
ARE YOU DELIGHTING IN BLESSING?

*As he loved cursing, so let it come unto him: as he delighted not in blessing,
so let it be far from him.*

Psalm 109:17

In the above psalm, David is speaking of the wicked, but I have to admit that the latter half of that verse gave me pause: *as he delighted not in blessing, so let it be far from him*. In essence, David was saying, "Since he doesn't acknowledge his blessings anyway, stop sending them." And that smote my heart to the very core.

How often do we take our blessings for granted? How many times do the blessings come, and we merely nod our heads like that was exactly what was supposed to happen? Why is it that it is so much easier to remember our troubles than it is our blessings? Could it be that we, like the wicked David spoke of, are failing to delight in our blessings?

Sure, we may send up a quick prayer of thanks. And yes, we'll often tell a few people about what God did for us. But then another day passes and instead of being thankful for what we have already received, we start looking to God and asking for more. Shameful, isn't it? What's worse is that Satan can get us so bamboozled that we begin to doubt that we have any blessings at all. It goes something like this:

"Yes, I have a roof over my head, but unfortunately, it leaks."

"It's true the Lord allowed us to replace the washing machine, but now the dryer is acting up."

"Yes, the Lord has always met our needs, but things are tighter than ever, and I don't see any way out."

Do you see how easy it is to bypass the blessing in order to find a reason to complain? I don't know why we do it, but it seems to be our natural tendency. I don't know about you, but I am desperately feeling the need for a change of tactics. I believe it's time to kick some "buts" out of my life and focus only on the blessings.

"Yes, I have a roof over my head." Stop!

"It's true the Lord allowed us to replace the washing machine." Stop!

"Yes, the Lord has always met our needs." Stop!

It sounds a bit like I'm trying to send a telegram, but I think you get my point. Don't state a blessing then negate it by saying, "but. . ." State the blessing and focus on that blessing lest God take David's advice and stop sending the blessings altogether.

THE WORRIER'S 23RD PSALM

A few days ago, my Song of the Day choice was "The Warrior Is a Child." There is a reason I chose that particular song. You see, on Monday, I had a bit of an emotional breakdown. I was extremely tired from a busy weekend, and as I faced the prospect of another hectic week, I lost it. As I cried on Jason's shoulder, I tried to explain my feelings and frustrations but, to be honest, I didn't think I was making much sense. Evidently, though, I was because he pulled out his phone, pressed a few buttons, then placed the phone in my hand. He had pulled up a video of "The Warrior Is a Child." As I listened/watched, I cried that much more. The song conveyed the exact message I was trying to get across. So many people look to me for answers and encouragement, and that's fine. But some days, this warrior gets weary and needs some encouragement as well.

While I watched the video, Jason went out to the kitchen to fix me some breakfast. (Is he a gem or what?) When the video was through, I met him in the kitchen and tried to smile. "That's pretty accurate," I said, "although right now I feel like the line should be *the worrier is a child*." He laughed, and I did too, but deep down I was cringing because I knew it was too true.

This morning, as the Lord dealt with my heart about my tendency to worry, I wondered what Psalm 23 would sound like if David had written it during one of his downward spirals into despair rather than on one of his "up days." (Yes, I know. I wonder about strange things.) Anyway, this is what I came up with. I call it *The Worrier's 23rd Psalm*.

*Anxiety is my shepherd,
and I never have all I need.
It maketh me to lie down
in sleepless frustration.
It leadeth me beside the
tumultuous waves.
It exhausts my soul.
It leadeth me in the paths of despair
for its name's sake.
Yea, though I walk through the
valley of the shadow of death,
I will fear all the more.
For anxiety is ever with me.
The chocolate and caffeine,
they comfort me.
Anxiety preparest a table before me*

*in the presence of mine enemies.
It anointest my head
with devastating thoughts.
My frustration runneth over.
Surely, despair and sickness shall follow me all the days of my life,
And I shall dwell in the
pit of hopelessness forever.*

I'm sure we wouldn't hear that passage quoted in many church services, now would we? Unfortunately, it's all too familiar to some of us. No, we may not put it in those words—or any words, for that matter. But we display it by our actions and attitudes.

By adjusting this psalm to the worrier's viewpoint, I ruined it. I turned something beautiful into something hideous. Something comforting into something depressing. I made it exactly the opposite of what God intended for it to be. When we worry, we do the same thing. We turn our lives into the opposite of what God has in mind for us. He longs for us to focus on Him, but we're too busy looking at our problems. We destroy the loveliness and comfort that we could have if only we would trust the Lord.

I was reminded twice recently that if you hold a coin up in front of your face in the right way, that coin can actually block out the entire sun. Our worries do the same thing. They block out the SON. Let's be careful. Worry is a drain on our time, energy, and health. It is also a sin. Trust God today. He's earned it!

*The Lord is my strength and my shield; my heart trusted in him, and I am helped: therefore
my heart greatly rejoiceth; and with my song will I praise him.
Psalm 28:7*

WATCH OUT FOR THE SNAKE!

Earlier last week, while on my morning prayer walk, I came upon a baby snake. Yes, the scaly intruder was on the walking path not in the woods where he belonged. Yes, he gave me quite a scare. And yes, I did my best to avoid him. I don't do snakes!!!!

On Friday, as I again went about my merry way, pouring my heart out to God and enjoying the lovely weather, I was met by three approaching bicyclists, who each warned me about a snake on the trail ahead. I thanked them and acted as if it were no big deal, but immediately, I was on full alert. My mind spun. Was it the same baby snake I'd seen earlier in the week? Could they have seen such a small snake from their bikes at that speed? Was the snake on the trail or just off to the side? What kind of snake are we talking about? And how big?

No matter how hard I tried, I could no longer focus on my prayers. My eyes darted back and forth across the trail. I searched the grass on either side. I watched for any movement. That silly snake became all I could think about, and here's the real kicker—I never found it! Nope, all the way back, I searched and expected the snake, but I never came across it. Either the bicyclists had scared it enough that it returned to its natural habitat, or it was only crossing the road to get to the other side (no chicken jokes here, I promise). Whatever the case, he was nowhere to be found, and I lost a good twenty minutes of my prayer time over that creepy critter.

Fortunately, the Lord also used the situation to teach me a valuable lesson. There is a reason He doesn't tell us about every bend in the road ahead and every heartache that is awaiting us. There is a purpose for him not showing us the master blueprint of our lives, complete with all its twists and turns, ups and downs. And the reason is this: that's all we would concentrate on.

If we knew there was a pitfall ahead, we would spend all of our time thinking about it. What kind of pitfall will it be? Is it big or small? Is it similar to something I've been through before? We would watch and wait, at every turn expecting to come upon trouble. And just as my snake-watching did, that intense focus would rob us of our joy, energy and time with God. It would overwhelm us. Anxiety and anticipation would permeate every fiber of our being to where we would be just about useless in accomplishing anything else.

Once I was off the trail Friday, and back in my neighborhood, I spent the rest of the walk home praising God for this beautiful reminder. I don't need to see the future; I only need to trust the One who holds it. And despite how many times I think I want to know all the an-

swers, Friday's snake encounter (or snake non-encounter, as the case turned out to be) reminds me that knowing is not always that great a thing. After all, if I hadn't known there was a snake ahead, I would have continued in my prayer time and enjoyed my beautiful morning walk. Knowing about that crazy snake changed everything: my focus, my attitude and my gaze.

My friend, sometimes it's hard to face the unknown. I get that. I do. But now I see that sometimes it's better not to know. It's better to trust the One who does. He understands the dangers ahead, and He'll keep us from harm. And when life seems overwhelming, remember that not only does Jesus know the way, He is the way! That's all we need to know.

*Commit thy way unto the Lord; trust also in him; and he shall bring it to pass.
Psalm 37:5*

ARE YOU SINGING OR SULKING?

In Exodus 15, the first twenty-one verses outline a song of praise and victory from Moses and the children of Israel. God had just delivered them through the Red Sea and from the hand of the Egyptian army, and needless to say, the people had reason to rejoice. So, for twenty-one verses they lift up their voice in praise, thanking God for who He is and what He is capable of doing. The song is specific, thorough and heartfelt, and though I don't have the time or space to type out the entire song here, I would like to share with you verse two: *The Lord is my strength and song, and he is become my salvation: he is my God, and I will prepare him an habitation; my father's God, and I will exalt him.* Keep this verse in mind because we will come back to it in a minute.

Now, I want you to take a look at what happens in the next few verses. *So Moses brought Israel from the Red sea, and they went out into the wilderness of Shur; and they went three days in the wilderness, and found no water. And when they came to Marah, they could not drink of the waters of Marah, for they were bitter: therefore the name of it was called Marah. And the people murmured against Moses, saying, What shall we drink? (vs. 22-24)*

Three days! Within three days, the miracle of the Red Sea had been forgotten. The praises of God had been replaced with murmurs and complaints. In fact, it's safe to say that the water wasn't the only thing that was bitter that day. There were a lot of bitter attitudes as well. What happened? What could have possibly changed so much in three days that their singing turned into sulking?

For starters, their circumstances changed. No longer were they standing on the edge of victory, but they were wandering around in a desert of defeat and despair. Secondly, their attitudes changed. Where earlier they had been full of joy and relief at their deliverance from Egypt, now all they could focus on was their hunger, thirst and fatigue. But do you realize what didn't change? God did not change. The God who delivered them safely across the Red Sea was the same God who was leading them in the wilderness. The God to whom they sang praise and honor and worship was still just as deserving of their song. Though their circumstances and attitudes had changed, God was still God, and as they stated in their own song, He was still their strength, their song and their salvation. How quickly they had forgotten.

But I'm afraid we have no right to judge, for we often do the same thing. When things are going well and we're walking in victory, it's easy to praise God and thank Him for who He is and all He's done. But after a few days in the wilderness, when our circumstances have changed, our attitudes grow bitter just like the waters of Marah. We forget all about our victory. We lose track of our song. And it seems all we can focus on is what's wrong in our lives

instead of remembering all the things that God has brought us through in the past. We concentrate on the things in our lives that are ever-changing instead of focusing on the One who never changes. And then, like the children of Israel, we begin to murmur.

Are you wandering in the wilderness today? Does victory seem far from your grasp? Are defeat and despair bearing down on you? If so, I remind you that this too shall pass. Your circumstances and negative feelings are not here to stay. They will shift and change as an autumn leaf on a windy day, so don't put too much stock in them. Instead, I urge you to focus on the One who never changes. He was faithful yesterday, and He will be faithful again today. He has seen you through the tough times, and He's not about to forsake you now. Hang in there, and whatever you do, don't lose your song!

SOMETIMES WEAKER IS BETTER

Sixteen years old was Uzziah when he began to reign, and he reigned fifty and two years in Jerusalem. His mother's name also was Jecoliah of Jerusalem. And he did that which was right in the sight of the Lord, according to all that his father Amaziah did. II Chronicles 26:3-4

If you've read through the list of Israel's and Judah's kings in the books of Kings and Chronicles, then you'll know that the phrase "did that which was right in the sight of the Lord" is, unfortunately, an uncommon phrase. Yes, it's in there a few times, but more often than not, the Bible tells us that the kings did that which was evil in the sight of the Lord. Honestly, it gets depressing. But now and then, there arose a king that trusted the Lord and did His will, and Uzziah was one of those kings. . . for a while.

Second Chronicles 26 details how Uzziah sought God, and because of that reliance, God made him prosper (v. 5). The chapter also tells us that God helped Uzziah in the fights against his enemies (v. 7). The Scripture talks about how much Uzziah accomplished during his reign because of God's aid and blessing. Unfortunately, in verse 16, the story takes a horrific turn: *But when he was strong, his heart was lifted up to his destruction: for he transgressed against the Lord his God, and went into the temple of the Lord to burn incense upon the altar of incense.*

Everyone knew that only the priests could go into the temple and burn incense. It was their job. It was God's command. It had been that way since the temple and priesthood began. But Uzziah didn't care about God's rules anymore. Evidently, all his prosperity had gone to his head, and Uzziah had started to think that he was "somebody." Like Nebuchadnezzar, he looked around at his kingdom and accomplishments and said, "Wow! Look at what I've done! I must be the best king ever!" God knocked Nebuchadnezzar off his self-appointed pedestal by turning him into some form of a beast that lived off the land. He humbled Uzziah by striking him with leprosy—a disease that remained until Uzziah's death.

There is a reason the Bible warns us over and over again about pride. God hates it, and it's dangerous—not just to us, but to others as well. Not only that, but I want to take particular notice of the phrasing the Bible used, *But when he was strong, his heart was lifted up to his destruction.* When he was strong. When I read that phrase, I thought of Paul's thorn. Though the Bible doesn't specify the nature of Paul's thorn, it tells us why the thorn was there. In fact, it tells us twice in the same verse: *And lest I should be exalted above measure through the abundance of the revelations, there was given to me a thorn in the flesh, the messenger of Satan to buffet me, lest I should be exalted above measure. (II Corinthians 12:7)*

The purpose of Paul's thorn was to keep him weak and humble, and I dare say that the purpose of our thorns may be the same. You see, when we're weak, we're dependent on God. We stay close to Him. We lean on Him for strength. Our thorns serve as reminders that we cannot make it on our own. Without them, we're in danger of becoming like Uzziah or Nebuchadnezzar. In that perfect world where everything goes our way, who needs God, right?

I don't know about your thorn, but I know about my own. I know how many times I've begged and cried to the Lord to remove it. I understand how often I've felt hindered from doing the things I want to do for the Lord because of my thorn. I feel the heartache each morning when I awake to realize the thorn is still present. But after reading today's passage in II Chronicles, I see things differently. If it takes a thorn to keep me humble and dependent on God, then I'll bear the thorn gladly because the alternative is unacceptable. Yes, I see now sometimes weaker is better!