE?:

- Getting a diagnosis
- Losing a loved one
- Losing a job
- Divorce

Some change is positive; some change is negative; ALL change can be stressful.

They say, "There is nothing sure in life but...CHANGE!" But here's something that IS SURE...God NEVER CHANGES.

- Change can bring on AFFLICTION.
- What do you think about when you hear the word AFFLICTION? I usually assume some kind of physical suffering. But it's more than that.

The New Webster Dictionary defines it as:

*"Something which causes trouble or distress; physical or mental suffering."*

- Last week we said "It's okay to have DOUBTS; It's what we DO with our DOUBTS that matters."
- This week's lesson is similar. "Change is a part of life and change can lead to AFFLICTION. It's what we DO when we are AFFLICTED that is important."

The Psalmist who wrote Psalm 102 was AFFLICTED.

- Our commentary tells us: "It's likely that the setting for this Psalm was the Babylonian captivity. Nebuchadnezzar had defeated Judah, destroyed Jerusalem and its temple and sent thousands into exile. It might have been the darkest hour in Israel's history."
- So, it's likely that the person writing this Psalm was in captivity to enemies; and going through very difficult physical and mental pain.
- From the heading of the Psalm we KNOW he is "afflicted; faint and pours out his lament before the Lord."
- When we're under great pressure and stress, it manifests itself in physical symptoms. What are some of the symptoms we might feel if we are AFFLICTED and under PRESSURE?
- So how AFFLICTED WAS the writer of Psalm 102? He uses some interesting metaphors.

Let's look at Psalm 102 verses 3 through 11

<sup>3</sup> For my days vanish like smoke;  
my bones burn like glowing embers.

- When you're under stress it can seem like you're living in a "fog" or a "blur"
- Like your days just disappear like smoke vanishing in the air
- Was he sick and running a fever? Maybe. But we also use "heat" to describe when we are under pressure. "The heat is on!" "Sweating bullets" "Feeling the heat!"

<sup>4</sup> My heart is blighted and withered like grass;  
I forget to eat my food.

- He was so depressed that he had "lost heart." It was as if he just didn't have the "heart" to do anything meaningful.
- He had lost his appetite.

<sup>5</sup> Because of my loud groaning  
I am reduced to skin and bones.

<sup>6</sup> I am like a desert owl,  
like an owl among the ruins.

- When you think of seeing an owl in a tree they are usually not in flock but all alone...imagine an owl looking for mice among the ruins of a house.
- The Psalmist felt all alone...deserted.

<sup>7</sup> I lie awake; I have become  
like a bird alone on a roof.

- When we're afflicted we don't tend to sleep very well do we?
- Ever walk outside when you can't sleep and everything and everyone is quiet...it's like you're the only thing alive in your yard...like a lone bird perched on the roof of a house.

<sup>8</sup> All day long my enemies taunt me;  
those who rail against me use my name as a curse.

- The Psalmist was probably being taunted and cursed by REAL ENEMIES!
- But here's another way to look at this term: When you are under great stress and in the midst of AFFLICTION the enemies that taunt you might be YOUR OWN NEGATIVE THOUGHTS.

<sup>9</sup> For I eat ashes as my food  
and mingle my drink with tears

- In Biblical times what did a grieving person sprinkle all over their head?

- Ashes
- The Psalmist might be saying that instead of a diet of nutritious food he had a diet of ashes mixed with tears!

<sup>10</sup> because of your great wrath,  
for you have taken me up and thrown me aside.

- He felt like God had thrown him on the ash heap...tossed him on the trash pile!

<sup>11</sup> My days are like the evening shadow;  
I wither away like grass.

- When we're stressed it's easy to feel like our life is slipping away and we're withering just like dying grass in the hot sun with no water!
- There are some similarities between last week's lesson and this one
- Last week we said that when we have DOUBTS we can take them to God SPECIFICALLY
- The writer of this Psalm knew what it meant to be AFFLICTED and he brought his afflictions before God SPECIFICALLY and in great detail
- Last week we also said that in the middle of the Psalm the writer changed his FOCUS; his PERSPECTIVE
- He shifted from his situation to WHO GOD IS
- Look at verses 12-17 of Psalm 102:

12 But you, O LORD, sit enthroned forever;  
your renown endures through all generations.

13 You will arise and have compassion on Zion,  
for it is time to show favor to her;  
the appointed time has come.

14 For her stones are dear to your servants;  
her very dust moves them to pity.

15 The nations will fear the name of the LORD,  
all the kings of the earth will revere your glory.

16 For the LORD will rebuild Zion  
and appear in his glory.

17 He will respond to the prayer of the destitute;  
he will not despise their plea.

- What is he remembering about God in those verses?

- God is GREAT and IN CONTROL!
- What will God do for His people?
  - Verse 17: He will respond to the prayer of the destitute. He will not despise their plea.

What else do we know about God when the world around us is CHANGING?  
 Look at verses 24 – 28:

24 So I said:

"Do not take me away, O my God, in the midst of my days;  
 your years go on through all generations.

25 In the beginning you laid the foundations of the earth,  
 and the heavens are the work of your hands.

26 They will perish, but you remain;  
 they will all wear out like a garment.  
 Like clothing you will change them  
 and they will be discarded.

27 But you remain the same,  
 and your years will never end.

28 The children of your servants will live in your presence;  
 their descendants will be established before you."

- When we're surrounded by stressful CHANGES what is true about God?
  - He NEVER CHANGES
  - Verse 27: "But you remain the same, and your years will never end."

Flip over to Psalm 46

Psalm 46

- 1 God is our refuge and strength,  
 an ever-present help in trouble.
- 2 Therefore we will not fear, though the earth give way  
 and the mountains fall into the heart of the sea,
- 3 though its waters roar and foam  
 and the mountains quake with their surging.

So, how are we supposed to respond when we are AFFLICTED? You probably noticed we skipped over the first two verses of Psalm 102.

The Psalmist STARTED his prayer EXACTLY THE WAY we should START OURS when we're AFFLICTED. Look at verses 1 and 2:

## **Psalm 102**

**A prayer of an afflicted man. When he is faint and pours out his lament before the LORD.**

<sup>1</sup> Hear my prayer, O LORD;  
let my cry for help come to you.  
<sup>2</sup> Do not hide your face from me  
when I am in distress.  
Turn your ear to me;  
when I call, answer me quickly.

- What is the lesson for us in these first two verses?
  - When we're AFFLICTED we should FIRST turn to God in PRAYER
- If I've heard Susan say it once I've heard her say a hundred times over the years: "I don't know how people without FAITH get through the difficult times in life!"
- It's a good question.
- Aren't you glad that BELIEVERS IN CHRIST can rely on a great truth?

The things around us may CHANGE constantly...but GOD NEVER CHANGES!

The Bible never promises things will be EASY. But it DOES PROMISE Jesus is there and he'll be our REFUGE!

Bill Bright was the founder of Campus Crusade for Christ. If you've ever used the Four Spiritual Laws...Bill wrote 'em! He spent the last couple of years of his life knowing he was dying; constantly depending on an oxygen tank; struggling for each breath.

In those dying days he wrote:

*"It is a joyful discovery to be reading a red-lettered edition of the Bible, in which all the type is black, and the pages can seem oppressively gray. But the words of Jesus appear in red ink, and suddenly, we turn to that precious passage in 2 Corinthians 12:9: 'My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.'*

*What a powerful promise from the most powerful Person! The unmerited sustaining grace of Jesus has been keeping me all these years, and He is yet applying it as a precious ointment to my soul in these dying days. This is the God who, I say from a bed of affliction, still raises the dead and still gives strength for the living and grace for the dying."*

- Pretty powerful words coming from a man whose days were literally numbered and who labored for every breath!
- If you keep reading that scripture he cited 2 Corinthians 12 and verse 10 Paul summed it up well:

2 Corinthians 12:10 (New International Version)

10That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak, then I am strong.

- When we get WEAK; Jesus goes to WORK!
- When we're losing HOPE; Jesus is there to HELP!
- When we're running DRY; He has a limitless SUPPLY!
- Where do I go when I'm feeling low?

I lift up my eyes to the hills- Where does my help come from?  
 My help comes from the LORD, the Maker of heaven and earth.  
 He will not let your foot slip -  
 He who watches over you will not slumber;  
 Indeed, he who watches over Israel will neither slumber nor sleep.  
 The LORD watches over you  
 The LORD is your shade at your right hand;  
 The sun will not harm you by day, nor the moon by night.  
 The LORD will keep you from all harm -  
 He will watch over your life;  
 The LORD will watch over your coming and going  
 Both now and forevermore.

Psalm 121

So, What's the Take Away?

- I heard a great line this week from a Southern Gospel song:  
 "Sometimes He calms the storm...and Sometimes He Calms ME!"
- That's the whole point of Psalm 102
- Being a Child of God doesn't make us immune from AFFLICTIONS. In fact, it might GUARANTEE we'll have them!
- When we're AFFLICTED and feel almost like God has turned his back on us and we're ready to throw in the towel, we just need to LIFT OUR CARES TO HIM
- His GRACE IS SUFFICIENT for the problems we face.
- We can know that God hears our cries when we bring our AFFLICTIONS before Him.
- We can rest assured that God is still in control and able to HELP US in our AFFLICTIONS.
- And, Because God NEVER CHANGES, we know the same power He used to create the heavens and earth is available to help US in our afflictions today!