

*"Sir, we wish to see Jesus" — John 12:21*

## Let Me Not Wander From Your Commandments

"With my whole heart I have sought You; Oh, let me not wander from Your commandments" (Psalms 119:10). Impressive, yes, but even more impressive when you consider all that David had to go through, all the things that could have easily made him wander. So take a few minutes to compare your attitude to the one expressed here by David. Would any of the following cause you to wander from God's commandments?

**When brethren rebuke you.** David's afflictions took many forms, including the rebuke he received from the prophet Nathan (2 Samuel 12). Afflictions didn't drive him away; they made him cling more closely to God's commandments. "Before I was afflicted, I went astray, but now I keep Your word...It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I may learn Your statutes" (Psalms 119:67, 71).

**When worldly people make fun of you.** And make fun of you they will, if you consistently do the right thing (1 Peter 4:4). David faced that, too, and here's what he said about it: "The proud have me in great derision, yet I do not turn aside from Your law" (Psalms 119:51).

**When persecution gets even worse**—when enemies lie about you, seek to destroy your name, or maybe even try to kill you. Would any of these cause you to wander from keeping God's commandments? David experienced all these things (Psalms 119:61, 78, 85-88, 95, 109-110, 157, 161), and yet it did not diminish his resolve. "But I have not forgotten your law...but I will meditate on your precepts...but I did not forsake your precepts...but my heart stands in awe of Your word...yet I have not strayed from your precepts"—David made all these statements in the midst of heavy persecution.

**When filled with sorrow and grief**—due to sickness, the death of a loved one, the unfaithfulness of a loved one, etc. Again, listen to David who experienced many occasions of sorrow. "My soul melts from heaviness, strengthen me according to Your word...trouble and anguish have overtaken me, yet Your commandments are my de-

lights" (Psalms 119:28, 143).

**When God seems so far away,** when you get to the point that you ask, "When will you comfort me"? (Psalms 119:82). David certainly knew that feeling, because he was the very one who asked that question. But look at the very next verse: "For I have become like a wineskin in smoke, yet I do not forget Your statutes" (Psalms 119:83).

**When the world seems so attractive,** when it appears to offer more than Christ does. David was no stranger to the pull of the world, which explains why he made this plea to God: "Make me walk in the path of Your commandments, for I delight in it. Incline my heart to Your testimonies, and not to covetousness. Turn away my eyes from looking at worthless things, and revive me in Your way" (Psalms 119:35-37).

**When "smart people" seem to have better answers,** when their explanations seem to make more sense than the explanations found in God's word. As for David, well, let's just say that he was less than impressed. "You, through Your commandments, make me wiser than my enemies...I have more understanding than all my teachers, for your testimonies are my meditation. I understand more than the ancients, because I keep your precepts" (Psalms 119:98-100). David was wiser than any of these men, because he knew God's wisdom.

Bottom line; don't let anything diminish your resolve to keep the commandments of God. Don't let anything shake your confidence in God or in His word. "Forever, O LORD, Your word is settled in heaven...The entirety of Your word is truth, and every one of Your righteous judgments endures forever" (Psalms 119:89, 160).

Bryan Gibson

# How to Handle Adversity

Sometimes we think of Bible characters like they are superheroes. In our own mind, they are so far superior to us that we shouldn't even compare our situations to theirs. But that is not how they are revealed to us in the Scriptures. Elijah, for instance, is described as having "a nature like ours" (Jam. 5:17). Another version translates that, "Elijah was a man just like us." He had his ups and downs. He had times of joy and times of sorrow. He had periods of prosperity followed by periods of adversity. Just like us.

We have policeman who provide security from thieves and people who break the law. We have insulated houses that provide security from the elements. We have economic advisers who can give us financial security. But we don't have anyone or anything that can assure us that we will never have to face adversity. The best thing we can do is be ready for it when it comes.

What does Elijah, a man with a nature like ours, teach us about handling adversity?

Learn to expect the expected. We are assured that difficult times will come. "Consider it all joy, my brethren, when you encounter various trials" (Jam. 1:2). Not "if." Not "perhaps." When. And they will be various, coming in different and often unexpected forms. Sometimes, even on the heels of spiritual success. Right after Elijah had won a great victory on Mt. Carmel, he learned of Jezebel's intent to kill him and "was afraid and arose and ran for his life" (1 Kings 19:3). Adversity can be expected that quickly.

Peter said not to be "surprised at the fiery ordeal which comes upon you...as though something strange were happening to you" (1 Pet. 4:12). Sometimes we are tempted to ask ourselves during such times, "Why me? Is there something wrong with me? Is God not pleased with me?" Perhaps the question ought to be, "Am I better than Elijah? Moses? David? Paul?" It happened to them; it can happen to godly people today, too. Learn to expect it. Only then can you learn from it.

Remember that whatever comes can be overcome. Elijah was ready to throw in the towel. "He requested for himself that he might die, and said, 'It is enough; now, O Lord, take my life, for I am not better than my fathers'" (1 Kings 19:4). First, he ran for his life and now he wanted to end it. What he needed was a reminder that God had not abandoned him. The Lord sent His angel to strengthen His prophet for the task before him.

God wants us to succeed. He does not delight in His people being overcome by their adverse circumstances. In fact, He provides the way for us to answer our adversity. "No temptation has overtaken you but such as is common to man, and God is faithful, who will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation will provide the way of escape also" (1 Cor. 10:13). Trust in His power to overcome. He is stronger than whatever comes your way.

Look away from the problem to the provision. Elijah could only see what was missing. God showed Him what was still there. His presence was with Him even in "a sound of a gentle blowing" (1 Kings 19:12). And not only that, the Lord said, "I will leave 7,000 in Israel, all the knees that have not bowed to Baal and every mouth that has not kissed him" (1 Kings 19:18). When you narrow your vision to see only yourself, you miss the mighty army that surrounds you.

Adversity can cause us to lose our focus. Times when we ought to be drawing nearer to God, we forsake Him. Times when we ought to be surrounding ourselves with our spiritual family, we push them away. These are the people the Lord has given us to help "bear one another's burdens" (Gal. 6:2). Even when you think you're the only one, look around. You are encompassed by a great cloud of witnesses with a nature like yours.

Two people appeared and spoke with Jesus on the mountain of transfiguration (Matt. 17:1-8). One of them was Elijah. He who ran for his life and then requested that he might die actually never saw death. God took him to heaven in a fiery chariot and whirlwind. Such a transport awaits those who hold on to their hope in the midst of adversity. And when we see Jesus coming in glory, toils of the road will then seem as nothing.

by Bubba Garner



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