

Trends

“Surveys conducted in 2018 and 2019 show that 4% of American adults say they are atheists when asked about their religious identity, up from 2% in 2009. An additional 5% of Americans call themselves agnostics, up from 3% a decade ago.”

- via Pew Research Center

Psalm 14:1: “The fool hath said in his heart, ‘There is no God.’”

Sentence Sermons

“Christianity, if false, is of no importance, and if true, of infinite importance. The only thing it cannot be is moderately important.”

—C. S. Lewis

Matthew 16:26: “For what profit is it to a man if he gains the whole world, and loses his own soul? Or what will a man give in exchange for his soul?”

News & Notes

Please pray for the Wallace family. They continue to miss our services (Heb. 10:24-25). “The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.” (Jas. 5:16)

Please keep sister Wilma Cardwell in your prayers. She’s an encouragement to all!

Pray for all our members who do not attend regularly. Try to encourage them!

Pray for Courtney Dickey. She is a member at Belleville and recently lost her husband Andy due to a tragic accident. Let us “mourn with those that mourn.” (Rom. 12:15)

Please pray for our brethren in foreign lands (e.g., Philippines, Nigeria, Zimbabwe, Malawi, Uganda, Chad, India, etc.). They labor under very difficult circumstances yet remain faithful. May God richly bless them!

Pray that Westside might be an influence for good in this community.

Pray for the all of our students: elementary, secondary and college. Our young people face many trials and temptations at school.

There are many needy saints, including preachers! Can you help?!

Anyone need prayers? Let us know so we can announce it and post it.

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Editor: Craig Thomas (812-320-9569); craigthomas82000@gmail.com

Please direct questions and comments to the editor.

Words of Life

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*“Lord, to whom shall we go? You
have the words of eternal life.”*

John 6:68



“Before I was afflicted I went astray”

Craig Thomas

Today’s **Thought for the Day** comes from Psalm 119, the eighth set of eight verses, “TETH” (vv. 65-72). In this section the psalmist praises God’s word for delivering him from his “affliction” (v. 67). The “affliction” from which he appears to be suffering from came from trials inflicted by “the proud” who had “forged a lie” against him (v.69). It is noteworthy that before the psalmist experienced this trial, he says (v. 67):

*“Before I was afflicted I went astray,
But now I keep Your word.”*

It is a universal fact of the human condition that all suffer trials and tribulations. Mine may differ from yours, yours may differ from mine; but “mark it down” all of us will ultimately deal with adversity. Most folks misunderstand why God allows us to suffer. Even those of us who are Christians often forget the why’s of suffering when we are in the midst of the “furnace of affliction” (Isa 48:10). I plead guilty to that charge.

It is so important to remember that our suffering never comes from God. But God permits Satan to afflict us. Read the book of Job very carefully. It was Satan who afflicted Job. It was God who helped him. As Job said, “*Shall we indeed accept good from God, and shall we not accept adversity?*” (Job 2:10) The psalmist recognized the benefit of his trials when he said (vv. 67 & 71):

*“⁶⁷ Before I was afflicted I went astray,
But now I keep Your word.”*

*“⁷¹ It is good for me that I have been afflicted,
That I may learn Your statutes.”*

When afflictions come, most shake their fist to the heavens and blame God. God is doing us a great service by allowing the gift of affliction to come our way. The psalmist’s afflictions did not drive him away from God but drove him toward God! It reminded him of the importance of keeping God’s

word. It put him in a frame of mind where he desired to “*learn Your statutes.*”

It is absolutely critical to our happiness in this life, the deepening of our relationship with God, and our preparation for eternal life to endure afflictions. We must realize God allows them so that our faith in Him may grow. As Peter said (1 Pet. 1:6-9):

“⁶ In this you greatly rejoice, though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, ⁷ that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, ⁸ whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, ⁹ receiving the end of your faith — the salvation of your souls.”

Precious metals like gold and silver can only be purified by the trial of fire. Steel can only be made useful if tempered by intense heat of the furnace. Similarly, our faith can only grow pure and strong through affliction. Through affliction, God allows us to learn the most important lesson we desperately need to learn: I am totally, absolutely, and completely dependent on Him! I cannot take one breath or one step without His constant abiding presence. Paul learned this lesson through his “*thorn in the flesh*” (2 Cor. 12:7-10). He learned he could not overcome it on his own. He learned that God would not take it away. He learned that he could only successfully navigate his personal sea of fire by placing his trust in God:

“⁸ Concerning this thing I pleaded with the Lord three times that it might depart from me. ⁹ And He said to me, ‘My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.’ Therefore most gladly I will rather boast in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. ¹⁰ Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in needs, in persecutions, in distresses, for Christ’s sake. For when I am weak, then I am strong.” (2 Cor. 12:8-10)

It is paramount for us to remember this when we are afflicted. We must reach out to God for the strength we need. We will not be able to summon that strength from within ourselves; only He can provide it. We must pray for wisdom to endure our trials (Jas. 1:5-7). That prayer must be with total confidence and trust God will answer! (Jas. 1:6-8) The wisdom to understand that even the most terrible and frightening of trials are but a “*light affliction, which is but for a moment, is working for us a far more exceeding and eternal weight of glory*” (2 Cor. 4:16). Affliction can only accomplish that if we allow God to bear our burdens. But we can be confident in “*casting all your care upon Him, for He cares for you*” (1 Pet. 5:7).

The next time you visit the “*furnace of affliction*” do not despair. Do not shake your fist heavenward and blame God. Instead,

“² My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into various trials, ³ knowing that the testing of your faith produces patience. ⁴ But let patience have its perfect work, that you may be perfect and complete, lacking nothing.” (Jas. 1:2-4)

God is doing us a grand favor when afflictions come! He is handing us on a “*silver platter,*” the opportunity to grow ever closer to Him.

“⁷¹ It is good for me that I have been afflicted, That I may learn Your statutes.

⁷² The law of Your mouth is better to me Than thousands of coins of gold and silver.”

OUR TOP PRIORITY

SWORD TIPS #2061 (SEPTEMBER 19, 2020)

Joe R. Price

33 But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you. 34 Therefore do not worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will worry about its own things. Sufficient for the day is its own trouble. (Matthew 6:33–34, NKJV)

Jesus said we must make the rule and reign of God and His righteousness the priority of our lives instead of the things of this world (Matthew 6:24-32). Daily priorities not only set what we pursue each day but also what we pursue our entire life. Priorities of a day turn into months, then months into years until finally, life ends. We are eager to set a lifetime goal of making God our top priority, yet we may fail to make Him and His will our priority each day. It is far easier to say Christ is a lifelong priority than to live that priority day by day (Luke 6:46; Matthew 7:21). How can we tell when we have fallen into this deception? By honestly assessing whether we are so worried and anxiously distracted by the troubles of each day that we push God’s rule and righteousness to the side (v. 34; Acts 24:25). When daily concerns are our most urgent priority, we are distracted and deterred from walking by faith. When that happens, God is no longer our priority. We are serving another master instead of the One who provides our daily bread and saves us eternally. Strengthen your faith and trust God every day. As your days turn into months and months into years, you will have eternal rest when death comes. (Sword Tips #1559, revised)