

Lessons from the valley

On certain days, we need the advice of our old friend and missionary Jesse Graham, who used to say “What we didn’t enjoy we endured!” Sometimes life seems like an endurance contest, with many of us running out of energy to endure. In such a case, we know the Lord’s purpose is always good, but let’s face it... we don’t feel like much good is happening during extended trials.

Recently I have been encouraged by the Lord about the value of personal battles, and the lessons learned in those battles. It seems Jackie and I are frequently pushed back to the basics in our struggles for peace and faith. We often have to relearn and review the weapons of warfare for our own spiritual, mental and emotional health.

These experiences usually bring us back to certain Scriptures that assure us of God’s love and faithfulness, promises to which we have clung over and over. Many of these are in the Psalms. We have underlined many, so that we can read them in times of distress. For example, in Psalms in 94, I have underlined,

“Thy lovingkindness, O Lord will hold me up. When my anxious thoughts multiply within me, Thy consolations delight my soul.”

Jackie and I have looked at each other in times of personal distress, and quoted one of the many verses of refuge and consolation in the Psalms. At times I have pondered, “Lord I seem too easily upset. Frequently I need to fall back into the promises of your goodness, and again give you thanks for my life just the way it is. Too much time is spent battling for my own peace. How can you use me to battle for cities and nations, when I have to keep relearning the basics?”

And then I discovered a secret....

One day while reading Psalms 107 I saw the words that appear in many places in the Old Testament:

“Give thanks to the Lord, for He is good; for His lovingkindness is everlasting.”

I responded to this command as I had learned before. I offered up a sacrifice of thanksgiving for my life — just the way it was. I declared the goodness and faithfulness of God in a time when it looked like God had forgotten us. I declared that His mercy, His loving-kindness never ceases, never ends...not because I could see it or feel it, but because His word says so! Discouragement and anxiety began to melt away, and my soul returned to rest. Whatever Satanic powers were pressuring me seemed to lose their hold at my thanksgiving and reaffirmation of God’s goodness and mercy.

What was the secret?

At the same time I remembered Jehoshaphat's battle in II Chronicles 20, where Judah had to face three nations. How did God lead them to battle against nations? He led out praisers who sang *"Give thanks to the Lord, for His lovingkindness is everlasting!"*

What I discovered was that the same weapon of thanksgiving and declaration of God's kindness that won the battle in my own head was the very weapon that they used to battle against national powers of darkness!

Thanksgiving is a weapon for personal victory. Thanksgiving can also be used to tear down strongholds over nations. Perhaps that is why Psalm 57:9 says, *"I will give thanks to Thee, O Lord among the peoples; I will sing praises to Thee among the nations!"*

Is it not significant that the Psalms which comfort us and guide us to the personal refuge in the Lord are the same Scriptures which call us to the nations? Psalm 149, which promises that *"He will beautify the afflicted ones with salvation"* is the Psalm that calls us to "execute vengeance on the nations" and to "bind kings with chains"....the chains of our praise, the chains of our songs of thanksgiving and praise!

The lessons you learn in personal battles, even in the valley of the shadow of death, are weapons against the enemy on any level of warfare. When you are in a personal crisis, and must lean back on God, take thought on this... Casting down thoughts of fear and unbelief in your own soul gives you ammunition to take down the worst powers of darkness that hell can produce. Giving thanks for all things in your personal life equips you to "give thanks among the nations" !

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