

THEOCORRECT

PSALM 39:6-11 FEBRUARY 28, 2018

There's a plague on the loose that impacts between 75% and 90% of Americans today.¹ I'm guessing just about every person here has contracted it, maybe multiple times. It's name? *Autocorrect*. There you are, innocently typing out a message. You're trying to move quickly - after all, efficiency is a good thing, right? - you hit your last character, hit send, only then to realize that autocorrect has transformed your message into something much different. Like, as one newspaper reported, "when you try to write 'No I don't' in a text to your mother and it comes out 'No idiot.'"²

Autocorrect had a particularly bad year on the iPhone in 2017. Many users were hit with 2 bugs in the software. In one case, the letter 'i' was replaced with a capital A with a little box with a question mark next to it. In the other case, the word 'it' was replaced with capital I, period, t.

There are whole websites dedicated to cataloging the hilarious misadventures of autocorrect. If you're like me, it seems that autocorrect has become more aggressive. Maybe we should start calling it *overcorrect* (*Ironically, as I typed that very word, autocorrect changed the entry to "overcorrectt"*).

In Psalm 39, David finds himself in dark days. He's sick. He's discouraged. He's frustrated. And he takes his cares to the Lord. As he prays and meditates on life, he comes to some important conclusions: First, that our lives on this earth are incredibly short in comparison to eternity. And second, God takes an active role in the lives of His people and works in them, changing them from the inside out.

Part of that work is the work of *correction* and discipline. This is the theme David takes up tonight in the second stanza of the Psalm, as he continues to consider the brevity of life.

Psalm 39:6 - ⁶Surely every man walks about like a shadow; Surely they busy themselves in vain; He heaps up riches, And does not know who will gather them.

David uses haunting words here to describe a life disconnected from God's intervention. The words he employs are almost frightening. He says that we as human beings are moving around like phantoms with no substance, stuck in the dark. And when it says they "busy themselves in vain" the sense is that these apparitions are going around moaning and roaring for nothing.

This bleak assessment of human life stands in stark contrast to the You-Only-Live-Once-Get-Rich-Or-Die-Tryin' -I'm-Gonna-Live-Forever mentality of the unbelieving world. Now, some might simply accuse David of being depressed or pessimistic, so he says, "Let's take a look at the data."

"He heaps up riches and does not know who will gather them." This is just reality. Pharaohs may have been buried with their gold and Miles Davis may have been buried with some of his horns,³ but when they passed on, the treasure stayed right where it was. The phrase draws our attention toward Ecclesiastes, an entire book devoted to exploring the vanity of life apart from a relationship with God.

¹ <http://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2017/01/12/evolution-of-technology/>

² <https://www.bostonglobe.com/news/politics/2015/11/30/why-does-autocorrect-make-such-crazy-errors/Nx7hYdCPKjsRrJk8U5XxIM/story.html>

³ <https://www.smithsonianmag.com/arts-culture/nine-famous-people-and-what-theyre-buried-180953186/>

David is exposing something very important in this downer of a verse: That *this* life is not the more significant one. It *feels* that way to us, because we are a sensory people. We see and smell and touch. But the reality is that it is the *next* life that is forever. And the only life of real substance and weight is the life given through Christ, which is an extraordinarily abundant, growing life, compared to the wasteful vanity of unbelief.

David's mention here of storing up riches also steers our thoughts to Jesus' words in Matthew 6:

Matthew 6:19-21 - ¹⁹“Do not lay up for yourselves treasures on earth, where moth and rust destroy and where thieves break in and steal; ²⁰but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust destroys and where thieves do not break in and steal. ²¹For where your treasure is, there your heart will be also.

While inheritors in this life have to contend with the death tax, probate, settling debts, funeral expenses and more, Scriptures tells us definitively that our investments in heaven will never be diminished or hijacked. Rather, when we heap up treasure there, the reward is *great*.⁴

Psalms 39:7 - ⁷“And now, Lord, what do I wait for? My hope is in You.

These grim and dismal thoughts led David to...*hope*? It's true. Even in his dark hour, even during intense suffering and discomfort, because David was a man with a *real* relationship with God he was able to lean upon the confident trust he had in the Lord. This is an example of the strength that God gives to sustain His people. There's a song making the rounds right now whose chorus goes:

*Strength, You give me strength
You lift my weary heart, You're the fire in my veins
Strength, You give me strength
You raise me up again, I will never be the same*

That's the work of God in our lives. It's that kind of supply that enabled David to write the hope of verse 7 after the gloom of verse 6.

We should note here that David's expectation wasn't in a particular action or resolution, it was in the Lord Himself. He was content and resolved to wait for the Lord to arrive in one way or another.

Waiting is never something we get excited about. But it's a regular part of the Christian life. The *Theological Wordbook Of The Old Testament* says:

*“Waiting with steadfast endurance is a great expression of faith. It means enduring patiently in confident hope that God will decisively act for the salvation of His people. Waiting involves the very essence of a person's being, his soul. Those who wait in true faith are **renewed** (emphases added) in strength so that they can continue to serve the Lord while looking for His saving work.”⁵*

As New Testament believers, we know that Christian 'waiting' is much more than just sitting around. We're called to an *active* hope. Look at the parables. The Sower has a lot to do while waiting for the harvest. The virgins in Matthew 25 had a long night of waiting, but kept their lamps oiled and their

⁴ Matthew 5:12, Luke 6:23

⁵ TWOT entry 1994

wicks trimmed. Later in the same chapter, when the servants were waiting for the return of their Master, those who were faithful were to be about his business, investing and accomplishing work. These are images of what it means for us to *wait* for the arrival of the Lord as we live in this life.

Psalm 39:8 - ⁸Deliver me from all my transgressions; Do not make me the reproach of the foolish.

David's philosophical thoughts about life are now becoming personal as he takes a look within at his *own* heart and life. As usual, he admits his own lawlessness and imperfection and asks the Lord for rescue. But here we're reminded that our sin has consequences, not only on our own lives and our own communion with God, but also on our testimonies. As Christians, we represent our King to a lost and dying world. While we can't do it perfectly, we must do it circumspectly so we don't bring a reproach on the name of Jesus.

Now, in verses 9 through 11 we get into the specifics of why David was experiencing the trouble he's talking about in this Psalm.

Psalm 39:9 - ⁹I was mute, I did not open my mouth, Because it was You who did it.

The New Living Translation gives us the verse in a way that makes a little more sense of what David was saying:

Psalm 39:9 (NLT) - ⁹I am silent before you; I won't say a word, for my punishment is from you.

David realizes that at least *some* of his affliction has its source in heaven. He was being disciplined because of some sin. And rather than argue with God, David chooses self-control and acknowledges that God was right to bring this correction into his life.

While the day-to-day experience of a New Testament Christian is different than the Old Testament Jew (especially when that Jew was the king of Israel), correction and discipline are still part of God's program for His people. This is a consistent truth in the Epistles and Jesus Himself says it in the Revelation. God *loves* you and that means He's going to rebuke and correct you. When that happens, we want to respond in humility like David does here in verse 9.

Charles Spurgeon once wrote:

*"If the King of kings lays His hand on our backs, let us, beloved, lay our hands on our mouths."*⁶

Psalm 39:10 - ¹⁰Remove Your plague from me; I am consumed by the blow of Your hand.

Agreeing with God didn't mean that David couldn't pray for relief or mercy, and that's exactly what he does. But let's note a couple things from this verse. First, despite the fact that David feels crushed by this discipline, he does not see God as his enemy. Remember, the Lord was David's hope!

Second, while God is always gracious and full of tender kindness toward us, sometimes His discipline isn't just a slap on the wrist. He doesn't *always* just say, "Now don't do that again!"

Sometimes the consequences are severe. I mean, the Lord *killed* people in Acts and in the church at Corinth. Sometimes lampstands were removed from a church. This is an aspect of our walk with the Lord we need to take seriously. God loves us, so, when necessary, He's going to discipline us.

Psalm 39:11 - ¹¹When with rebukes You correct man for iniquity, You make his beauty melt away like a moth; Surely every man *is* vapor.

David here properly categorizes what the Lord was doing in his life: It was *correction*. It wasn't revenge. It wasn't torture. It wasn't malice or cruelty. It was God working to make something right that had gone wrong in David's life. It was God continuing to transform this son, who He loved, into a more glorious treasure and workmanship.

At the moment, David isn't cheered up, but he has made a profound discovery about life. It is only through the hands-on work of God that our lives will not be *wasted*. The things the natural man thinks are beautiful and delightful and meaningful are, in reality, just the noisy groans of a phantom passing through a dark graveyard. But a child of God is very different. The life of a child of God is a place of abundant, eternal work. *Through* that work, God transforms us and conforms us into *His* image. Like any great remodel, there's a lot of work that will need to be done. Some of that work is going to be uncomfortable to us and our natural tendency will be to want to wriggle out, like we see David doing here. And it's *ok* to pray for relief and for rescue and for an end to discipline. But we want to be in a mindset where we recognize that God's correction is not a *bad* thing, it's a sign of His love, *AND* it's something that is good and beneficial for us.

The olympics just ended. There's always a lot of focus on the incredible dedication of the athletes, the things they go through in order to be able to compete at this high level. Imagine for a moment that your dream was to compete in the luge at the Olympics. It's a sport that requires real precision in a lot of ways. Weight and balance and angles and nudges while you're sliding down an ice track at 90 miles per hour. People *die* doing the luge!

Now, imagine that your coach never corrected your form. He never showed you where you were stepping wrong. He didn't help you get into the proper shape or condition or mentality to keep you alive as you careened down the course. If that was the case, he wouldn't be a coach very long *and you wouldn't be a luger very long!* Now compound the situation by making your coach your loving father. And you're no amateur, you were *born* to luge. Well, in that case, of *course* you'd need correction and adjustment and discipline. They're necessary to make you a champion.

God's correction in our lives isn't a nuisance like autocorrect. It isn't *overcorrect*. It's a sign of His extraordinary love and it's a sign that the Lord is making something truly substantial out of your life - That He is delivering you from sin and bringing purpose to your daily living and renewing your mind with His power. It is a process by which the Lord draws us closer to Him and conforms us more into the image of His Son as He continues to glorify us.

We don't need to be distressed by God's discipline or by the shortness of this life. We can take comfort in what has been revealed about God in His Word. And we can invite Him to do His work as we commune with Him, waiting for His arrival to take us home to our *real* lives in eternity.