

Purpose in Affliction
August 20, 2017

What kinds of afflictions are you dealing with today? Maybe you have a medical problem... or two. Maybe you are facing a financial problem. Maybe you have relationship problems. Maybe you are under tremendous stress because your To-Do-List always runs over into the next week no matter how hard you try to catch up. Maybe you are facing some other kind of crisis or hard situation in your life. Are fears, worries, or threats getting the better of you?. Have you started asking God why, "Why this, why me, why now?" This morning we are going to explore some possible reasons for your affliction.

Many years ago I was trying to share Jesus with a man in the community. He had a loving wife, a good job, two responsible adult sons, a good education, a nice home, a decent income, and good health. He said to me, "I've had a good life, God must be satisfied with me."

His assumption was that if God wanted something more from him than simply being a good person and believing in God, that God would do something to get his attention. Since he was living a blessed life, he figured God and he were on good terms.

This is called rewards theology. Rewards theology says God blesses the good and punishes the bad. It is not an uncommon belief system. It is at least as old as the book of Job in the Old Testament. Even Jesus' disciples had this kind of belief for awhile. We see this in John, chapter nine.

John 9:1-2 (NIV) As he (Jesus) went along, he saw a man blind from birth. His disciples asked him, "Rabbi, who sinned, this man or his parents, that he was born blind?"

There is a lot unstated in this short passage. Let me try to unpack some of it for you. First, somehow they have determined that the man was born blind and did not become blind some time after he was born. Maybe one of the disciples already knew about the man and shared with the group that he was born blind. Or maybe, curious, someone asked him. Or maybe they asked someone nearby about the man. Somehow they have learned that the man was born blind.

Secondly, their question shows their belief in a rewards theology. It was a common belief of many people in that day. And blindness being one of the most serious things anyone would have to deal with, they were curious about who God was punishing.

Today, science gives us reasons a child might be born blind. But the only explanation they could come up with was God punishing someone's sin.

Third, it seems strange to us that they thought the man could have sinned before he was born. But some people at that time believed that souls existed in heaven before being placed in a fetus. They may have thought that such souls could sin in heaven. Or maybe they thought a soul could somehow sin in the womb. Or perhaps they believed

that he was born blind for some sin that God knew he would commit after he was born. We don't know exactly what they were thinking when they asked the question.

Fourth, the disciples suggested only two possible answers to their own question. But I learned to look for more than the obvious answers to a question. Let me suggest several other reasons you might be dealing with whatever YOU are dealing with this morning.

Your affliction may be a natural consequence of someone's actions, a direct result of your sinful act or someone else's.

There are two kinds of consequences when we sin. The first kind of consequence is called a natural consequence. Let me give you an example.

Let us pretend that you have been told by your parents not to throw balls in the house. If you do something may get broken. You choose to throw the ball in the house anyway and the television gets hit, falls off its stand and the cord is ripped out of the TV. Now, no one can watch the TV. You miss your favorite show because the TV is broken. And it is broken because you threw the ball in the house. That is a direct or natural consequence of your sin.

Whatever affliction you are dealing with right now in your life may be a natural consequence of your sin. But there is another kind of consequence.

Your affliction may be a logical consequence of your actions, a result given by some authority.

In our previous example, because of your sin, the TV got broken. So in addition the consequence of missing your favorite shows until the TV is fixed, your parents give you an additional consequence. They restrict your use of the television for two weeks, AFTER it is repaired. This is a logical consequence of your sin.

How does this work out in your relationship with God?

Every sin strains your relationship with God. (_____ consequence)

Let's relate this to your relationship with a friend. If you lose your temper and yell something nasty at a friend, that action strains the relationship. If you do not catch yourself quickly and apologize, the disruption could grow and worsen, even destroy the relationship if your friend starts behaving the same way. It will take an intentional act of seeking reconciliation to heal the relationship. You will have to humbly say you are sorry and ask forgiveness.

Similarly, every sin strains our relationship with God. So we must approach God and humbly apologize and seek reconciliation with Him based on the blood of Jesus.

In addition, God may give you a logical consequence. Look with me at Hebrews 12.

Hebrews 12:10-11 (NIV) Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness. No

discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it.

The logical consequences God places on us are not punishment as much as they are training. God is not out to hurt you, but to help you. He is training you to make better decisions. **God uses logical consequences to get your attention and call you to repent.** Ongoing repentance requires self-discipline. We must develop self-discipline if we are to become fully obedient followers of Jesus.

Paul writes of such discipline in one of his letters to the church at Corinth telling them that some of their members are sick because of their continuing sin of observing the Lord's Supper in an unworthy manner. God brought illness to call attention to their sin.

And while Paul does not say so, I believe God warned those Christians that what they were doing was sinful and they ignored Him. This is the pattern we see of God in the Old Testament. Israel sinned and sinned and God warned them through a prophet, and when they failed to repent God brought a logical consequence upon them. You can see this repeated over and over in the book of Judges.

Again, this is not so much about punishment as about training us to be obedient to God. If God's focus was punishment, He would just end our life. Instead, God is working to make us holy. And as a loving parent He disciplines us, if necessary, with logical consequences to call us to repent of our sin.

Your affliction may be a logical consequence of a continuing sin problem.

Or God may be allowing your affliction to test your faith.

This is not because God needs to learn how much faith you have. God knows everything. God tests our faith to show YOU how little faith you have. You need to see how inadequate you are to fully obey Jesus in your own strength AND how big your God is to help you. Look at the following passage.

Luke 22:31-32 (NIV) "Simon, Simon, Satan has asked to sift you as wheat. But I have prayed for you, Simon, that your faith may not fail."

I find this passage scary, but fascinating. Satan has asked God for permission to test Peter's faith. It is much like what we see at the beginning of the book of Job. The devil asked God for permission to test Job's faith. God said yes, and Satan took away Job's children, Job's possessions, and Job's health. That is pretty scary. We don't know what

Now Satan has asked to test Simon Peter's faith. Jesus is made aware of this request concerning Simon Peter. Instead of praying that God would refuse, Jesus prayed that Peter would be strengthened in order to pass the test. We don't know what afflictions Satan was given permission to use on Peter. It may have been something like what you are going through.

God's purpose for whatever affliction you are currently facing may be to test your faith. It is only through such testing that YOU will see your need to live by the Holy Spirit.

There is one more possible explanation for what you are facing. The disciples suggested only two possible answers to their own question. Jesus says both of them were wrong.

John 9:3 (NIV) "Neither this man nor his parents sinned," said Jesus, "but this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life.

Now, Jesus does not mean that the man is not a sinner or that his parents are not sinners. The Bible clearly teaches that we are all sinners. What Jesus means is that the man was not born blind in order to punish anyone for their sins. God had another purpose in mind for his affliction.

God may be planning to use your affliction to reveal His presence and power to you, or through you to others.

This is the reason Jesus gave for this man's blindness.

John 9:3 (NIV) "...this happened so that the work of God might be displayed in his life.

His blindness was not a natural consequence of any sin. His blindness was not a logical consequence for any sin. His blindness was not a test of his faith. No, this man was blind from birth because God was going to reveal His presence and His power when Jesus healed him. And that is exactly what happened.

John 9:7 (NIV) "Go," he (Jesus) told him, "wash in the Pool of Siloam"... So the man went and washed, and came home seeing.

God knew before the man was born that he would be born blind. Maybe it was a birth defect. We don't know. But God, who knows everything in the past, present, and future, saw that this man would be born blind, and God let it happen, planning for the day when he would have Jesus heal the man. God could have prevented his conception. God could have prevented his blindness in the beginning. But God allowed this because He had a purpose for this man's blindness.

The disciples were focused on the beginning. Jesus was focused on the end. The disciples were focused on the cause. Jesus was focused on the solution. The disciples see a problem. Jesus sees an opportunity. The disciples are looking to lay blame. Jesus is looking to give glory. Whatever the cause of your affliction today, God's purpose is His glory. Realizing that should help you determine the reason for your affliction.

I want to tell you about another blind person today. **Fanny Crosby was born in March 1820.** She became blind shortly after her birth. She was an American mission worker, poet, lyricist, and composer. **She wrote the words to more than 8,000 hymns and gospel songs.** There are 17 hymns of hers in our hymn book. We sang one already and will close with another one. When she was only eight years old she wrote this little rhyme,

**Oh, what a happy child I am, Although I can not see.
I am resolved that in this world, Contented I will be.
How many blessings I enjoy That other people don't.
To weep and sigh Because I'm blind, I cannot and I won't!**

She lived blind for 90 years with that kind of faith. My point is this.

Sometimes God gets glory by healing your affliction and sometimes He gets glory by working through your affliction.

God revealed Himself not by healing Ms. Crosby's blindness, but by sustaining her through it. God often intends to do the same in our lives.

So why are you facing your current affliction? Is it a natural consequence of some sin? Is it a logical consequence from God? Is it a test of your faith? Is it so God can manifest His presence and power in your as you live through it?

Maybe you already know. Maybe in the course of this sermon you have realized the reason for this affliction.

If it is due to sin, God is calling you to repent. Jesus is calling today, calling you to repent, calling you to trust Him, calling you to depend on Him, calling you to testify to His work in you.

Jesus is calling you today, but tenderly, not harshly.
Jesus is tenderly calling you today.
He loves you. He died for you.
Won't you heed His call?

Some of you Jesus is calling to salvation.
He is calling you to trust in His death as the price of forgiveness for your sins.
He invites you to put receive Him as your Savior and Lord.

There is a sample response prayer at the end of the sermon outline in your bulletin.
I urge you to answer His call on your life today.

We're going to sing 316 right now. Praise team come up now.
Everyone stay seated, as we sing.

Sing it this morning and answer the call of Jesus.