

Teth  
Psalm 119:65-72  
ABC 7/1/18

Most people have heard the argument against Christianity based on the fact of suffering in the world. It's been expressed in different ways depending on the viewpoint of the unbeliever who says it. CS Lewis phrases it like this: If God were good He would wish to make His creatures happy, & if God were almighty He would be able to do what He wished; but His creatures are not happy, therefore God lacks either goodness or power or both.<sup>1</sup> This is the problem raised by Rabbi Harold Kushner in his book, *When Bad Things Happen to Good People*. Though Kushner doesn't deny God's existence, his solution denies God's omnipotence. He says to love God & *forgive Him despite His limitations*.<sup>2</sup> Forgive Him? Limitations? What a nut! The problem with this argument is that it assumes that the ultimate good is our lack of suffering & the only factors in it are the benevolence & omnipotence of God. Any serious thinker, & all Christians, know there's more to the problem of suffering than this. Nevertheless, the problem of pain is a big one. It's also personal & inescapable, because there's no one on earth who doesn't go through suffering at some point. The psalmist endured a lot of it. We've already looked at some of his trials that came to him because of his resolve to live faithfully by God's Word. In the next 3 sections of Ps 119 we see trials of a much broader nature, trials that the writer refers to as *afflictions*. But what's surprising is that he sees them as **good**. Vss 65-72 address some things we might not think belong together, God's goodness & our affliction & God's goodness in our affliction. Knowing how these things go together is vital for every one of us, even if we never know all the details. It's in the midst of affliction that we reveal our true heart & attitudes. In the midst of affliction, as we acknowledge the Lord's goodness & our confidence in His wisdom, we show the fruit of the Holy Spirit working in our life. John Phillips is helpful when he says,

*The constant gnawing of adverse circumstances can wear down even the most committed believer. Yet, as the constant washing of the waters smooths the pebbles & the constant wearing of sand rounds the ragged edges of even the roughest rocks, so the unremitting adversities of the psalmist were doing their work of polishing & refining his soul.*<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> *The Problem of Pain*, p 26

<sup>2</sup> p 148

<sup>3</sup> *Exploring Psalms*, 321

Our good God only does good things for His servants. The Hebrew word for **good** occurs 6x & begins 5 lines of this stanza. **Good** means pleasant, beneficial, precious, appropriate, delightful, & right. It's the dominant idea that ties these 8 vss together. However, sometimes those good things from our good God flow in the purifying waters of **affliction** (67, 71). They may not feel good, but they are good for us. Our prayer should be that of the psalmist, **It is good for me that I was afflicted** (71). The psalmist has found that suffering is good when it flows from God's unwavering goodness toward us. Affliction is not good in itself, & doesn't usually seem good to us when we're enduring it, but it has a good purpose when God sends it. Stand as we read God's Word to us today. **65-72 PRAY**

Before we get into the psalm, let's ask the age old question: *Why do the righteous suffer?* Is it because God isn't good? No. Is it because He's not powerful enough to prevent it? No. When we look for the answer to this question in the Bible we find there are various explanations, which isn't surprising since this isn't a simple problem. There are at least 5 reasons for affliction given in Scripture.

1. Some suffering is simply the common experience of man. We live in an imperfect world. We get hurt, we get sick, we die. We stub our toe, get the flu, & our favorite team loses. It isn't always the case that we're to read divine meaning into such afflictions. As Job said, **Man is born for trouble (as surely) as sparks fly upward** (5:7).

2. Some affliction is constructive. This suffering is used by God to sharpen our skills & develop our character. Paul wrote, **tribulation brings about perseverance; & perseverance, proven character; & proven character, hope** (Rom 5:3-4).

3. Some distress is given only to glorify God in it & by it. The afflictions of the man born blind were of this type. Jesus explained he'd been suffering neither for his own sin nor that of his parents, but only **that the works of God might be displayed in him** (Jn 9:3). He'd been allowed to endure blindness his whole life in order for Jesus to heal him at this point in history & so bring glory to God as the One who gives physical & spiritual sight.

4. The 4<sup>th</sup> purpose of suffering is cosmic, for lack of a better term. Job is the Bible's most profound & detailed example of this type of suffering. This suffering demonstrates before Satan & the angels that a person can love & trust God for who He is in Himself & not merely for what he gets out of Him.

5. Finally, there's suffering that's corrective. This is the most obvious category of suffering for most Christians & it's what the psalmist is speaking of in this psalm when he says, **Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I obey Your word** (67). He's confessing that the afflictions he endured were sent by God to get him back onto the path of obeying God's Word. Vss 65–72 (& 73-88) explores affliction in the believer's life. The writer says God sent affliction into his life as a divine corrective to teach him to obey & understand God's Word.

**1. Good Dealings** (65) The psalmist begins with a confession of confidence & trust: **You have dealt well with Your servant**. The phrase **dealt well** is the Hebrew word for **good**. Who is the One who has been good to His servant? It is the **Lord** (Yahweh) & He's been good to his servant **according to His word**. Spurgeon says it well.

*This kindness of the Lord is, however, no chance matter: He promised to do so, & He has done it according to His Word. It is very precious to see the Word of the Lord fulfilled in our happy experience; it endears the Scripture to us, & makes us love the Lord of the Scripture. The book of providence tallies with the book of promise: what we read in the page of inspiration we meet with again in the leaves of our life story.<sup>4</sup>*

Our good God keeps His good word to His servant. That's one thing you can always count on. The author is asking God to do good to him, which God has done & is certain to continue doing. & He does it **according to His word**. We know from vs 39 that God's Word is **good**. By saying, **according to Your word** it suggests the psalmist not only knew the promises of God & pled them in prayer (49), he also received the promises by faith & experienced them. It reminds me when Mary said to Gabriel, who'd just told her she'd be the mother of the Messiah, **Behold, the bonds slave of the Lord; may it be done to me according to your word** (Lk 1:38). This should be the experience of every child of God. We know that God has dealt well with us & we know it's been **according to His word**. The psalmist acknowledges the wisdom of God in dealing with him because God acts

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<sup>4</sup> *Treasury of David*, [www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/treasury-of-david/psalms-119-65.html](http://www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/treasury-of-david/psalms-119-65.html)

according to the precepts, promises, & principles given in His Word. Because of this, we should pray & act accordingly.

*Lord, the way You dealt with me was good & wise. You are good & You do good & the way You dealt with me was good because it was according to Your Word. Just like Your Word teaches me that You are going to deal with me, You dealt with me that way & I want to acknowledge Your goodness.*

Think of all the ways God has dealt with us. He loves us, He chose us, He called us, He drew us to Himself, He rescued us, He declared us righteous, He forgave us, He saved us, He put His Spirit in us, He adopted us into His family, He makes us kings & priests & co-workers with Him, & He gives us eternity with Him. He's dealt well with us, hasn't He?

**2. Good Discernment** (66-67) Vss 66-68 begin & end with a prayer. Both prayers are petitions for the Lord to teach His servant His Word. The psalmist asks the Lord to **teach me good discernment or judgment & knowledge**. He's asking God to give him wisdom & insight so he might make good & wise decisions. He's confident in his request because he's committed to the Lord & believes in the Lord's commandments. The word of God is a fountain of wisdom & knowledge & he wants that fountain flowing in his life.

Vs 66 explains that the **good** the psalmist wants is the knowledge of God's ways, which leads to good judgment. Every believer needs such knowledge & the good judgment related to it. Notice how he's saying that in the Lord's dealings with him he's grown in true knowledge. Ignorance doesn't sanctify; truth does. How did Jesus pray for each of us in the Upper Room on the night before He died? *Father, sanctify them in the truth; Your Word is truth* (Jn 17:17). True knowledge is the instrument of the Holy Spirit in our sanctification & the psalmist is acknowledging that here. *Lord, all of this good dealing You've been doing with me has driven me to Your Word & given me true knowledge. It's grown me up. I needed knowledge & You've given it to me.* It's also given him good judgment. Ever known a really smart person who didn't have a bit of common sense? It's possible to know a lot & not have good judgment, isn't it? The psalmist doesn't want to be one of those people. He wants to have true **knowledge** that sanctifies but he also wants good judgment. How do you get that? From God's Word at work in your heart & life. **Teach me good discernment & knowledge**, is a great prayer for all of us. Many have knowledge but little

judgment & discernment. The psalmist doesn't want to be one of them & we shouldn't either. He wanted God to **teach** him because he really did **believe** the commands & words of God. If we believe His Word, then we too want Him to teach us to live wisely & obediently. We should pray the prayer of vs 66 because the better we know God's Word, the better we can pray in God's will & obey God's will. He goes on ... 67.

This doesn't suggest the writer had plunged into deliberate & willful sin & was then reproved by God & returned to the path of righteousness. Going **astray** has to do mostly with ignorance. It's like the sheep going it's own way in Isaiah 53. It means that before God brought affliction into his life he trusted his own judgment & wandered into harmful paths. When things didn't go well for him, he turned to God's Word & discovered the right way to live & began to obey the Bible's teachings. The psalmist knows from personal experience, as many of us do, the pain of wandering away, going **astray** from God's Word. Note the honest acknowledgement of his sin, **I went astray**. *I did this to myself*. God, however, is a good Father who lovingly disciplines His children when they get off the right path (Heb 12:5-13). He may even use affliction, pain, suffering, & difficulties as the rod of His chastisement. Affliction is often a bitter medicine. It doesn't taste good, but it has a good result. At the time, discipline wasn't pleasant, but it brought God's servant back to the place of obedience, so it was worth it (71, 75). For the psalmist that's quite clear. **Now I keep Your word**, he says, as a result of being afflicted. That's the right result.

### 3. Good God, Good Deeds 68

This is vital because it anchors goodness in the very nature of God: God is good & He is always doing good. The psalmist knows God is good in essence & He does good in His actions. Therefore, **teach me Your statutes**, *be my divine Instructor*. Discipline is never pleasant but it is good because it brings us back to the place of obedience. The psalmist cries out, & we ought to be able to cry out in our afflictions, *Lord, You are good & do good*. Of course, I realize that all of us, at times in our afflictions, don't feel like saying that, but we want to get there. There are times in our afflictions when we don't see the purpose or benefit of it. But we're in the best place in our afflictions when we get to the place where we can say, *Lord, You are good & do good*;

**teach me Your statutes.** What's the hymn, *All the Way My Savior Leads Me*, say? *For I know what'er befalls me, He doeth all things well.*<sup>5</sup> That's exactly what the psalmist is saying here.

*Lord, what has befallen me I would never have chosen. I wouldn't have prayed for it, I wouldn't have asked for it, & very frankly I don't enjoy it, & I wish that it were different, but having reflected upon my affliction & Your goodness, I can say, Lord, You do all things well. You are good & You do good.*

That's not easy in the midst of affliction, is it? Sometimes it's a very long process & sometimes there are pits & darkness along the way. Sometimes you reach that point & then lose it again. But it ought to be our desire in all our afflictions to be able to say, *Lord, You are good & You do good.* We must see & acknowledge the Lord's wisdom & goodness in His dealings with us even in our afflictions. He is good. Good in Himself, good in His very essence. Charles Bridges puts it like this:

*All the names of God are comprehended in this one of Good. All the acts of God are nothing else but the effluxes (or flows) of His goodness distinguished by several names according to the object it is exercised about. When He confers happiness without merit, it is grace. When He bestows happiness against merit, it is mercy. When He bears with provoking rebels, it is patience. When He performs His promise, it is truth. When He commiserates a distressed person, it is pity. When He supplies an indigent person, it is bounty. When He supports an innocent person, it is righteousness. & when He pardons a penitent person, it is mercy. All summed up in this one name—Goodness.*

*None so communicatively good as God. As the notion of God includes goodness, so the notion of goodness includes diffusiveness. Without goodness He would cease to be a Deity; & without diffusiveness He would cease to be good. The being good is necessary to the being God. For goodness is nothing else in the notion of it but a strong inclination to do good, either to find or to make an object, wherein to exercise itself, according to the propensity of its own nature; & it is an inclination of communicating itself, not for its own interest, but for the good of the object it pitches upon. Thus God is good by nature; & His nature is not without activity. He acts consistently with His own nature.*<sup>6</sup>

The knowledge that God is good & does good is an important truth to remember in affliction. The psalmist didn't become bitter or resentful towards God for the affliction that brought him greater obedience. Despite the affliction, which was real, he still proclaimed, **You are good, & do good.** In fact, he even wanted more instruction from God, saying, **teach me Your statutes.** This is said with the understanding that this teaching might require more affliction; yet it was the psalmist's desire. This shows how confident he was in God's goodness.

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<sup>5</sup> Hymn 172 in our hymnals

<sup>6</sup> <http://gracegems.org/26/bridges3.htm>

**4. Bad Lies** (69-70) The devil has plenty of people, in & out of the church, who are more than willing to do his dirty work. The psalmist experienced this up close & personal in the form of lies & false accusations. **69a**

The Message says, *The godless spread lies about me.* The idea is the prideful have slandered him. What they say is not true. It doesn't feel good to him & it isn't good. The actions of these arrogant liars stands in contrast to the good God who always does good. Therefore, the psalmist won't compromise his loyalty & allegiance to God. Rather, the arrogant drive him to the Lord & he resolves, **with all my heart I will observe Your precepts** (69). The prideful have no conscience, no genuine sense of right & wrong. Their hearts are hard & insensitive. There's nothing in them that longs for God & His Word. When it comes to the Lord, they don't care. When it comes to telling the truth, they don't care. When it comes to obeying God, they don't care. **70a**

Their heart as fat as grease, gross like fat, covered with fat. What's that mean? It's a Hebrew idiom meaning their minds have become dull & insensitive. It can include the idea of cruelty as well. There are times when suffering comes from the enemies of God, whose hearts are insensible (17:10; 73:7), but God can even use godless opposition for our good & His glory (1 Pt 1:6-9; 4:12-19). Again, in striking contrast to the prideful, the Psalmist professes his affection for both God & His Word, **but I delight in Your law** (70). The Message paraphrases it, *I dance to the tune of your revelation.* He prays in effect, *Lord, I will delight & keep Your law even in the face of the lying & insensitivity of the world.* He'll even accept the slander & lies & insensitivity of these insolent people as an affliction God has given to him. It reminds me of David having to march out of Jerusalem after the rebellion of Absalom. Remember Shimei? He's up on the hill throwing rocks & shouting curses at David. He's mocking & telling lies. & what does David do? He just keeps his mouth shut. His men say, *Let us take a shot at him. We can take him out.* David says, *Nope, let him talk* (2 Sam 16:5-14). Here the psalmist says, *Lord, even the lies of the arrogant were good for me because it drove me into Your Word.* Don't believe that when God is teaching you through affliction that the world will always be nice to you. & when the world mocks you & lies about you,

let it drive you into the Word. Don't let the mocking of the world drive you away from but into the Word of God.

**5. Good Affliction** (71-72) The last 2 vss are ones we'd do well to memorize & mediate on. Vs 71 speaks of the value of afflictions & vs 72 speaks of the value of the Word of God. James Boice says vs 71, *is an exact equivalent of Romans 8:28.*<sup>7</sup> There the Bible says, **we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose.** The Psalmist & Paul are in perfect agreement. **It is good for me that I was afflicted.** There was profit in his pain. Why? How? Because through it he's driven to God's Word. We learn more about who God is & who we are in times of affliction. We learn better how God works & what He's doing in our life during these times. Paul adds a valuable insight when he writes, **For momentary, light affliction is producing for us an eternal weight of glory far beyond all comparison** (2 Cor 4:17). What does the psalmist say? **71**

This vs applies the general goodness of God's character to the specific matter of the psalmist's affliction. Since God is good & since He sends suffering, the suffering itself must have a good purpose. This is what Martin Luther meant when he confessed, *I never knew the meaning of God's Word, until I came into affliction. I have always found it one of my best schoolmasters.*<sup>8</sup> Luther already understood God's Word but he came to understand it more deeply when God led him through the deep waters of affliction. Our good & gracious God skillfully & lovingly uses affliction & adversity, pressure & pain, trials & tribulations, as instruments in maturing those who belong to Him. God's goodness sometimes comes in a cup overflowing with affliction. Evil may be used for our ultimate good. Let God take His own way with us. Let us interpret His providences by His promises & instead of fainting under affliction, we should long to learn & grow because of it & guard against the wrong idea that afflictions automatically make one better or godlier. Sadly, there are many who are worse from their affliction because they fail to turn to God & His Word for wisdom & guidance.

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<sup>7</sup> *Living by the Book*, p 71

<sup>8</sup> Quoted by Bridges, Ps 119:181-182, <http://gracegems.org/26/bridges3.htm>



Vs 72 gives us the Psalmist's opinion of the value of God's Word. It's pretty impressive. Let's break it down. **The Law of Your mouth...** The Bible is the very breath & words coming from God's mouth (2 Tim 3:16). **Is better to me...** **Better** is again the word **good**. This is to be our personal evaluation of the Word of God & its value & importance. It is **good**. Others may disagree (69-70), but this is what we know to be true. **Than thousands of gold & silver pieces...** The Bible is priceless. No words can truly capture the value & worth that it is & has. This is the 2<sup>nd</sup> time in the psalm that the writer has compared God's truth to treasure (14) & he'll use this image again in vss 127 & 162. The person of faith doesn't live by the priorities & values of the world (Heb. 11:24-27) but puts the will of God ahead of everything else. When we find the good treasures of truth in the precious Word of God, we rejoice in the goodness of God. Spurgeon provides a nice summary: *It is a sure sign of a heart which has learned God's statutes when it prizes them above all earthly possessions.*<sup>9</sup> Stack up all the gold & silver you can find. Would you gladly walk away from it all for the priceless treasure that is the Word of God? The psalmist would.

Herbert Lockyer tells a story concerning the largest Bible in the world, a Hebrew manuscript weighing 320 pounds in the Vatican library. Long ago, a group of Italian Jews asked to see this Bible & when they'd seen it they told their friends in Venice about it. As a result a group of Russian Jews tried to buy it, offering the church the weight of the book in gold. Julius the Second was Pope at that time, & he refused the offer, even though the value of such a large amount of gold was enormous. Wrote Lockyer, *Thousands of gold & silver pieces are nothing in comparison with the inestimably precious Word of God.*<sup>10</sup>

Do we prefer God's Word over every other thing? If we do, we'll spend time in it. So let me ask, how important is the reading & studying & meditating on God's Word to you? How much time do you spend with Him in it? Do you treasure the time you spend with Him in it? If it is **better to you than thousands of gold & silver pieces**, you will.

Many have said that God sometimes uses pain to get our attention. & if that's true, it's also true that God uses affliction not just to get our attention, but to do us good. In Jer 22:21, God says to Israel, **I spoke to you in your prosperity & you would not listen.** Here the psalmist says, *I understand that. Sometimes when things are good I turn a deaf ear to God, but in affliction He has my full attention.* But it's not just attention; it's blessing. Do you remember the story of Job? I

<sup>9</sup> *Treasury of David*, [www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/treasury-of-david/psalms-119-72.html](http://www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/treasury-of-david/psalms-119-72.html)

<sup>10</sup> *Psalms*, p 565

don't think many of us would want to sit down on the pew next to Job & say, *You know, Job, you had it bad but let me tell you about my life!* Most of us would be embarrassed about our light afflictions if we were sitting next to Job. He was one who was deeply & profoundly afflicted in many ways that are far beyond what we experience. Yet what does Job say about that experience as he comes through it? Here's Job's own assessment of what God has done in his life (Job 42:1-6).

**Job answered the LORD (1).** This is after God's long speech to Job where Job is asked a whole bunch of questions. Do you remember when God asked Job all those questions that he can't answer? Here's Job's response:

**I know that You can do all things, & that no purpose of yours can be thwarted (2).** That's an acknowledgment of God's sovereignty. **Who is this that hides counsel without knowledge? (3).** Who does he say it is? *That's me, Lord. I'm in the front of the line. I'm the one who hides wisdom or counsel without knowledge.* **Therefore I have declared that which I did not understand, things too wonderful for me, which I did not know (3).** He's saying, *Lord, You're exactly right. I've been talking about things I know nothing about. But now I am going to speak.* Listen to what he says in vs 4. **Hear now, & I will speak; I will ask You, & You instruct me.** What does he say next? **I have heard of You by the hearing of the ear, but now my eye sees You; therefore I retract, & I repent in dust & ashes (5-6).** It's a stunning statement. *Lord, I had heard of You. I thought I knew You, but now I've seen You. Through this affliction I've come to see who You are, what You are like, & You are right & I am wrong.* It's an acknowledgment that God is good & does good even in our afflictions. & Paul gives us even more encouragement than that in Rom 8:28 where he tells us God can use all things for our good. What's included in that? What does he say in vss 35-39?

**Who will separate us from the love of Christ? Will tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? Just as it is written, "FOR YOUR SAKE WE ARE BEING PUT TO DEATH ALL DAY LONG; WE WERE CONSIDERED AS SHEEP TO BE SLAUGHTERED."** But in all these things we overwhelmingly conquer through Him who loved us. For I am convinced that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor things present, nor things to come, nor powers, nor height, nor depth, nor any other created thing, will be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

In other words, the Lord uses everything, even affliction, for our good. When you find yourself in a place of affliction, remember that even Jesus learned obedience from what He suffered (Heb 5:8). If your Savior learned obedience from what He suffered, surely we can learn godliness & contentment & the goodness of God in our afflictions. Let's pray as the men come for communion.

COMMUNION Pain & suffering are an inescapable reality. Everyone experiences it. Even Jesus. As the suffering Servant, He was afflicted, not for His own sins, but for ours. His suffering took Him through a series of lies, insults, & beatings culminating in a Roman cross. Yet through it all He would say, *The Lord has dealt well with His servant. I delight in God's law & it was good that I was afflicted.* We might ask, *Good? How can that be good?* To which He'd say, *Look at what My afflictions accomplished!* If we ever doubt that good can come out of pain & suffering, & sometimes we will, we need only to turn our eyes to the cross. The greatest affliction, the greatest good. The most evil act ever performed on this earth was the crucifixion of the Lord of Glory, yet God used that to bring His salvation to the world. PRAY PASS

Isaiah 53 reads in part

**4** Surely our griefs He Himself bore,  
 & our sorrows He carried;  
 Yet we ourselves esteemed Him stricken,  
 Smitten of God, & afflicted.

**5** But He was pierced through for our transgressions,  
 He was crushed for our iniquities;  
 The chastening for our well-being fell upon Him,  
 & by His scourging we are healed.

**6** All of us like sheep have gone astray,  
 Each of us has turned to his own way;  
 But the LORD has caused the iniquity of us all  
 To fall on Him.

**7** He was oppressed & He was afflicted,  
 Yet He did not open His mouth;  
 Like a lamb that is led to slaughter,  
 & like a sheep that is silent before its shearers,  
 So He did not open His mouth.

**10** But the LORD was pleased  
 To crush Him, putting Him to grief;  
 If He would render Himself as a guilt offering...

We eat the bread remembering the affliction Jesus went through as a **guilt offering**, a sacrifice, not for Himself, but for us. He was **crushed for our** sins. He died in our place. We remember Him as we eat the bread together.

11 ...the Righteous One,  
My Servant, will justify the many,  
As He will bear their iniquities.

12Therefore, I will allot Him a portion with the great,  
& He will divide the booty with the strong;  
Because He poured out Himself to death,  
& was numbered with the transgressors;  
Yet He Himself bore the sin of many,  
& interceded for the transgressors.

We take the cup remembering that **He poured out Himself to death**. He was punished for our sins. We remember His death as we drink of the cup together.