

The Hard Way

By Bob Larsen

"LORD, make me to know mine end, and the measure of my days, what it is: that I may know how frail I am. 5 Behold, thou hast made my days as an handbreadth; and mine age is as nothing before thee: verily every man at his best state is altogether vanity. Selah. 6 Surely every man walketh in a vain shew: surely they are disquieted in vain: he heapeth up riches, and knoweth not who shall gather them. 7 And now, Lord, what wait I for? my hope is in thee." – Psalm 39:4-7

It is often said, "experience is the best teacher." Sometimes we have to learn things the hard way. Sometimes God leads us through difficult times to teach us something we need to learn. This is His way of making it real in our lives. David knew this better than most men. It was a long and dangerous road of difficulty from the moment he was anointed king by Samuel to the day he was finally crowned king. David had plenty of moments to reflect on how the Lord had led him. He had plenty of time to compare the plans he had had for his life and God's plan for his life.

Many of us have similar moments of reflection. One such time for me was In February of 1990, when I made a spur of the moment decision that I was going to spend the weekend alone to fast, pray and study scripture. The temperature was about 30 degrees in Elk River, so I decided that if it was 30 degrees in Elk River, it was probably 30 degrees everywhere. That sounded like a descent temperature for camping. Winter camping – it sounded fun. I had never camped in winter before, and I didn't have any special gear. "How hard can it be?" I asked myself as I packed my camping gear into my blue 1982 Ford Escort on my way to work. When I got off from the printing press at 2 pm, I quickly put 200 miles behind me until I wound up at Gooseberry Falls State Park on the shore of Lake Superior. I climbed out of the car and took in the view.

There were just a few minor details that I had not taken into account. One thing was that it was a little colder up there than it was down in the cities. Okay, it was a lot colder. It was about 5 degrees, and there was a stiff wind blowing off the lake. It was very, cold and very windy.

Another thing that I hadn't considered was that when people fast, they can't tolerate cold. Apparently, we need food to keep us warm. Fasting and winter camping don't mix. However, I was determined to overcome this revelation, so I pulled out my tent and grabbed my tent stakes. Some of you probably know that it's pretty hard to pound anything into the ground when the ground is frozen. Every time I tried to hammer my plastic tent stakes in the ground, they snapped. So far, my plan wasn't working the way I had expected. Another camper finally took pity on me and gave me some iron railroad stakes. With these, I finally got my tent up and crawled inside. I don't know what I expected, but it almost felt colder inside than outside. I decided that winter just wasn't a good time to be out camping.

I gave up on the camping, drove 13 miles into town, and gave up on the fasting at a Hardees's just before it closed around 11 pm. I had given up camping and fasting, but I hadn't given up on the campsite. I drove back and did the best I could to sleep in the car, waking up long enough to turn the heater on whenever it got too cold. In the morning, I gave up on the campsite too. I packed my stuff and headed back into town, where I booked a nice warm motel room. I had given up on so much that I decided I wasn't going to give up on studying the scriptures. I'm glad I didn't.

That day, I did my studying at Hardees's. Psalm 39 kept coming to me and I spent most of the time studying it. Here, I noticed: David said in verse 4: "LORD, make me to know mine end, and the measure of my days, what it is: that I may know how frail I am." Boy, that hit home. In verse 5 it continued: "Behold, thou hast made my days as an handbreadth; and mine age is as nothing before thee: verily every man at his best state is altogether vanity." I had just had my great plan for how to spend the weekend picked apart before my eyes.

I began to understand personally how David was pointing out that our lives, plans, and ambitions are temporary and that they pass quickly. He used the words "vain" and "vanity" to describe them. My plans sure felt vain right then. That reminded me of King Solomon, who wrote the Book of Ecclesiastes. Over and over in that book Solomon spoke of how brief our lives are and all that we plan and conspire is nothing before God. He compared them to a vapor that appears for a while and then vanishes.

Then I remembered that Solomon was David's son. David probably taught him the things that he wrote in Psalm 39, but Solomon did not learn very well from his dad. He learned the hard way, through experience, the way children so often do. Ecclesiastes tells of all that Solomon went through before he came to the same

conclusions that his dad had come to in Psalm 39. Then, I thought of my kids. They will have to learn some things the hard way, too. We are all children before God and often times the only way we learn is the hard way. We learn by experience.

We would do well to consider making Psalm 39 our prayer to the Lord, as we go through this hard experience called life.

Psalm 39

"1 I said, I will take heed to my ways, that I sin not with my tongue: I will keep my mouth with a bridle, while the wicked is before me. 2 I was dumb with silence, I held my peace, even from good; and my sorrow was stirred. 3 My heart was hot within me, while I was musing the fire burned: then spake I with my tongue, 4 LORD, make me to know mine end, and the measure of my days, what it is: that I may know how frail I am. 5 Behold, thou hast made my days as an handbreadth; and mine age is as nothing before thee: verily every man at his best state is altogether vanity. Selah. 6 Surely every man walketh in a vain shew: surely they are disquieted in vain: he heapeth up riches, and knoweth not who shall gather them. 7 And now, Lord, what wait I for? my hope is in thee. 8 Deliver me from all my transgressions: make me not the reproach of the foolish. 9 I was dumb, I opened not my mouth; because thou didst it. 10 Remove thy stroke away from me: I am consumed by the blow of thine hand. 11 When thou with rebukes dost correct man for iniquity, thou makest his beauty to consume away like a moth: surely every man is vanity. Selah. 12 Hear my prayer, O LORD, and give ear unto my cry; hold not thy peace at my tears: for I am a stranger with thee, and a sojourner, as all my fathers were. 13 O spare me, that I may recover strength, before I go hence, and be no more."