

Heavenly Father! To Whose Eye*Josiah Conder (1789–1855)*

Heavenly Father! to whose eye
 Future things unfolded lie;
 Through the desert when I stray
 Let Thy counsels guide my way.

Leave me not, for flesh is frail,
 Where fierce trials would assail;
 Leave me not in darkened hour,
 To withstand the tempter's power.

Lord! uphold me day by day;
 Shed a light upon my way;
 Guide me through perplexing snares;
 Care for me in all my cares.

Should Thy wisdom, Lord, decree
 Trials long and sharp for me,
 Pain, or sorrow, care or shame, —
 Father! glorify Thy name.

Let me neither faint nor fear,
 Feeling still that Thou art near;
 In the course my Saviour trod,
 Tending home to Thee, my God.

ΤΩ ΚΡΟΝΟΥ ΚΑΙΡΩ*In the Nick of Time***Tried With Fire: Direction***Kevin T. Bauder*

We face a kind of paradox in doing the Lord's work. On the one hand, God often places us in positions that require us to overcome obstacles. As we depend upon Him, these circumstances require determination, persistence, and courage if we are to succeed. In fact, God often uses difficulties to develop exactly those qualities in us.

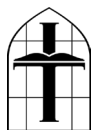
On the other hand, God also leads through circumstances. If we ignore His leading, our determination becomes defiance, our persistence degenerates into obstinacy, and our courage turns into the worst sort of self-reliance. Consequently, we must develop a capacity for judging when God is using circumstances to test us and when He is using circumstances to change our direction.

If we are headed in a direction that we know to contradict His will, we can expect our circumstances to become painful. That was certainly Jonah's experience as he fled to Tarshish. He was trying to evade God's will by escaping from the presence of the Lord. The Lord pursued him into the hold of the ship, then into the sea, then into the maw of the monster that He had prepared.

In the creature's belly Jonah recognized that he might as well be in Sheol. There the prophet humbled himself and submitted to God's will. The world's most reluctant prophet, he went on to complete a mission that he was never happy about.

God sent the storm. God prepared the sea-creature. In one sense, these calamities represented God's chastening. At the same time, however, the sovereign Lord meant them to change Jonah's direction. God used both the storm and the leviathan to lead His prophet.

It would be a mistake to think that God only uses hard circumstances to direct us away from disobedience. God repeatedly used affliction to stop the apostle Paul from doing one good thing and start him doing another. Paul was actively ministering in Philippi when God used a beating and imprisonment to send him down the road to Thessalonica. At Thessalonica a riot and the arrest of a colleague induced the brethren to hustle Paul out of town; he went to Berea. More public agitation prompted brothers from Berea to escort



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Paul into Athens. In Philippi, Thessalonica, and Berea, Paul was experiencing effective ministry. He led souls to Christ and planted churches. He left none of these churches willingly. God used harsh events to lead Paul from one good thing to the next.

Paul certainly did not plan to be arrested in Jerusalem and spend years in jail in Cesarea, only to be shipwrecked on the way to Rome so that he could remain in prison while awaiting Nero's pleasure. Yet these were exactly the events that God used to open a door for ministry among the Praetorian Guard, to provide occasion for Paul's prison epistles, and to give Paul an audience before the most powerful ruler in the world. God sent circumstances to Paul that were not pleasant, but those circumstances opened opportunities that he would never otherwise have encountered.

We do not need to wonder how Paul felt about all this upheaval. He himself tells us in Philippians 1:12-20. He embraced his troubles, he rejoiced in the opposition of devious brethren, and he even faced the prospect of death with equanimity. These verses are worth reading over and over again. They are like a lamp when we enter the dark forest of affliction. They can give us hope and light.

We will need them. God will use affliction to direct us, just as he did with Jonah and just as He did with Paul. He may lead us into illness, poverty, betrayal, bereavement, or any of a hundred other calamities, and He will do it to put us somewhere we would not otherwise have gone or to provide us with a platform for some ministry that we would never otherwise have chosen. Paul's prison cell became his pulpit. Our pulpit may be a hospital bed, a funeral, or a foreclosure. We do not know the form it will take, but we do know that affliction is on the way.

When it arrives, we could immerse ourselves in self-pity. We could rail against God and others. We could demand explanations from the Almighty. We could hunker down in sullen resignation. Or we can look for the direction God is leading us and the opportunity that God is opening before us—because there will be one.

God does not waste afflictions on us. He never sends them without purpose. He intends to use them, and one of the things He sends them for is to direct us into paths that we would not otherwise have traveled. His ultimate goal is to use us and to bless us.

God will not waste our afflictions, and He expects us not to waste them, either. He places them before us as opportunities. Are you facing a complete financial reversal? Don't waste your poverty. Have you been diagnosed with a terrible disease? Don't waste your illness. Have you lost your job? Don't waste your unemployment. Has your spouse abandoned you? Don't waste your divorce. Has someone committed a crime against you? Don't

waste your victimization. Has a loved one died? Don't waste your bereavement.

These are terrible things, but God permits terrible things in the lives of His children, then He uses them for good. He uses calamities like these to direct us into places where He wants us, but where we would not choose to go. He uses affliction to lead us, to guide us, and to make us useful to Him. Carpe Tribulationis.



This essay is by Kevin T. Bauder, Research Professor of Historical and Systematic Theology at Central Baptist Theological Seminary. Not every one of the professors, students, or alumni of Central Seminary necessarily agrees with every opinion that it expresses.
