

When God Blocks our Path

When God Blocks Our Path

... And 30 Other Bible-Based Meditations

Roger Ellsworth

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Purpose

My Coffee Cup Meditations are short, easy-to-read, engagingly presented devotions based on the Bible, the Word of God. Each reading takes a single idea or theme and develops it in a thought-provoking way so that you are inspired to consider the greatness of God, the relevance of the good news of the life, death, resurrection, and coming-again of Jesus, and are better equipped for life in this world and well prepared for the world to come.

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Dedication

Dedicated to the dear saints of Fellowship Baptist Church,
Milan, Tennessee

(Philippians 1:3-6)

About This Book

This book is the result of the labors Roger Ellsworth and the thought he has given to various passages of Scripture over the years. You may read more about Roger on page 141.

We hope you will enjoy these Bible-based meditations. We would love to hear from you, so please send us a note to tell us what you think—which ones you liked most, and how they made a difference in your life or in the life of a family member, friend, or work associate. To reach us online, go to www.mycoffeecupmeditations.com/contact

MY COFFEE-CUP

MEDITATIONS

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- 1 -

From God's Word, the Bible...

So the churches were strengthened in the faith, and increased in number daily.

Now when they had gone through Phrygia and the region of Galatia, they were forbidden by the Holy Spirit to preach the word in Asia. After they had come to Mysia, they tried to go into Bithynia, but the Spirit did not permit them. So passing by Mysia, they came down to Troas. And a vision appeared to Paul in the night. A man of Macedonia stood and pleaded with him, saying, "Come over to Macedonia and help us." Now after he had seen the vision, immediately we sought to go to Macedonia, concluding that the Lord had called us to preach the gospel to them.

Acts 16:5-10



When God Blocks Our Path

Paul wanted to take the gospel into Asia, but he was “forbidden” by the Holy Spirit. He quickly formed a new plan, namely, to go into Bithynia. But the Spirit of God would not permit this either (v. 7). Some think the means that the Spirit used to thwart Paul’s plans was sickness.

Two plans and two disappointments! So Luke, the author of Acts, tells us that Paul and his associates came down to Troas. We may well characterize Troas as the place of disappointment.

Every child of God has spent some time in Troas. We have walked its dark streets, felt the heaviness of its air, and smelled the stench of its stagnant waters.

Why does God put Troas on the itinerary for His children? Why would a loving God allow them to visit such an unpleasant place? Why is it that God seems to block our path?

We might say God has a school there in which He wants

us to enroll. He sends us to Troas so He can teach us important lessons.

We don't know why it was necessary for Paul to visit Troas, but God knew. We do know this—Troas is never an accident. Our disappointments come to us in God's wise design. They wean us away from our self-sufficiency and cause us to cast ourselves in humble dependence on Him. Through our disappointments, God teaches us not to rely on our own understanding but rather to trust wholeheartedly in Him as the One who always has our best interests at heart (Prov. 3:5-6; Rom. 8:28).

When disappointments come our way, we may be inclined to think that God has failed us and forsaken us. But Scripture assures us that such things are never the case. God went with Paul to Troas. He gave Paul a vision in which a man from Macedonia "stood and pleaded" with him, saying: "Come over to Macedonia and help us" (v. 9).

The Lord never sends His people into difficult circumstances without going with them into those circumstances (Isa. 49:16; Matt. 28:20; Heb. 13:5).

If God is with us in our disappointments, the thing we must do to help ourselves face those disappointments is focus on Him. We might say that the best thing to do when facing Troas is to delight ourselves in God instead of questioning Him.

The prophet Habakkuk learned this. He was disappointed that God would use the Babylonians as His instrument to bring judgment on the people of Judah. Habakkuk learned to say:

*Though the fig tree may not blossom,
Nor fruit be on the vines;
Though the labor of the olive may fail,
And the fields yield no food;*

*Though the flock be cut off from the fold,
And there be no herd in the stalls—
Yet I will rejoice in the LORD,
I will joy in the God of my salvation.
(Hab. 3:17-18)*

It is important to note that nothing had changed in Habakkuk's circumstances when he resolved to rejoice in the Lord. The people of Judah were still sinful, and judgment was still coming. Habakkuk rejoiced because in the midst of trying circumstances, he still had God and God's salvation.

The salvation believers enjoy through Christ always puts them in a happy position—so much so that they can say they would rather have salvation with bad circumstances than not to have it with good circumstances. Believers on their worst day are always better off than unbelievers on their best day.

Troas was not a permanent place for Paul. It wasn't long until he and his company were on their way to even greater usefulness for God. God's people never enjoy it when He blocks their path. They would never choose to put it on their itinerary. But as they take the road out, they can be grateful that God put it on their itinerary. As they reflect on it, they may well join Robert Browning Hamilton in saying:

*I walked a mile with pleasure,
She chattered all the way;
But she left me none the wiser
For all she had to say.*

*I walked a mile with sorrow,
Not one word said she;
But, oh, the things I learned
When sorrow walked with me.*

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From God's Word, the Bible...

*There is no one like the God of Jeshurun,
Who rides the heavens to help you,
And in His excellency on the clouds.
The eternal God is your refuge,
And underneath are the everlasting arms;
He will thrust out the enemy from before you,
And will say, "Destroy!"*

Deuteronomy 33:26-27



Above, Near, Around, and Beneath

After leading the people of Israel for forty years, the time has come for Moses to say goodbye. In Deuteronomy 33 we have his farewell address. It falls into three easily discernible parts. There is an introductory statement (vv. 2-5), a blessing for the nation's individual tribes (vv. 6-25) and a closing blessing on the nation (vv. 26-29).

That closing blessing ... what wonderful nuggets of truth it contains! How they must have cheered the hearts of the listening Israelites! Here they are: God is above you, near you, around you, and beneath you. Put them all together, and you have Moses saying this to Israel—God is totally sufficient for you.

God above them? Yes, here it is:

*There is no one like the God of Jeshurun,
Who rides the heavens...*

The name “Jeshurun,” meaning “upright one,” may have been an affectionate term for the nation of Israel. This much we know for sure—Moses wanted his people to understand that there was no one who could compare to their God. They were poised to enter the land of Canaan. There they would encounter many new gods, but their God was the true God and over all other gods.

God was also near them:

...Who rides the heavens to help you...

Does that mean God was near them? Sure, it does. One has to be near to help.

The Israelites had already experienced God’s nearness—abundantly so! He drew near or came down (Ex. 2:8) to deliver their fathers from slavery in the land of Egypt. And He would be near to help this new generation as they faced the challenges ahead.

What about the truth that God was around them? Where do we find it? It’s right here:

The eternal God is your refuge...

When the people of Israel entered the land of Canaan, they would find many refuges, that is, cities with high walls. The Canaanites were surrounded and protected by those walls. The Israelites, on the other hand, dwelled in flimsy tents. How could they, a tent-dwelling people, hope to conquer those mighty fortresses?

Moses assured them that God would be their refuge or fortress. He would surround and protect them as those imposing walls protected the Canaanites.

So we come to the final truth—God was beneath them. Moses says:

And underneath are the everlasting arms...

The challenges facing the people of Israel were so daunting that the Israelites would sometimes feel as if they were falling into failure. Moses assured them that God would be there to catch and lift them.

An ancient leader saying farewell to an ancient people! Is that all we have here? No, there is more, and the more is that the truths Moses put before Israel are just as much for us as they were for them.

- ▶ God is *above* us. He is the same God now as He was then. He was not limited in wisdom and power in Moses' time, and He is not limited today. He is ever the sovereign ruler of the universe who is greater than all the forces of evil.
- ▶ God is *near* us. He is as near to us as He was to Israel of old. God drew near when He sent His Son and told Joseph to call Him "Immanuel," which means "God with us." Our Immanuel is the one who has promised to be with us always (Matt. 28:20).
- ▶ God is *around* us. He has surrounded us with the walls of salvation which protect us from eternal loss (Isa. 26:2). That salvation is found in the Lord Jesus Christ who bore on the cross the penalty for sinners so that all who trust in Him in His atoning death will never have to bear that penalty themselves.
- ▶ God is *beneath* us. Christians will never be perfect in this life. Oftentimes we fail. And Satan is eager to suggest that failure means that God will have nothing more to do with us. It is not true. No saint of God can ever fall so far that the arms of God are not there to catch and lift him or her.

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From God's Word, the Bible...

So he answered, "Do not fear, for those who are with us are more than those who are with them." And Elisha prayed, and said, "LORD, I pray, open his eyes that he may see." Then the LORD opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw. And behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire all around Elisha.

From 2 Kings 6:8-17

(Read 2 Kings 6 for this meditation.)