

A Sandwich Psalm

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Monday, 17 May 2010 22:34 -

There's a remarkable plot in Psalm 66 -- unnoticeable at first, but profound when you realize it's there. The psalm begins with a few verses proclaiming God's great and awesome works, then concludes with similar praise. But in between (vv. 10-11) is where a lot of us live right now: "You, O God, tested us; you refined us like silver. You brought us into prison and laid burdens on our backs. You let men ride over our heads; we went through fire and water."

Wow. That doesn't sound much like a God who delivers and heals and provides. In fact, it doesn't even sound like a God who cares. But the next phrase is about how He brings us to a place of abundance, and the psalm continues with gratitude and glory.

I get a lot out of that psalm. It reminds me that even when it seems like everything is against me -- and when it seems that God Himself is even fueling the adversity -- it's only for a season, and there's a purpose in it. The hard circumstances in this psalm are a tiny sliver of it, just like the hard circumstances are only a tiny sliver of our lives, especially with eternity in view. (Those situations seem magnified in our perspective sometimes, but they are in fact brief.) And even the trials serve to highlight God's goodness and power. We know who He is when He intervenes much more than we did before anything went wrong. We call Him "deliverer," "healer," and "provider" with much greater conviction and heart than we did when those words were only theological truths. Because of the trials we face, those words become our experience. And God is magnified in our lives.

That perspective is hard to remember when you're living in between the two slices of glory. The trials and tests in the middle of this sandwich are painful. But God is praised from eternity past and will be praised for eternity future. We will join in the praises heartily forever. Why? Because the trials end after a season, and He brings us to a place of abundance.