

A Partial Cessation From Labor

by George Kulp

The sermon explores how rest and suffering can lead to spiritual transformation and renewed purpose in ministry.

Scripture: Ezekiel 1:1, Daniel 11:35, 2 Corinthians 1:3, James 1:2, Revelation 1:10

Topics: "Suffering And Sanctification", "Christian Compassion"

Description

George Kulp preaches about the transformative power of affliction and suffering in the life of a clergyman who was initially lacking in sympathy and tenderness, but through the furnace of affliction, became tender, considerate, and tearful, resembling the compassion of Jesus. The pastor's experience with affliction led to a deep change in his character, making him a comforter at funerals and a constant visitor to the sick and poor. Through suffering, the pastor learned valuable lessons with Christ, enhancing his usefulness and bringing him closer to those in need.

Transcript

"Come ye apart into a desert place and rest

"By the river Chebar the heavens were opened and I saw visions of God."

"And many shall be purified and made white and tried."

"I was in the Spirit on the Lord's day and heard a voice."

A clergyman was settled over a large and influential church. He was a man of commanding talents, but was distinguished for his intellectual strength, rather than for his susceptibility. He was not sympathetic or tender. He had no magnetism, yet his grip on the intellect was strong. He hardly knew what sickness was. Death had never come into his family. Though he was kind, and meant to console the sick and afflicted, he lacked the gush and heart that only experience can give. He seemed out of place at a sick-bed, and at a funeral he appeared awkward, embarrassed, and almost indifferent. The Lord had a discipline in store for him. He put him in the furnace of affliction, and tried him "as by fire." He loved his youngest child, a bright, beautiful boy, as he had never loved any thing else. He would turn aside from his books for his prattle, and the study door, barred against all visitors at certain hours of the day, was always opened at the tap of the child. A scourge came into his household. Every member but the pastor was sick. The mother was helpless, and assistance was sought in vain. The darling boy sickened at the last, sickened with a

noisome disease. The father was his nurse. He attended him night and day, and, like David, he prayed God earnestly that the child might be spared. He would have borne the disease, taken the pain, and even died for his darling boy. But no human aid could avail. The little boy died in convulsions, and died in the arms of his father.

The pastor came out of that furnace a changed man. He had seen affliction, and it melted him. He was tender, considerate, and tearful. He was especially a comforter at funerals. The death of a child unmanned him. He was a constant visitor to the homes of the lowly, and took a special interest in sick and poor children. Like his exalted Master, he seemed to be "made perfect through suffering."

Mr. Smith was always tender and sympathetic, and yet in the school of suffering he was to learn lessons with Christ, that would still further enhance his usefulness, and bring him into closer touch with the suffering and sorrowing around him, who needed help.

At the Conference of 1828, Mr. Smith was compelled to become a supernumerary. His constitution was so broken up, that it was manifest his life could be prolonged only by, at least, a partial cessation from labor. It was with great reluctance that he submitted to this arrangement; but of its necessity he had in himself evidence too palpable to be resisted. He therefore took up his residence at Beeston, a pleasant village a few miles from Nottingham; and it is proper to be recorded; that a handsome provision was made for him from the circuit funds, and that his friends were assiduous in supplying every alleviation of his affliction which was within their power. Yet with all the consolations which faith can command, and friendship afford, the situation of a supernumerary is deeply painful. To Mr. Smith it was peculiarly so, and his mind was often exercised by powerful temptation and deeply depressed. He could not be prevailed upon to remain in an inactive state. That relaxation which he took was, however, highly beneficial, and through the year his health gradually improved.

We give a few extracts from his letters during this time.

From Barnsley, where he was staying for his health, he wrote to his wife, September 11, 1828: "I am very glad that you are rising in your soul. There is no substitute for intercourse with God. Without Divine communications the soul droops and dies, and becomes a corrupt thing. But with what life and beauty and blessedness God can impregnate a soul! Yes, before the mighty energy of God, the Holy Ghost, everything that is foul and corrupt is driven, and from the indwelling Spirit spring love, joy and peace. Let us, my dear, pray on, and pray hard. God will not disappoint a feeble worm that trusts in Him. I thank you for the help of your prayers. You have my poor prayers, and shall have them. Notwithstanding much unfaithfulness, I believe it possible for us to live to God as we never have lived. Let us try. God's blessing, His peculiar blessing, is always connected with entire devotedness to Him. It will also be an inheritance to our children. Oh, that the blessed God would send us speedy and appropriate help! I am in a fair way to come about again. Most likely I shall long be a delicate man with respect to bodily health. This may be the best for me. This I know; God cannot err, nor can He be unkind. Glory be to Him! With a peculiar sense of the value of your affection, and wishing that you and your charge may dwell under the shadow of the Almighty, I am," etc.

Under the date of December 26, 1828, he thus writes: "My soul has fast hold on God. He is mine, and I am His. I have had, of late, some very gracious Divine communications. I am looking for brighter, more penetrating, and soul-transforming manifestations of God. I want, 'beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord,' to be changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.' The grand

adversary has laid hard at me, but God has pitied me and rebuked him. Disorder is retiring from my body, health and vigor are returning. With caution on my part, God seems disposed to build me up again. Much prayer has been made, and God has heard and regarded. I mean to use my returning health for God and souls. He will help. You are aware that I have commenced preaching again and God is pleased to connect His soul-saving power with me. I have raised a class which meets in our home. God has owned it. The first night a local preacher got a clean heart, the second four obtained pardon; the third, two others; the fourth, two more, and last Wednesday night, five were cleansed, as was another who came to our house just as we were commencing family worship. Glory! glory be to God! The cleansing God still lives and works. My wife is well and happy in God. Ellen is under a Divine influence. What a pleasing thought, our children are the Lord's. We must try and prevent the devil making any use of them. The provisions of the Gospel are neglected. The promise is to us and to our children. We will try that they may be a holy seed. May the Lord help you and me to claim the grace which is provided and offered in Christ ... I am loaded with the kindness of the people in this circuit. I trust God will reward them. My prayers they shall have. You and yours have my prayers and tears. I am, dear brother, yours," etc.

"March 17, 1829. -- My Very Dear Father:

A few weeks ago, I spent upwards of a fortnight in London. I had liberty beyond my expectation in preaching at Hinde Street one Sunday night, from, 'As I live, saith the Lord, I have no pleasure in the death of the wicked,' etc. The strong power of God was among the people. One woman cried out while I was preaching, and a general burst was anticipated. This, however, did not take place, perhaps through not going to prayer at the time. A great multitude stayed at the prayer-meeting. Many were powerfully wrought upon, and it was supposed about thirty were saved. Glory be to God! On Wednesday I and Brother McD_____ went to Woolwich. I preached in the evening from, 'Ask, and ye shall receive,' etc. D and I returned to London that night; but we afterwards learned that the pardoned and cleansed amounted to sixteen. The following Sunday night I had special liberty from, 'This is a faithful saying,' etc. There was much of the cutting power of God among the people. Fifteen hundred people stayed to prayer-meeting. The praying men then came forward, several got liberty, the high praises of God were sung. Mr. Reece marshaled the meeting until after ten o'clock, and then requested the seekers to retire into the vestry. It is said not fewer than forty were saved that night. You would not be surprised at this were you to hear these mighty men pray. Oh, what straightforward believing in God! Oh, what powerful wrestling! The following Wednesday I preached at Charles Street from, 'Wilt thou be made whole?' God displayed His power and mercy in saving souls, and not fewer than thirty prayed through. Glory be to God! By this time my body was shorn of its strength, and I was glad to seek rest by returning to Nottingham. In different places, in our own circuit I have seen several saved. To God be all the glory! Amen, and amen.

"July 2, 1829. -- I preached at Sheffield, according to appointment, to a large congregation; and there was a powerful influence connected with the truth of God. I should think twelve or fourteen hundred stayed to the prayer-meeting. Many were in distress, and a goodly company either found peace or were cleansed from sin. I preached out of doors at Chilwell, a few days afterwards: three or four were awakened, and have since joined the society. On Whitsunday, we had a good day at New Basford. Five found peace in the evening. They are going on well there. I was at Hickling, in the Melton circuit, a short time ago. Many were in distress, and five found peace. The week before last I went to Clauson, where we had a very signal time; a crowded chapel, much power under the sermon, and, after some powerful struggling in the prayer-meeting, fifteen or sixteen were saved. We had one saved at our class last Tuesday night. So you see the Lord is still working among us. O Jesus, ride on till all are subdued. Through mercy we are all

tolerably well in health, and determined to try and get and diffuse more of God." Then, in allusion to his temporal circumstances, he adds: "I would rather break stones on the road than pass another such year as the last. I like to earn my bread, and that has sometimes made me labor when I ought to have rested. But I hope God will smile after bruising me a little."

On Easter Sunday evening of this year, Mr. Smith preached at Hockley chapel, and, having commenced a prayer-meeting, went into the vestry, intending immediately to return home. A poor man followed him, and with an expression of extreme disappointment, exclaimed, "What! are you going?" "Yes," said Mr. Smith; "what is the matter with you?" "Oh, I am a miserable man, sir!" "Are you a backslider?" "Yes, I am; and I am a miserable man!" "Do you wish to come back? do you want to be saved again?" "I am come on purpose; and now you are going." "Go into the chapel, and get upon your knees," said Mr. Smith, "and I will be with you in a few minutes." He did as he was directed, and, when Mr. Smith went to him, he found him in an agony of distress, exclaiming, "There never was such a sinner as I am." "You deserve Hell," said Mr. Smith. "That's true," replied the other, with a deep groan; "I do indeed." "Oh, man! God will not allow you to remain in this distress. He says, 'I will heal your backslidings, and I will love you freely.' Do you think God tells lies?" "No." "Then He will do it, will He not?" The penitent laid hold on the truth, and was instantly delivered and his joy was as extreme as had been his previous anguish.

The same evening a poor woman went forward with two others; she said: "Mr. Smith, this is my daughter, and this other is my son's wife; they both want salvation." God gave them the desire of their hearts.

Mr. Smith's health being sufficiently restored, he resumed his labors and was appointed in 1829 to the Lincoln circuit. Monday evening he preached a farewell sermon and twenty were saved. Among these was a woman who had a persecuting husband. She had once enjoyed the favor of God, but permitted her domestic troubles so far to prevail over her that she lost out in her soul. On this evening she went up to the form usually appropriated to penitents, and, kneeling down, resolved not to rise till the Lord again lifted on her the light of His countenance. In a short time, the Comforter returned to her heart; and, with a face wreathed with smiles, she was retiring, when she caught a glimpse of a man who had just obtained a similar blessing. It was her husband. She rushed into his arms, and fainted. It afterwards appeared that each of them was ignorant of the other's coming to the chapel. The power of God laid hold of the ungodly man's heart during the sermon; and just at the time that his wife received the renewed assurance of the Divine favor, he also entered into the enjoyment of peace in believing.

Such was the closing scene of Mr. Smith's regular ministry in a circuit most tenderly endeared to his own heart, and in which his name will long be remembered with deep emotions of gratitude and reverence.

He began in Lincoln on Sunday, August 30th, by a powerful sermon from John 16:24, and in the evening from Job 22:21. In both these discourses he gave his hearers to distinctly perceive the order of his preaching. "Whoever discredits my Master," said he, in one of them, "I do not. His promise is, 'Where two or three are gathered together in My name, there am I in the midst.' Jesus is here. Glory, glory be to God!"

He thus speaks of the results of his early labors in this circuit, in a letter to a friend:

"Oct. 21, 1829. -- I am rather strong to labor; I am disposed to labor. I have plenty to do; and the best of all is, God is with me! I had been told that the Lincoln congregation consisted of very still sort of people, who were incapable of excitement, etc., etc. Caution, caution would be necessary. Well, pondering took place in my mind. The result was, I will strike the first Sunday. I did so; execution was done. God saved four; and He has saved, I should think, at least fourscore since in Lincoln. Hallelujah! Hail to the Lord's Anointed!"

The royal diadem belongs to Him! We will crown Him Lord of all! The floods are coming! Many drops, some showers, have already descended. How refreshing! But the floods are coming! If our people continue in agonizing, believing prayer, which has fast hold of them at present, -- and why not? -- nothing can stand before them. Satan will fall as lightning from heaven. Hardness, levity, carelessness, and profanity are as chaff before the wind. God has risen from His holy habitation, and speaks salvation in every direction. What an honor to be one of His attendants! to be one of His heralds! I cry out, He is coming; and often, He is here! His royal presence is known by His bounty distributed, pardons in great numbers, the frequent healing of backsliders, clean hearts: filled spirits go away rejoicing, and the arrows stick fast in the hearts of the King's enemies. With tears, and cries, and groans, and rejoicings, I say,

'Live, for ever, wondrous King,

Born to redeem, and strong to save!'

Good luck to Thee! ride on, win, subdue, conquer, triumph, have the glory forever and ever! What! do tears of joy fill your eyes, and do you say, 'Amen, my God! let there be a sweeping work! and strengthen his body?' Oh, my brother, I have just had to wipe away my tears at the thought of your praying for me -- body and soul. Thank you, thank you! Well, when we shake hands on the banks of the river, we will sing, 'Hallelujah to the Lamb!' I should like to enter into particulars, but for want of space cannot. Some of the most unlikely ones found salvation, proud spirited, haughty young men. But what is this to the omnipotent Spirit whose work it is to save? From four to twenty have been saved at one meeting in Lincoln again and again. Persons from nine to seventy-six years of age are among the saved. Last Sunday I was at Bassingham. I preached at one-thirty from, 'Create in me a clean heart.' We then had a good love-feast. Just as I was about to give out a verse, a young man got up and said some time ago he had lost a clean heart, but the sermon had convicted him. Then suddenly he cried out, 'God cleanses me again.' It went like an electric shock. I said, 'Now you see God is here in cleansing power. If you want a clean heart you may have one.' A young man exclaimed, 'I have got it,' and looking round added, 'You all may have it.' We began to pray and the meeting did not conclude till I went to preach at six o'clock. I was told that thirty-three obtained entire sanctification, and many were pardoned. In the evening, the strong power of God was present. I suppose towards thirty were pardoned, and many cleansed. Glory be to God! I went on Monday to Besthorpe. Seventeen found peace, several were cleansed, and others in distress. Yesterday morning, I saw two cleansed, and one get into liberty. These are days of grace. It is God's will that they should continue. Hallelujah! On Monday night, at the prayer-meeting in Lincoln, four or five and twenty were saved. Expectation is high, and God will not fail. Love to the praying men."

November 4, 1829, he writes to his friend, Mr. Alderman Carey: "God is with us; yes, He is mightily working. Not a week passes without some being pardoned or cleansed. Last Sunday afternoon, at the prayer-meeting after the sacrament, about twelve found peace; three more at night, ten others on Monday. Last night I was at Saxilby: three found peace, six obtained clean hearts. Today I have seen one cleansed, and two pardoned. I say to our friends in Lincoln, that if they will only stick to it, if they continue in agonizing and believing prayer, there will be such a work in Lincoln as was never witnessed. Glory be to God! Forty-five were proposed [one evening] to receive notes on trial, besides many more who have begun to meet in class. We have begun to confess the sins of the people, to plead the blood of the covenant, and the promise of the Spirit. The business, I trust, will be continued: the Lord will not fail. In many places in the circuit God is working mightily, and souls are entering into Canaan."

In January of 1830 he went to Nottingham to preach for the Tract Society. He wrote in his diary: "My object in going is to glorify God: 1. In the awakening of sinners, the bringing them to Christ that they may be pardoned, accepted, adopted, and regenerated; 2. The restoration of poor backsliders; 3. The entire sanctification of believers; their support and comfort under trouble and temptation; and their being filled with all the fullness of God; 4. Begetting and increasing, in God's people, concern for the salvation of souls in general, and of sinners in Nottingham in particular. Every soul in Nottingham was called into being by the blessed God, and has been preserved and redeemed by Him; and it is God's will that each should be saved. For the getting and cultivating sympathy for souls, consider that they are, 1. Immortal; 2. Accountable; 3. Capable of bliss or pain extreme; 4. Naturally corrupt; increasers of corruption in themselves, and propagators [of it in others]; also, that they are acted upon injuriously by men and devils. God pities them, and bids them welcome to the blessings of His house; Christ died and intercedes for them; the Spirit works upon them, and is ready to furnish still more powerful influence; but they must use the means of God's appointing, actively concur with the Spirit, or perish everlastingly. They are our brethren; we have access to them in person or by proxy. We are capable of acting upon them. A Divine influence is connected with every Christian. God and Christ require it of us. We have power with God for them. Their state must be looked at with as much particularity as possible. The atonement must be believed for them; promises of the influences of the Holy Spirit must be seized and pleaded for them; their hardness, profanity, pride, carelessness, will give way; and it will appear that God is with Zion, making her 'a sharp threshing instrument, having teeth.' Individual pleading in this way will do much; united pleading will do more. Who will come up to the help of the Lord against the mighty? Allow not the work to flag; stick to it. Personal piety will improve, and there will be accessions to the church of Christ, etc. Who is sufficient for these things? No one, but the man whom God fits for the work. Lord, help me!"

Mr. Smith's labors at Nottingham, on this occasion, were greatly blessed; and, among other cases of his success, there was one meeting which he conducted, in which not less than forty souls obtained the pardon of their sins. In his correspondence, he speaks of the Sabbath which he spent with his Nottingham friends at this time as a day never to be forgotten.

Why are there not more mighty "praying men" today? more "wrestling men" who will not leave go until the heavens bend, and the answer is felt and seen? Our pulpits in too many places are dealing in glittering generalities, and these are the death of prayer and of spirituality.

Children may be taught the value of prayer and to realize its power in their own experience. A little girl was placed in an attic to pass the night. It was a room seldom occupied; but it became necessary to put her in this chamber, to make room for friends who had come unexpectedly to the house. She was awakened in the night by troops of rats running over the bed. The animals were large and bold; they not only chased each other round the room and across the bed, but even across the face of the little girl. Some of the rats took their station on her bosom and looked her fiercely in the face. The little child was terribly frightened and screamed in terror. Her cries did not seem to disturb her visitors; they continued their gambols all the same. She was so far away that the family could not hear her outcries. The child had been trained in the fear of the Lord. She wondered if the Lord would hear her in her extremity, and send her deliverance. She thought over the lessons she had learned in Sunday School. She remembered that her Heavenly Father heard Joseph in prison, and delivered Daniel from the den of lions. Timid and fearful, she resolved to call upon the Lord. Her prayer was first that the Lord would send her deliverance. If it did not please Him to do that, she prayed that He would keep her from harm. While she prayed, a scratching was heard at the door. The little child jumped out of bed, and hurriedly opened the door, when a large cat entered. She was a

stranger to the house, but immediately fell upon her enemies. She cleared the room in a trice. The child returned to her bed, and soon fell asleep. She was not disturbed again through the night. In the morning, her deliverer was nowhere to be found. Where she came from or where she went to, no one knows. The child still affirms, and her family believe, as she is a child of undoubted truth and intelligence, that He who shut the mouths of lions when His servant was in peril, had pity on the sufferings of a little girl, heard her prayer, and sent deliverance.

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