

# The Lord's Loving Affliction

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at Oak Grove Baptist Church, Paducah, Ky.  
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Isaiah 30:20, 26

**20 And though the Lord give you the bread of adversity and the water of affliction, yet your Teacher will not hide himself anymore, but your eyes shall see your Teacher.**

**26 Moreover, the light of the moon will be as the light of the sun, and the light of the sun will be sevenfold, as the light of seven days, in the day when the Lord binds up the brokenness of his people, and heals the wounds inflicted by his blow.**

These words sound so strange to the 21<sup>st</sup> American Christian's ear. God giving His children the bread of adversity and the water of affliction? That God's hand would bring a blow? We don't want to believe in a God like this. It doesn't fit our theology of God. The stereotype we have of God in this country does not allow for Him doing these kinds of things. Oh no, we serve a very different kind of God, a God that may allow affliction but He will not be the one administering it. Many in this country don't even believe that. Their understanding of God does not allow for this. They believe if they are good and work hard enough God will bring prosperity and they will not suffer in the least if they only believe. According to their theology the Christian should never suffer, especially by the hand of God.

But your understanding of God must not be based upon what some television preacher or best-selling book that promises prosperity says. Your knowledge of God must come from Him and God's knowledge has been revealed to us through the person of Jesus Christ and the testimony of Jesus Christ is the Bible. Therefore, if the Bible says that God will afflict us from time to time and that He will bring loving blows that wound us, we need to believe it even though our nature resists it. "Thus saith the Lord," trumps "Thus saith the preacher, the teacher, or the Christian celebrity."

I want to explain the pain God brings, not in defense of God for He needs no defense. He is the sovereign Lord God. Who am I to stand in His defense? Part of our problem is our depravity that we cannot see or submit to this great sovereign hand and His glorious purposes in our lives, even when they are difficult.

What I want to do is bring an answer to why God would inflict pain upon His own children. No man can restrain His hand or demand an answer of Him, "What have you done?" But I want to biblically demonstrate some of God's purposes in afflicting us to help us to submit to His hand. We must be persuaded that all His hand does, whether it brings blows or blessings, is good because He loves us.

## I. A DESCRIPTION OF GOD'S AFFLICTION

What is this strange language? The text drives our understanding. There are many places in the Scripture where we could glean but I want to stay with the text. Time will not allow me to be exhaustive, so I just want to mention a couple.

God's affliction is:

### A. The Inability to Sense God's Presence.

*“yet your Teacher will not hide himself anymore”*

What is *the bread of affliction, the water of oppression* for a Christian? When God seems to be either silent or hidden. Beloved, there is no greater trial for the child of God than this season, this dark night of the soul, the sense that God is not there. I've gone through many difficult things in my life, the loss of loved ones, financial deprivation, failures, people who once loved me turning and hating me. I've experienced many trials but I can say to you truthfully I know of no greater trial than to go through a season where it seems I'm all alone and can't sense God. There is no greater pressure upon the soul of a child than to put Him in the vice of God's absence and he be squeezed.

We shouldn't be surprised. The Bible shares this in many different stories. For example, Job. His health, wealth and children were taken from him but it seems like the greatest agony of all was the absence of God. Job never mentioned his wealth or children being taken, he instead cries out, “Where is God?! Oh that I could have an audience with Him, that I could bring my case to Him, that I could argue my defense with God.”

David, the psalmist declares this same sense of the loss of God's presence over and again many times in his life but none greater than Psalm 42, “My soul thirsts for the living God. When shall I come and appear before Him? My tears have been my meat day and night while they continually say to me, ‘Where is thy God?’” He laments, “Why are you cast down oh my soul and why are you disquieted within me?” David knew this oppression, this great affliction of the withdrawal of the consciousness of God's presence.

### B. Allows Enemies to Triumph Over Us.

Another affliction from the Lord is allowing an enemy to have the upper hand over us. I know many of our theologies don't like that. Here are some things we've heard, some even this morning:

“I'm more than a conqueror.”

“I'm an overcomer.”

“I have victory in Christ.”

“Christ has triumphed.”

Yes, that’s true but there are seasons where God will allow an enemy to prevail over you. He will give you over to them. It happened to Jesus.

David prophesied of Christ being turned over to His enemies in Psalm twenty two, “Many bulls have surrounded Me; Strong bulls of Bashan have encircled Me. They gape at Me with their mouths, like a raging and roaring lion.” Christ was given over to evil and it had a victory over Him.

Can you imagine, as Christ hangs between heaven and earth, nailed to a cross, what hell sounded like as they began to shout their shouts of victory? As they wailed those gruesome sounds signaling their belief that they defeated the Son of God? Hell began to shake with its joy and celebration. Christ could sense that and at that moment He could no longer sense His Father’s presence. “My God, My God, why have You forsaken Me?”

No, He just wasn’t absent of the conscious awareness of God, but God had truly abandoned Him, turned His back and forsaken Him. He was all alone. The dark night of the soul had come upon Him and He was in complete darkness. Why? For me. For you. So we should never again be afraid of the dark.

### **C. Inexplicable Adversity.**

Daily there are a million things that come crashing down on us invading our lives and disquieting our hearts. Things come and shake up our lives and we feel it deeply.

The diagnosis we didn’t want to hear.  
The pink slip we didn’t want to see.  
The phone call we didn’t want to receive.

Every discomfort that causes us to run to Him in childlike resignation is His design. It’s the infliction of God.

That’s a brief description, but the answer we want to entertain is ‘why the trials?’

## **II. THE REASONS FOR GOD’S AFFLICTION**

Why would God do this? Again, this list is not exhaustive.

### **A. Sin**

I want to deal with sin in two categories—sinful deeds and sinful nature. These are two of the reasons God sometimes strikes you with His rod of correction or gives you the bread of affliction or the water of oppression. In the case of Israel, they had ignored God. Century after century, they worshipped other gods. The Lord had sent prophets to warn them and in their warnings God pleaded with them like a husband pleads with a wife who left him for other men. He pleads with them, *Come, return, repent*. But His every overture, every plea was rejected.

As the prophets warned, the day finally came—God allowed them to be turned over to their enemies, the Babylonians. They were drug away from their homeland to a strange place where people spoke with a foreign language. Sinful deeds caused this.

### 1. Sinful deeds.

God will bring into our lives correction when we disobey.

*Proverbs 3:11-12 —“My son, do not despise the chastening of the LORD, Nor detest His correction; For whom the LORD loves He corrects, Just as a father the son in whom he delights.”*

God delights in us. God delights in you. God delights in me. He enjoys me. He loves me. And therefore He corrects me.

Is your theology so narrow that God cannot bring rebuke into your life when you, out of love, will rebuke and correct your own children? Surely not. Surely we can allow God to love us like this and be thankful?

### 2. Sinful nature.

There is still something about you and me that is, to this day, corrupt, foul and unholy. Many of these sins of nature we are unaware of. We don't know they exist, because they're at home within us. We call it a way of life, we've grown up with these things. What am I talking about? It's not things you do; it's what you are. How you think, your likes, your dislikes, your lusts, your dream, your ambitions. You don't know they're there and that God doesn't approve of them. In fact, you think He does approve of these things. You're not aware that God finds them offensive. It's like hairs on your head; you're aware that you have hair but you're never aware of a particular single strand until somebody plucks at it. You're not conscious of that hair, but when someone pulls it you know it's there.

God allows the bread of affliction and the water of oppression to strike us in the right place in order to expose these things in our lives.

What I'm really saying is that the reason God does this is for this big word called *sanctification*.

## **B. Sanctification**

What does that mean? Some have said it means to make you holy and that is certainly true, but let me give you something else to think about.

**Sanctification is nothing more than the reducing of self and the increase of Christ in your life.**

This is exactly what John the Baptist said of his own life,

*John 3:30 —“He must increase, but I must decrease.”*

Here was this successful prophet. He began preaching at the River Jordan and thousands came to hear him. This was a celebrity made overnight. People were baptized, heeding his message. Then one day a carpenter from Nazareth comes and John points and says, “Behold, the Lamb of God who takes away the sins of the world.” It was of the Messiah John said, “He must increase, but I must decrease.”

What happened to John’s ministry? The numbers began to dwindle. One day Herod came and arrested him and eventually beheaded him.

John the Baptist was not excused of the affliction I’m talking about and nor will you or I.

*I. To make us holy.*

We are naturally more in love with ourselves than we are of God. Some of you don’t believe that because you say, “I’ve been saved. I’m not the same person that I used to be.” And that is true, but you are still a human being with self. What is self? It’s the personality. It’s who you are. The self that *naturally* loves you more than anyone else.

Before you became a true child of God, every decision you made was based upon self-love and self-gratification. Conversion changed that, absolutely. God gave us a new heart with a new goal—to love God more than anything else. But we have been so well trained by sin’s domination in those prior years that the flesh, this human nature, still reacts to this life through the patterns taught to us by sin.

When you were born you were born with a nature that not just opposed God but hated Him. You hated what He stood for. You hated His rule and control over you. You despised Him His rightful place of authority, so everything you did was in opposition to God because that’s the way you were born. That’s the nature. The cat doesn’t oink and the pig doesn’t meow. It’s not according to their natures to do so.

One of the great Puritans said, “If you want a pig to lick himself and keep himself clean like a cat the only way you can do that is to turn the pig into a cat.” He’s got to have the nature of the cat.

The only way to turn a sinner into a saint is to give the sinner a new nature. If you want the sinner to love God and be holy you must change the sinner's nature. That's what God does at salvation. Salvation does not mean to just be forgiven of your sins but to be transformed at the basic root, the fundamental essence of a person.

I wasn't sinful just because I wanted to be, sin also enslaved me. But the moment Jesus saved me, the chains of sin's domination broke and I was set free. I could then walk with Him and obey Him and love Him. However, this human nature is still with me. Not sin's domination, but its presence, its corruption and imperfection.

*But not in everything.* There were some areas in my life when Jesus saved me that I didn't have to give it a second thought—I didn't want them in my life anymore because I knew instantly they didn't please my new heavenly Father. I wanted to please Him more than I wanted to please myself.

*But not in everything.* There were and are still things in me that I still choose self-love over love for God. Why would a Christian do this? Let me give you two reasons:

*a. We don't know God is not pleased.*

The flesh, that is our fallen human nature, is tricky. Let me rephrase that and say you are tricky. We are masters of self-deception. We have perfected lying to ourselves so much that we actually believe ourselves. If a person is deceived it means he does not know he is deceived. If he knows it, then it isn't deception it is willful sin. There are many things we do for ourselves that we deceive ourselves into thinking we're really doing for the Lord. For example, if a brother or sister wounds your heart and you go to them and tell them how they wounded you, you could easily tell yourself that you are doing God's work, but you could be very well motivated by pure revenge.

Another example, you join a ministry and get involved telling yourself you're doing it for the glory of God. But are you? You may simply do it because you don't want to feel guilty not doing it.

That's how this deceptive flesh works. It deceives and hides itself. It doesn't want you to know why you're really doing something so it gives you a spiritual reason for it. So you say, "Surely this is fine, this is wonderful." Friends, a lot of ministry is being done today by the power of the flesh and many people believe they are doing it for God and by His strength but they're not. You don't know what God knows.

The second reason a Christian can choose self-love over love of God because he is:

*b. Not willing to surrender absolute control.*

We don't mind God controlling the major parts of our lives so long as we can have some parts to control.

As you have heard it said many times before, “If Jesus is not Lord of all, He’s not Lord at all.” How very true. To give God every part and parcel of your life but hold out just one little part for your own desires is to love yourself and reject Christ. What does God do? He patiently, with much longsuffering, He comes and administers His affliction and strategically places His blows where needed to render you free from this terrible master called *self*.

God brings darkness, He brings affliction, He brings trials, He brings pain in order to expose me to me because I don’t know I’m that bad.

When everything is wonderful and blessings are mine, I don’t see the dark corruption that still clings to me. But you let problems come and my self begins to rise. You let a brother, husband, wife, say an unkind word and what do you feel raging up on the inside? Oh, you have justified it by saying “It’s my right, they were wrong. I need to deal with this, we’ve got to bring the Bible into this.” But the Bible isn’t administered as a loving ointment but as a club to beat them over the head. God takes you through that difficulty to expose the ugliness of your own heart.

It’s like a dog—sorry to compare you to the canine world, or should I apologize to the canine world?—he seems nice and dossal, kind and safe, but he falls into a trap or catches his leg in a snare, fear sets in. When you approach now he bears his fangs and begins to growl. The hair on the back of his neck rises and he takes a defensive, angry, ferocious position. What happened to the kind, dossal, wonderful canine friend? Difficulty came and it began to expose his true nature.

The same is true with you. God applies the affliction and the first thing that arises is this discomfort and dislike for the pain and we begin to bear our fangs, growl and complain to God.

I do not hesitate to say that the rule is there is not one Christian who doesn’t start out with God thinking God is going to make his or her life increase and not decrease. Every one of us at the beginning of our Christian lives believed it would lead to prosperity and not failure, comfort and not discomfort, pleasure and not pain. Perhaps there is only one exception and that’s the Apostle Paul because Christ tells him at the first what great things Paul would have to suffer for Christ’s sake. But the norm is the opposite. We think life with Christ is going to be easier and not more difficult.

And why do we think this? Well, I think preachers and the church must bear some responsibility. We proclaim a gospel that sounds very close to this, do we not? “Come to Jesus and He will help you.” Yes, He will but help us do what? Be holy. Because that’s what you need more than anything else. You don’t need your marriage fixed. You don’t need your children’s problems solved. You don’t need a bigger home or better things. What you need is to be holy.

The moment God begins to bring affliction we begin to flail like a fish out of water; we cry like a baby who’s uncomfortable with his hunger. We complain that God must either have abandoned us or worse, He can’t be trusted. Why do we so gripe and growl to God? It’s because we love ourselves so much and self is unhappy. It is proof that we are still enslaved to self-gratification.

As long as you think happiness is tied to self-satisfaction, you will never be happy. Happiness is in being free from self and lost in Christ.

Therefore, God in His mercy must loose the moorings of our soul from self but revealing the insufficiency of self. Do you know what mooring is? Have you ever seen a boat tied to the dock? Those ropes are the moorings. God has to untie the connection you have, this love of self, so that you can be free in the ocean of His love. What God's doing is not hurting but helping to set you free from the remaining corruption of sin that is still within. What God's trying to do through the disappointments and the pain and the failure and the loss is proving your smallness. He's proving your inabilities and His abilities. He will even give you over to your lusts and allow backsliding to come to prove you're not as holy as you once thought. We take pride in our spiritual progress; therefore God must allow spiritual failure in order to prove that apart from Him you can do nothing. He can allow unbelief to have a season with you in order to prove you don't trust as you think you do.

*c. A most vital question.*

Could not God make us holy without hurting us, without breaking us, without affliction? Of course He could. His hand is all-powerful. He can turn the heart of any king or president as easily as He can a river. All of our hearts are like water in His hand. So yes, God could make us holy without affliction, but He has chosen to not do so, therefore, I can only conclude it is for our best that He does not do it instantaneously.

Surely, the Lord could as easily make us fully sanctified and mature saints in one instance. But He has chosen not to do it for the same reasons He does not make us make us fully mature adults in one instance. He has chosen to create us as helpless babes who must grow through the growth process unto maturation.

He does not want to short circuit the growth cycle anymore than you would want to do for your children. I understand there were times we wished we our children could hurry and grow up, but those times were few and short lived. I look back upon my sons' childhood and relish each moment, even the difficult ones. What does this tell us about God? That He is in every sense a true father. The title Father is not some metaphorical description of God. No, He truly is your Father and He truly loves you. In every sense of the word He is your heavenly Father and you are His child.

Again, you ask, but why so mysterious and why so slow? Why does He take so long to grow us up in the faith? Why must pain be involved? The very asking of the question is its own answer. We don't like pain. Self doesn't like discomfort. Self doesn't want to lose control. What does pain and difficulty and adversity do? Makes us lose control and get uncomfortable. The very reason you ask that question shows why He must afflict us. We love ourselves so much that we want to live as painlessly as possible. Therefore the only way God can free us is to afflict us.



The love of self runs deep. Hundreds of years ago before they had anesthesia, before chloroform, do you know how they did surgeries? They performed surgeries without any anesthesia. When the infection and disease ran deep, the surgeon's knife removed it and the patient had to endure the surgery with full senses. What if in a particular case the doctor had to operate, the knife had to be applied to remove the cancer or the gangrene, the corruption, and it was the surgeon's own son? Would he do it nonetheless? All the more reason he would do it. Your Father must sometime bring the knife to remove the corruption for it is very deep. If we were more holy He wouldn't have to cut as deep and it wouldn't hurt as badly, but we're not so holy. The love of self runs so deep that the knife must go deeper.

One of the reasons God brings affliction in our lives it to make us more holy. But there is one more reason.

## 2. Increase faith.

We are naturally more trusting and dependent of ourselves than we are of God.

Therefore, God does His work of grace, sanctifying us slowly and in the dark, so we are forced to depend upon Him. He doesn't explain what He's doing before He does it and He shuts you up to the dark. The sun refuses to shine and the moon, the illumination of the night, is gone and everything is dark. As we said earlier, daylight, darkness, it doesn't matter, it's all the same and there is no way out. What is God doing? You pray and ask God, *Please, Lord, tell me what's happening. What do You want me to do?* And no response. The no response ought to tell you what you should do—trust Him. You're in the dark and don't know what's happening because God wants to develop your faith in Him.

Did you ever play that game when you were a kid where you had a partner and you put a blindfold on and you had to listen to the instructions of your partner who wasn't blindfolded? Ah, you exhibited great faith in your partner because both of you wanted to win. You trusted they wanted to win so you heeded their instructions because you wanted to also win. What is God doing to you but blindfolding you so you will do exactly what He tells you to do so. He is teaching us that in the end He will never let us down.

God must shut us up to faith. Many people don't come to the Lord because their pride is so strong that they refuse to do anything unless they know what they're doing beforehand. They will not trust in the Lord. Those that remain proud remain in their blindness.

### **III. THE RECOVERY FROM GOD'S AFFLICTION**

v. 26—*“in the day when the Lord binds up the brokenness of his people, and heals the wounds inflicted by his blow.”*

God will not always afflict. God's affliction of us is not to hurt us but to help us. He does not apply the surgeon's knife gladly. The Bible says in Lamentations 3:33, "For He does not afflict willingly," in other words, God does not enjoy afflicting His children.

Back to the illustration of the surgeon without anesthesia. The surgeon's son is on the table and there is nothing to give him to dull the pain and yet, because of love, the father will apply the knife to cut out the diseased part to heal the son—to save his life. As that child begins to scream those horrific screams of terror and tears come out of that little boy's eyes, would you tell me that the eyes of the surgeon are dry? I can see him even crying along with the son, "Oh son, I'm sorry! I'm sorry. But it's for your good, just trust dad." And he takes the knife a little deeper. That's your heavenly Father. He doesn't enjoy bringing pain in your life. Stop thinking that if you do. He is a true Father and He does not relish the difficulty you are in. I believe that with every tear you weep He cries ten thousand more. He doesn't afflict you willingly. But He knows this will help you in the end and bring you through and you will be more like Him in the conclusion of the matter.

### **A. God's Affliction Brings Healing.**

The things we grieve over now would only make less happy in the end. The things you are trusting for in this life, your comfort, will not bring lasting comfort or happiness.

Recently somebody said, "If God does something in your life He may send you to Africa like He did Paul and Velda." I'm telling you that if Paul and Velda resisted that call and stayed here they would be less happy in the end. It would destroy them to stay. They have to get out of here. Their wellbeing necessitates it. Their happiness in Christ necessitates it.

The thing you grieve over as God takes it from your clenched fist, is only going to make you unhappy in the end and He knows it. Trust Him.

There have been so many things God has taken out of my grip that I grieved over and thought I could not live without only to find out that life is better without it. So many times God has saved me from my own self. I don't know if you can understand what I'm saying so let me illustrate it this way. I love my wife dearly. We've been married 32 years, but you know that's nothing compared to somebody who has been married sixty or seventy years. They have spent their whole adult life together. And then when one spouse is taken and one is left I cannot imagine the pain. It's got to be hard to lose a part of you because after 50, 60 or 70 years they are a part of you deeply.

It seems so cruel but listen to me, what God takes away He replaces with Himself.

Now that widow can learn of Christ in a way she could have never known before. The Bible says He has a peculiar interest in the widow and the orphan and now Christ can be her husband in a way He could not have been before when she had a husband. She didn't know Christ in that aspect but now she can.

## **B. God Restores His Gifts.**

The widow may be left behind but she's on the footsteps of her husband and she shall join Him soon. All of us are on the heels of those who departed. We're not far behind them. Soon we will join them also and God will restore what He's taken from us.

Look at the case here. The Jews here were exiled and at the end of this prophecy when the promise was fulfilled, the Jews returned to their homeland better than when they left. They came back serving the One True God. They had been cured of their idolatry and now they could truly enjoy God's blessings.

God only deprives us of what we love so that He can teach us how to truly love and enjoy it without it being a snare.

What God takes away from you temporarily is to teach you how to truly love it and to enjoy it without it becoming a temptation, an idol.

God must destroy our infatuation with ourselves so that we may be able to really enjoy God's love for us.

He will always bring healing. You will be healed and happy that He did it. You will stand and say, as we heard one say today, "I'm glad He did this. I'm glad this happened because I've learned something now about my God and myself. I saw something in my life that was terrible, hideous and repulsive. I don't want to be that person. I saw Christ and His love and compassion and pity for me and now my heart loves Him more."

That's what God's doing. When you become comfortable in the dark, knowing you're not alone even though it may feel that way, you can enjoy living in the light. It's in the darkness I learn His voice and find that He never misguides or misleads. He directs me safely as if I were already in the light and could see my way clearly. I can trust the Lord for when it's dark it's really not, for the light of the Son of God is with me. Amen.