

GOD'S WORDS FOR OUR ONGOING TRIALS

PSALM 138

Case Study:

Beverly's preference was to avoid conflict. She was known as a hard worker and a kind-hearted person. Being in the room when people disagreed was uncomfortable for Beverly, much less when people disapproved of something she did.

Unfortunately, Beverly found herself in the center of a controversy. She has taught the 7th grade girls Sunday School class since they were in 4th grade. Each year they graduated to the next class, she decided to graduate with them. Beverly's own children are out of the house, so she has been able to devote extra time to building a relationship with her class.

One of the girls in her class has been going through a rough family situation for the last 8 months and has begun to confide in Beverly more than her mother. A troubled marriage and a distant daughter has made this already insecure mother jealous of Beverly. The mother has spoken with the youth minister and several deacons about how Beverly is "monopolizing" the class.

When questions began to be asked of other parents (before coming to Beverly) there were mixed responses. Some parents wanted equal attention for their children in other classes, other youth teachers felt like they were being made to look bad by Beverly's work, and (the most silent segment) commented on how much they appreciate Beverly's heart for their children.

Beverly is becoming the focal point of a conversation amongst many influential people in the church. But she only realizes it when comments leak back to her second and third person. When she learns all that has been done she is amazed and unsettled by the amount of talking that has occurred. She is hurt, angry, and wants to hide.

Every interaction is counter to Beverly's nature. She likes to serve people with only mild gratitude in return. She realizes she must rely on God in new and more constant ways. As she reads her Bible she comes across Psalm 138 and finds that it echoes her situation. She even finds comfort in the fact that the situation to which the Psalm speaks does not seem to be resolved yet (like her own), so she prays it often in her struggle; making it her own.

Pre-Questions:

This case study is meant to challenge you to think biblically about the real struggles of life. These questions will not be answered completely in the sections below. But they do represent the kind of struggles that are being wrestled with in Psalm 138. Use the question to both stir application and to give you new insight into the psalm.

- How would you comfort Beverly when she said, "I was just trying to serve God by discipling a generation of our children. I didn't mean to upset anyone.?"
- Assuming the youth minister and deacons knew of the family situation driving the mother's jealousy how should they have balanced comfort and directiveness in their response to her?

- How would Beverly begin to feel comfortable in her own church and ministry role again? What responsibility does she bear and the church leaders bear in regaining that comfort?
- What are some of the most dangerous or tempting distractions for each person involved in this situation?
- How should the church minister to and protect the young girl who “sparked” this situation?

Read Psalm 138 in your preferred Bible translation. The “rewrite” of Psalm 138 below is an attempt to capture the words that God would give Beverly to pray (Romans 8:26-27). This would be something Beverly would need to pray many times as he struggled to surrender her work-based identity to the Lord.

A re-write of Psalm 138

1. Lord, You have been so good to me and I want to acknowledge that whole-heartedly. I would say that to anyone; even those who don't believe in You or act like they should have Your job (smiling).
2. As hard as it is when I am fearful and hurt, I humble myself vulnerably before You. You have always been faithful and Your love I cannot question. My situation would make it easy for me to forget that. There are two things You have declared most important: Your name and Your word. That is why I love teaching my class; I use one to lift up the other.
3. There has never been a moment in my hurt and fear when I called and You were not there. When I felt like I lost everything else regarding my faith (my church, my leaders, my friends, my class), You always heard and answered my prayers. That is what has given me strength to continue to serve.
4. I know everyone in this situation truly wants to honor You; every deacon, parent, and teacher. They come to church to hear Your word, because they love it too.
5. They sing the hymns and I can tell they truly want to praise Your name and give You glory. I have to remind myself of that often when their sin and fear spills onto me. You must overlook (through the blood of Christ) all our sin when we sing our hymns.
6. You are the God who declared “blessed as the poor in spirit” because you delight in comforting the hurting, fearful, and insecure. You draw near to us (both me and this mother) when we will admit our need. But if we refuse to admit our need we push Your comfort away.
7. I am in a hard place right now. Keep me humble. Don't let fear become pride or entitlement so I will remain in the care of Your protection. If those who are making my life hard are doing so with a hard heart and malice intent, I trust that they will answer to You. But let me focus on Your deliverance more than their punishment.
8. The most important thing is that Your will for my life will be done. Your love cannot be thwarted by man's sin or time's erosion. You never get an “incomplete” on your work. I am Your “work in progress.” Help me remember and be comforted by these things even after I say, “Amen.”

Passages for Further Study:

Romans 5:1-10; Philippians 4:1-10; Colossians 1:24-29; James 1:2-4; I Peter

Post Questions:

Now that you have read Psalm 138, examined how Beverly might rewrite it for her situation, and studied several other passages, consider the following questions:

- How does this Psalm help Beverly maintain her focus on God in a situation that would distract her to many other things?
- How could Beverly maintain a confidence that God does hear her when she prays even when her situation is unresolved? How might personalizing this Psalm help her with that?
- How would your answers to the “pre-questions” have changed as a result of reflecting on Psalm 138?
- For what instances of work or performance-based identity do you need to re-write your own version of Psalm 138?