

God's will is not to harm us but to bless us

Deuteronomy 8:1-10, message by David Yeh, 25 Sept 2016

The book of Deuteronomy is about reaffirming God's law to the second generation of the Israelites, those who were under 20 years old. When God brought judgment on the people because of their unbelief, all those who were 20 and older died in the desert.

We have many hardships in life, even faithful, God-loving people go through the same problems and difficulties as those who do not know God. But there are great differences between us Christians and those who don't know God. The way we see these difficulties, how we face them and the outcome are all different to non-believers. When we have hardship we would ask, is it because I have sinned against God? Is God punishing me? Or is it because I walked away from God's will?

The Bible in this passage in Deuteronomy says that if Israel, or us, follow God's law we will be blessed, we will be able to receive what God has promised us. But why do we still have trials and face hardship? Yes, many of the hardships come because of disobedience. For example, we may spend too much time on social media so we don't have time to do our study or work or to be with our family. Or we go to bed so late that we feel miserable the next day. We may face hardships because we do not listen to others' advice on how to conduct our life, on choosing our friends, on our attitudes – and as a result we suffer, because of our own choices or decisions. Maybe you made a wrong decision and have had to pay the consequences. But many hardships we face do not come to us because of some sin or due to our own fault – but rather they come to us in order to train us for life.

Some hardships come because of other people. You might have a hard time with your friends at school or your colleagues at work. You may have an accident or have to deal with a health problem, financial crisis – something out of your control. Such hardships are just like what the second generation Israelites faced. When we think of the people of Israel wandering in the desert for 40 years, we may think they were being punished for their disobedience, but was that the only reason? Numbers 14:33 says, ***“Your children will be shepherds here for forty years, suffering for your unfaithfulness, until the last of your bodies lies in the wilderness.”*** It wasn't the fault of the second generation that they had to be in the desert for 40 years. It was the fault of their parents.

Let see what the Bible says about this:

1. Hardship in life is to build your spiritual life vrs. 1- 3

a) He humbles us and tests us v.2

V2 ***“Remember how the Lord your God led you all the way in the wilderness these forty years, to humble and test you in order to know what was in your heart, whether or not you would keep his commands.”*** The people of Israel stayed in the desert for 40 years because of the disobedience of their fathers. They saw the result of disobedience and they suffered with them, until all those 20 years and older died away. So it was not because of their sin.

What was the purpose? The purpose was to humble them and test them to see if they would obey the Lord's command. In their hard life in the desert, they faced hunger and lack, they faced hardship, and they lived in tents for 40 years.

How many of you like camping? I like it – maybe for 5 to 7 days. If over 10 days I want to go home. If it was for 40 years I think I would go crazy! God was testing them. In their hardship would they still trust in God, would they complain? Would they go and do things their own way?

All these hardships were to bring discipline to the Israelite's life, and to build a right relationship with God. Why? Because they were entering into a land that was full of idol worship and surrounded by morally corrupted nations. They needed to be strong, not to fall into temptation due to the influences that surrounded them. Before God could give them the blessing, they needed to learn that in life God is all they needed. Those 40 years of becoming nothing, of

total submission taught them dependence on God.

In the same way, through the hardship we face God is testing us. Will we still trust him, even if it seems like God doesn't love us? I believe it is not like trying to pass an examination but rather it is like gold that goes through fire in order to be purified. When we are mistreated by other people; when things are stolen; when people misunderstand us; when we face some illness; when people close to us betray us; or when God takes away a loved one – the question is, will we still trust that God loves us? Will we hold on to the fact He is in control?

When we suffer, the easiest sin we commit against God is asking the question, "Why Lord?" By using the word "why?" we are questioning God's doing, complaining and doubting God. "Why did this happen to me? Don't you love me anymore?" When we face hardship will we still trust in God? Will we still believe that God loves us?

Illustration: Learning to swim

When I was a young boy my dad would teach me how to swim. He would hold me and I would swing my arms and kick but I would never really be able to swim unless I swam by myself. So my dad would let go and let me swim by myself. I would drink a lot of water, but he was there all the time so I wouldn't drown.

When my dad let me go was it because he didn't love me or because he was being irresponsible? No! He wanted me to learn to swim. So in the same way in going through trials and difficulties, our faith can grow stronger and our love for God can become deeper.

Illustration: (Katherine)

In the past in my ministry I relied very heavily upon my wife Katherine. I even realise there was a time I loved Katherine more than God. But God took that away from me. **I lost my wife.** We were so much in love, we served together. We went to conferences together. We came home together. 24 hours a day we were together. When God took her away I didn't ask why, because I believed God was in control. Even before God took her away He had told me this was what He would do. She left me in front of me. As her heart beat slowed down, my eyes were right in front of her eyes. Although she loved God, she was not willing to leave me. She closed her eyes and tears flowed down from both sides of her eyes. She then opened her eyes again. And then she left me, her eyes still open.

Three months later, one night after I came back from a counselling class for those who had lost their loved one, I came out of my shower and saw our bed. I saw the side Katherine had been using, still untouched from the day she went into hospital. I just cried out "why?" As soon as I cried out "Why" the Lord said, "Why do you doubt me, why do you just think about what you have lost, your wife? Why don't you thank me for giving you 10 lovely years of time with Katherine?" I knelt down, repented and started giving thanks to God, suddenly the pain just left me. I knew God was with me comforting me. I was crushed and humbled, yet I was able to trust in God. I came out stronger, knowing God was still there in my pain and sorrow.

Why does God need to humble us, His people? Because pride will cause us to rely on self and not on God. We start to think we can do it ourselves and we don't need God. Gradually we depart from Him. In my ministry in Taiwan we saw breakthrough in the last two years of my time there. I was beginning to have pride and I was relying on myself and on my late wife. Yes, we still loved the Lord and had a genuine relationship with Him, but our need for God was more for the purpose of ministry than due to the fact we ourselves desperately needed the Lord. People need God to solve problems. People need God for the things they want to have. People need God for ministry, but do we need God Himself? Do we need Him for Who He is? God took Katherine away so that I would rely on God Himself, and my relationship with God has never been as close as now.

b) He wants us to rely on Him and His Word v.3

Deuteronomy 8:3 says, "**He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna, which neither you nor your ancestors had known, to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.**" After they left Egypt after a few days the Israelites ran out of food. Most of us would think about buying more food, but this is not so easy in the wilderness, especially with several million people.

Unless they had encountered such difficult circumstances, they would not have gained some basic knowledge about God that they needed to know. They needed to rely on God. What did God do? God had a good purpose. He brought relief. God provided manna, an unknown food that only lasted during their forty years in the wilderness; God provided miracles day after day for 40 years – that is 14,600 days of unfailing provision. Notice in Deuteronomy 8:3 it is God that humbled them. V.3a **“He humbled you, causing you to hunger and then feeding you with manna...”** They needed to follow God and His Word. They needed to obey the very one that provided the daily food that sustained their life.

Illustration: From Relying on Katherine to relying on God

I relied on my late wife, the ministry and social activity. When I lost her, I felt everything had fallen apart. It was very difficult serving God during the first few years after I lost my late wife. One night when I was so depressed, God let me see I was like a bird with one wing. When a bird has lost a wing, it is not simply that it loses half of its ability to fly. In fact it cannot fly at all! The Lord showed me that He was the wind that was going to carry me up to the sky. I learned to rely on God and pour my heart out to God. My relationship with God has become more intimate than before. When I was ready, when God had become my all, God prepared a new wonderful wife for me to move on to the next stage of my life and ministry.

Angie

Angie is a very kind and gentle person. Many people like her. She supports me gently and gives me great advice. God has done such things in our lives. He is not being malicious. It is the way loving parents deal with their children. They let them go through certain hardships so they can grow. V3b says, **“...to teach you that man does not live on bread alone but on every word that comes from the mouth of the Lord.”** Our life is not just about satisfying our physical needs but learning to trust God, to rely on Him and to know Him.

For example, Jesus quoted this verse in Deuteronomy when He was challenged by Satan to change the stone to bread to eat when He was hungry and had fasted for 40 days. Satan wanted Jesus to satisfy His physical need and turn away from the purpose of seeking God. Jesus knew that seeking God and having a relationship with God was more important than satisfying physical needs. After the testing, the Bible says God send angels to minister to Jesus.

Yes God will provide for you in your hardship. It is during this time that we come to God and ask God for answers, for comfort, encouragement, strength and direction, and our love for God increases. The suffering will make you or break you. It will make you a better person or break your faith. Don't doubt God when going through such times or you will be confused and experience much pain. Instead patiently wait for God to deliver you and seek His help. The key is to focus on the lessons to be learnt and to delight in the provider rather than to try to escape from the difficult situation.

2. During hard preparation, God will provide for your needs v4-v5

Deuteronomy 8:4 goes on, **“Your clothes did not wear out and your feet did not swell during these forty years.”** What it says sounds impossible but it is not impossible to God. This is actually what the people of Israel experienced. The clothing industry would be closed. The people should have no reason to doubt God and His care for them. God will provide the strength and comfort and joy you need to go through your hardship. You will find that does miracles far greater than your problem.

Illustration:

God prompted my late wife and I to help someone in their financial crisis. We ourselves were in debt also but we obeyed God and gave \$4000 to this person. My late wife had more faith than I did, I was grumbling. The person we helped did not come back to church. A few weeks later someone gave us an offering. When we opened the envelope, it was \$4000. We were so amazed. An experience like this will make you believe God is alive, God knows everything and He knows our need. He will take care of us. All of our experiences differ. Your experiences are different from mine, but we all see how special is God's work in the lives of His people.

3. God's purpose is for us to receive His promise and blessing v6-10

Reading from v.6 in Deuteronomy 8, **“Observe the commands of the Lord your God, walking in obedience to him and revering him. ⁷For the Lord your God is bringing you into a good land—a land with brooks, streams, and deep springs gushing out into the valleys and hills; ⁸a land with wheat and barley, vines and fig trees, pomegranates, olive oil and honey; ⁹a land where bread will not be scarce and you will lack nothing; a land where the rocks are iron and you can dig copper out of the hills.”**

It is God's desire to bless you because that is who He is. Before God can trust us with money He needs to see if we are a trustworthy steward or not. Before He uses us in a prominent place we need to learn to be humble, not to fall into pride but to give Glory to God. Vrs 6-9 When we read this passage don't we get envious? What a beautiful land it was. There was such abundance there. They didn't need to do anything, all this abundance was there for them to enjoy.

Illustration: Courting Angie

As I said before, God provided me a lovely wife Angie. It is not easy for her, leaving her home and family and coming to a new place, and having to accept me, and my children. She owned a small business in Singapore enough to support herself. She could wake up when she wanted to, enjoy her life, didn't need to cook, but now she needs to cook. She has to get up early, go to work in a junior post, gets annoyed by two children. Why? Simply because God told her to come. A few days ago she said, *“My dear, it seems you didn't need to do much when courting me, pursuing me.”* I admit, all I did was to send her one flower. It is all because of God. But she also said, *“I feel I am loved by you more now than when you were courting me.”*

Even coming to this church was God's hand. At the end of last year I had to leave *Bread of Life Church* in Pakuranga and go to another *Bread of Life Church*. I didn't want to go. I was sad to leave, so were my co-workers, but I obeyed the church. I knew that church was not the right place for me longer-term but I ministered faithfully there. When there was an opportunity in this church I didn't apply because I wanted to know if God was leading me here or not, but after fasting and praying it became clear that this was the place to which God was leading. I believe this is the place that God has been preparing me for my whole life. I asked God to give me confirmation by enabling us to sell our house in east Auckland for a good price. Indeed we did sell our house for an incredible price – some \$60,000 more than all the agents expected. Our agent just kept on saying: *“It's incredible!”* We also bought a house in Mairangi Bay for \$50,000 lower than the expected price. And I wanted to have settlement at the end of year so my sons can finish their school in east Auckland for the year and both houses agreed to settle on 9 December.

When our life is right then we will see God pour out His blessing on us. He wants to pour His blessing on us, even financially so we can enjoy God's abundance and be vessels of blessing to others. He wants us to enjoy life and serve Him. He wants to give us whatever we need, not that those things will become our God or that we will neglect the One who gives us the blessing – but that we love Him more.

V10 **“When you have eaten and are satisfied, praise the Lord your God for the good land He has given you.”** When we have received God's blessing, we must not forget to give thanks to God. When we give thanks to God we acknowledge that all good things come from Him. God's will is to bless us

Application

Can you identify deep struggles that you have gone through? Perhaps you are going through them now. Maybe there is pressure from the expectations or demands of your parents. Maybe your friends at school are giving you a hard time. Maybe your school results are bad. Maybe your work environment is not good. Maybe your physical condition is poor or you have a health problem. Will you turn to God and learn from these hardships? Will you treasure these life lessons so that throughout your life you will faithfully live before Him?