

Guided by God

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“Nevertheless I am continually with thee: thou hast holden me by my right hand. Thou shalt guide me with thy counsel, and afterward received me to glory.” (Psalm 73:23–24)

In Psalm 73 the inspired psalmist Asaph reveals a painful struggle of faith that he endured. He speaks of how he was brought to the point of despair when he considered the life of the ungodly. He saw how they enjoyed riches and pleasure and how they seemed to have no cares or worries (vv. 3, 5).

And then he compared that with his own life. His life was filled with many sorrows and afflictions (v. 14).

In these circumstances, the psalmist responded in a sinful way. He was angry with God. He doubted God and his love and goodness. He even despaired of living as a child of God any longer (vv. 2, 13).

As Christians, we know that our life is not going to be easy and free of sorrows. Some of you may not be experiencing that presently, but you know that someday you will. For others of you, you are there right now. You are hurting deeply. Some of you have been hurt by living in a bad home with fighting parents. Some have had a parent abandon and leave you. Some of you have had a parent die. Some have been deeply hurt by things said or done to you. Some are dealing with sickness and constant pain, even one young woman who couldn't come to convention because of leukemia. Some are discouraged and disappointed because their plans have not come about. Some come from churches that are deeply troubled. Some are hurting because they are lonely and have no friends. Some are struggling with feeling like they have no gifts.

Our struggles increase when we compare our life to the life of others. It seems like no one has it as bad as we do.

Like Asaph, we are tempted to respond to these hard circumstances in the wrong way. We are tempted to be angry with God: “God, why would you do this to me!” We are tempted to doubt God and his goodness: “God must not love me if he has sent this into my life!” We might even be tempted to despair of living as a Christian any longer: “What’s the use! If God doesn’t care about me, why not live how I want to!” This is one of the most powerful and difficult temptations that the child of God faces. We respond so easily in the wrong way.

The proper way to respond to these things is taught in vv. 23–24. We respond by filling our mind with thoughts of God. Rather than *listening* to ourselves (our feelings, our self-pity), we *preach* to ourselves the truth of who God is and what he has done for us. There are three things we are to fill our minds with.

1. *Fill your mind with the thought that God is guiding you by his counsel (v. 24a).*

A guide is a person that knows a certain path and helps lead someone that does not know the way. Think about a white-water rafting guide. He maps out the path through the rapids and rocks, and then he leads the inexperienced rafter through the river.

God is our guide, and he guides us by his counsel. This means that God has planned all of the details of our life in his counsel. God's counsel is his eternal, perfect plan which determines everything that will occur in time and history. From eternity God not only planned the details of the creation and history broadly, but he also planned the details of our lives. He planned when we would be born, how long we will live, where we will live, how tall we will be, what calling we will have, whether we will marry or not, and the number of our children we will have. His counsel includes even the seemingly small and insignificant details of life: how many hairs are on our head, every little twitch and movement we make, and so on.

Having determined all things about us in eternity, God now guides our life according to that plan. He leads us every step of our journey according to his eternal plan.

This is so important to remember in our struggles. We need to remember that these things do not come by chance and at random. They are not a mistake. God didn't mess up or get it wrong. But we are being guided by the counsel of God.

We don't always understand these things. God's counsel is mysterious (cf. Isaiah 55:8–9).

But we believe that God's counsel is wise and good. Because God is wise and good, his counsel also is wise and good. He directs all things in a perfect way to reach the highest goal: his glory in our salvation.

2. *Fill your mind with the thought that God loves you and is with you always (v. 23).*

We must not imagine God's guidance to be that of a cold and distant God as if he made his abstract plan in eternity and then watches from afar as it plays out. God's guidance of us is that of a warm, personal, loving God who is present with us.

The reason why we are continually with God is because God is continually with us. God has established his covenant with us and has drawn us to himself. This means that God is with us and we are with him.

And this is the case always. God's covenant is unbreakable. Once we are in God's covenant, we are always in God's covenant. He is with us, and we are with him at all times.

This gives us comfort in so many difficult circumstances of life. God is with us when we are a single and are lonely. God is with us when our family and friends forsake us. God is our Friend who never leaves us, forsakes us, disappoints us, betrays us, lets us down, or hurts us.

We have this comfort because of Christ. He felt what it was to be forsaken by God at the cross, when he cried, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Because he was forsaken, we are never forsaken.

So close is that presence, that the psalmist says, "...thou hast holden me by my right hand."

Think about how an earthly father holds the hand of his child. He holds the child's hand as they're walking simply so that the child knows they are together. When there is something that scares the child, the father holds on tight to the child's hand.

In the same way God our Father places our hand in his hand and holds us tightly. This is the expression of his tender, fatherly love for us. We are with him always, because he is always holding our hand. What a comfort when we are going through some dark time to know that our Father is holding our hand! O how great is his love that will not let us go!

3. *Fill your mind with the thought that God is leading you to glory (v. 24b).*

When the psalmist speaks of glory, he is referring to the heavenly life that awaits us at the moment of death. When we die, we will be taken to life in heavenly perfection. This will be a life without any more sorrow or suffering or sin. We will be delivered from the battles against the devil, from our wearisome labor, from the dark clouds of doubt and fear that descend. But the greatest joy and blessing is that this is life with God.

This will be glory. The word for glory refers to something that is heavy or weighty. Something that is heavy is not cheap, flimsy, or passing. It is something solid, something expensive, something that lasts. That's the glory that awaits us. It is not cheap, flimsy, or passing. But it is solid and lasting. It is of infinite value because it was purchased with nothing less than the precious blood of Christ.

When the text uses the word "afterward" it is indicating that there is an inseparable connection between our trials and glory. It is not simply the case that trials are followed by glory chronologically or that the trials are outweighed by the glory. But the truth is that the trials are the necessary way to glory. God uses the trials to prepare us for glory. 2 Corinthians 4:17 says, "For our light affliction, which is but for a moment, worketh for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory."

Trials strengthen our faith and draw us closer to God. They loosen our grip on the things of this earth and make us look heavenward. They cause us to see our sins and turn from them. In these ways, God uses the trials to prepare us for glory.

The trials that God sends are difficult. They make us hurt, and grieve, and feel overwhelmed. And we don't always understand why God does what he does.

But in faith and dependence upon him, we submit to his way for us. We measure what he sends not by how much it hurts but by the outcome. We live in the hope that in heaven we will see that we did not have one trial too many. All were necessary to lead us to glory.

Receive the trials God's sends in that way. Walk by faith, and not by sight. When we walk by sight and not by faith, then we stumble and despair. But when we walk by faith and not by sight, we will receive strength to bear those trials. Trust God in the dark.

With your mind filled with these thoughts of God, press on! Press on in the knowledge of God's guiding counsel! Press on in the knowledge of God's loving presence! Press on in the hope of glory!

Originally published in:

Vol. 77 No. 11 November 2018