

Psalm 119:65-72 “Tentatio...Truly a Great Blessing!”

We’re in our third and final week of our “Saturate” series here at Victory of the Lamb. And so far, we’ve taken a look at two wonderful, positive, uplifting blessings that God gives us. Oratio and Meditatio. Prayer and Meditation. Those seem pretty great.

But then we get to our subject for today—Tentatio. Words you might use to translate that Latin word are “trial, temptation, affliction, challenge, testing.” In the words of Luther, which we just saw on screen, we could define Tentatio as “The devil afflicting you.” Oofta—that doesn’t sound quite as nice as the acts of prayer and meditation, does it? In fact, it sounds just the opposite. It sounds terrible and like it’s a lot of trouble. Who wants to have troubles and challenges in their life, anyways?? Most people would opt to have a trouble-free life rather than a trouble-filled life, if given the opportunity.

A couple examples—Would you rather be living paycheck to paycheck, wondering how you’re going to pay the bills next month, or never have a negative thought about your financial situation?

Would you rather feel stuck in a rut at your job, and strongly dislike your work, or be extremely excited and joyful and loving your job every minute of every hour you work?

Would you rather be in the doctor’s office every other week, or would you rather have a clean bill of health your whole life?

Financial stability, a perfect job and absolute health sure sound like the obvious choice. Because what good could it possibly be—struggling to function due to your health, being afflicted with the worry of not having an adequate amount of money, or suffering through a dead-end job that is no fun? You might think the answer is “no good at all.”

But today, I pray the way we think about troubles, hardships, afflictions, and challenges in our life changes. Because as we dwell on God’s words that he speaks to us in Psalm 119, we are going to see that troubles and afflictions in our lives—what Martin Luther called Tentatio—they are truly great blessings! Let’s look at the words of our lesson. They are found on page 5 in your worship folder, or you can also follow along on the screen. **“Do good to your servant according to your word, Lord. Teach me knowledge and good judgment, for I trust your commands. Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I obey your word. You are good, and what you do is good; teach me your decrees. Though the arrogant have smeared me with lies, I keep your precepts with all my heart. Their hearts are callous and unfeeling, but I delight in your law. It was good for me to be afflicted so that I might learn your decrees. The law from your mouth is more precious to me than thousands of pieces of silver and gold.”**

To review once more—the last 2 weeks we’ve talked about Oratio and Meditatio—prayer and meditation. And these are things that we *do*. We pray to God and we meditate on his word, and these things are good for us. But Tentatio—and you heard the psalmist mention Tentatio a couple times when he said—**“Before I was afflicted”**—verse 67...**“It was good for me to be afflicted”**—verse 71—Tentatio, affliction is different. This is not something we strive *to do*—it’s something that simply happens to us. We don’t have to go and search to try to find challenges and afflictions for our life. They just happen. Just think about God’s people in the Bible—they *all* had challenges. Here are just a few examples:

Joseph—sold into slavery, thrown into prison.

David—Before David was king, King Saul tried to kill him over and over again. Then when David was king, a couple of his sons tried to take the kingdom away from him.

Shadrach, Meshach and Abednego—they were thrown into a fiery furnace so hot that it killed the men who threw them in. They were thrown in because they wouldn't worship a gold statue. They would only worship God.

Daniel—similarly—thrown into a lion's den because he prayed to God and not to the king.

In the New Testament—the apostle Paul. He was beaten, thrown in prison, shipwrecked, run out of town, people tried to stone him to death, and many other things.

The Bible is full of people being afflicted with troubles, and your life is no doubt full of troubles as well. Sometimes it might be little things—waiting at what seems like every traffic light on your way to work or school. Sometimes it is bigger things. You're drowning in financial debt. Serious medical issues. Families ripped apart by sin. You can all make a list of the troubles and afflictions in your life.

How do you react when things don't go how you think they should? When you are pulled over for running a red light. When you *are* in the doctor's office for the 3rd time in 4 weeks, and they can't figure out what's wrong. Do you ever get angry at God about it? Do you ever question God's motives? Ever just pity yourself? Satan tries to feed you the lie that when you have troubles, you should blame God. That you have troubles because God doesn't really love you—because why would God give you troubles if he really loves you? Troubles are no good!

But that is not what the psalmist wrote. He said, **“It was good that I was afflicted.”** Why? **“So that I might learn your decrees.”** The psalmist's affliction sent him into God's Word. That's really what Psalm 119 is all about—it constantly praises how good God is and how good God's Word is.

One reason God's Word is so good is because in it we find the bottom-line reason why we can truly say that affliction in our lives is a blessing. Because in God's Word we read about Jesus' *Tentatio*.

We saw an example of Jesus going through affliction in our second lesson this morning. Jesus had fasted in the wilderness for 40 days and 40 nights, and then he was tempted by the devil. Think of how weak, how susceptible, how vulnerable you'd be to temptation after not eating for 40 days. And yet Jesus did not surrender to the devil's attacks. He answered each of the devil's attacks by going to Scripture and proving the devil wrong. Jesus obeyed the commands God gave in the Bible. He didn't believe Satan's lies and misuse of Bible passages. Jesus trusted in his Father above all else.

Jesus went through the *Tentatio* of temptations from the devil for us—facing those temptations and not sinning was part of Jesus' work of saving us! But he did more—he went through even greater affliction. Think to the last days of Jesus' life. On the night he was betrayed, his sweat was like drops of blood—that's how much anguish he was in. Later that night and into the next day he was beaten to the point of death. He had a crown of thorns crushed into his head. He was totally abandoned by the Father on the cross as he bore the guilt of every single sin every one of us has ever committed. Talk about *Tentatio*, talk about trials, afflictions, tough times. Jesus went through it all. My friends, Jesus went through that affliction *for you*. He suffered through that ultimate *Tentatio*—bearing the guilt of your sin—so that you don't have to.

That's why the psalmist can say that **“it is good that I was afflicted”**—the affliction pushed him back to God's Word, where God showed him and showed us the purpose of affliction in our lives—to bring us closer to him. To remind us of his love. To show us in that in the eternal scope of things, it is not our afflictions that define us. What defines us is the fact that Christ went through the greatest affliction *for us*. We see a great illustration of this in our first lesson that we read earlier. The apostle Paul—he had what he called “a thorn in his flesh that tormented him.” We don't know exactly what it was, but we do know that Paul pleaded with God numerous times to take away this affliction. But what did Christ say to Paul? **“My grace is sufficient**

for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.” And then Paul writes: **“Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ’s power may rest on me. That 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.”**

A trouble-free life doesn’t make us strong. Paul says he’s strong *when he is weak*, because it is then that he recognizes that he is resting under Christ’s power. It is in time of difficulty that he most vividly recognized Christ’s love for him—love that drove our Savior to experience terrible affliction—and even death.

What if your life were free of any and all troubles? What *could* happen? Maybe you would wake up every day praising God and looking to him as the source of all the blessings you have. But maybe eventually, gradually, you would kinda forget about God. You might miss a morning or two of saying “thank you” to him, you might forget to read the Bible, you might skip church. And before you know it, you’ve forgotten about God altogether. After all—if your life is perfect—what need do you have for God?

That’s why Tentatio is a blessing—Tentatio drives us to the Bible, to God’s promises. To Prayer and Meditation. Through studying and chewing on God’s words and through speaking directly to our heavenly Father in prayer, Tentatio brings us closer to our God.

But there’s more. When you recognize that Tentatio is a blessing—you will not only more fully grasp God’s promises for yourself, but you will also help others grasp those same promises. Let me illustrate this with a story of a woman I knew for a couple months last fall. Her name was Eva.

I visited Eva in the hospital a few times—she was a woman in her mid-70s, and she had beaten cancer 4 times in her life already. Now her body was simply failing her. 3 separate times she had 2 whole liters of fluid drained from her lungs, but the fluid kept coming back. At times she was unable to speak above a hoarse whisper. And yet she had a joyous confidence that she would presumably soon be with her Savior in heaven. She said she was just ready to go home and be with Jesus. Even in her immense pain and affliction, she was incredibly strong in Christ.

But in Eva’s Tentatio—God didn’t just strengthen *her* faith and bring *her* closer to him—through Eva’s Tentatio God also brought *me* closer to him. Eva’s joy and confidence in her Savior’s promises, even in her time of affliction—it strengthened my faith.

On one visit I was just reading Psalm 23 to her, and she started reciting the words right along with me. I couldn’t believe how strong she was in her trial. You listen extra carefully when a lady on her deathbed says to you with tears in her eyes, “The Lord’s my shepherd, I shall not want. He makes me lie down in green pastures, he leads me beside quiet waters, he restores my soul. Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for you are with me. Your rod and your staff, they comfort me. Surely goodness and love will follow me all the days of my life, and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever.”

When someone in the throes of Tentatio lovingly proclaims God’s Word to you, you listen. It helps *you* when you are going through struggles. It brings you closer to Christ. And so, my family in Christ—when you are going through Tentatio—God doesn’t *only* use those struggles to bless you. Whenever you are afflicted, God has given you a wonderful opportunity to make other people’s ears perk up and cause them to say, “Whoa—this person is going through a terrible time right now, and they are still praising their God and talking about how much God loves them! Who is this God—I’ve got to check him out!”

Tentatio is truly a great blessing. When you’re going through struggle and you are driven back to God’s Word, you are blessed because God’s bringing you closer to himself. Then, when you proclaim God’s wonderful promises you find in his Word—then through hearing you speak God’s Word others are blessed as well. May God use Tentatio to bring all of us and all those we know closer to him. Amen.