

The Plumbline

¹⁰I'd still take comfort, relieved even though in persistent pain; for I've not denied the words of the holy one. ¹¹What is my strength, that I should hope; my end, that my life should drag on? ¹²Is my strength that of rocks, my flesh bronze? ¹³I don't have a helper for myself; success has been taken from me. (Job 6:10-13)

Job was lamenting his struggles and trying to come to grips with what was happening in his life. We would have been hard-pressed to have dealt with it ourselves. We get an inventory of the trials this man is enduring: bodily affliction, loss of family, income and associates who do nothing but speak in a despairing fashion. All of which would be terribly overwhelming to any individual. Also considering he is unaware of the challenge that Satan is throwing at God. Job would persevere in the long term. However, the questioning and doubt of oneself and the Almighty is on full display in the text.

The author C. S. Lewis in speaking of the dryness we experience during trials writes:

(The Devil's) cause is never more in danger than when a human, no longer desiring, but still intending, to do (God's) will, looks round upon a universe from which every trace of Him seems to have vanished, and asks why he has been forsaken, and still obeys. (Screwtape Letters. Parentheses are mine)

The Book of Amos speaks of a plumbline. "This is what the Lord showed me: The Lord was standing by a wall, with a plumb line in his hand." (Amos 7:7).

What is a plumbline? It is a device builders use to ensure that a wall is upright. Through many years of ministry and counsel, I have found three things to use as a plumbline in evaluating where I am and in assisting others amid the trials they go through.

In the Episcopal Church they have a concept of "The Three Legged Stool" when it comes to evaluating truth and correct doctrine. They are: Tradition, the Word and the Holy Spirit.

The Holy Scriptures should, of course, be primary. And time spent in prayer and meditation can open us to the Holy Spirit so he can guide us. But are we willing to add tradition? I am not speaking of habits or ritual. I am speaking of the wisdom and testimony of old preachers and authors who have gone before us; saints who we have worked with and whose testimonies address similar challenges in our lives.

I remember listening to R. W. Shambach and Charles Simpson in ministers' sessions. They built up my faith and it helped me to recognize God's work in my life. Other wonderful men and women of God spoke into my life as well, whose life experiences gave me insight studies could never have given me. It is good to remember that we have not experienced everything. There have been many gone before us who have and can offer help. I remember how smart I thought I was in bible school. However, the longer I have been in ministry I have learned to listen to the godly voices of the ministry.

So in conclusion: "...let's also run the race that is laid out in front of us, since we have a great cloud of witnesses surrounding us. Let's throw off any extra baggage, get rid of the sin that trips us up, and fix our eyes on Jesus, faith's pioneer and perfecter. He endured the cross, ignoring the shame, for the sake of the joy that was laid out in front of him, and sat down at the right of God's throne. (Hebrews 12:1-2 CEB)