

Living Victoriously

by J.R. Miller

The ideal Christian life is one of victory over all enmity, opposition, difficulty, and suffering, achieved through faith in God and Christ.

Scripture: Isaiah 26:3, John 16:33, Romans 8:37, 2 Corinthians 2:14, Ephesians 6:10-11, Philippians 4:13, 2 Timothy 4:7, James 1:2-4, 1 Peter 5:10, 1 John 5:4

Topics: "Victory in Christ", "Spiritual Growth"

Description

J.R. Miller emphasizes that life is a constant conflict, where every good thing requires struggle and perseverance to attain. He illustrates that true character and spiritual beauty are forged through battles with inner and outer evils, and that the path to victory is paved with trials and self-discipline. Miller encourages believers to embrace their struggles, as they are essential for growth and transformation into Christlikeness. He reassures that through faith in Christ, Christians can achieve victory over life's adversities and maintain peace amidst trials. Ultimately, he calls for a life of victory, reminding us that we are more than conquerors through Him who loves us.

Transcript

Life is conflict. Every good thing lies beyond a battlefield, and we must fight our way to it. There must be struggle to get it. This is true in physical life; from infancy to old age, existence is a fight with infirmity and disease. In mental life, the same is true. Education is a long conflict; the powers of the mind have to fight their way to strength and development. So it is in spiritual life; enemies throned on the path and contest every step of progress. No one ever attains to beauty and nobleness of character, except through long and sore struggle.

Many of earth's great historic battlefields, are now spots of quiet peace. Once men met there in deadly strife--arms clashed, cannon thundered, the air was filled with the shouts of contending armies and the groans of the wounded and dying, and the ground was covered with the dead. But now, in summer days, the grass waves on the once bloody field, sweet flowers bloom, harvests yellow to ripeness, children play and the air is full of bird-songs and the voices of peace. But he who walks over the spot is continually reminded of the terrible struggle which occurred there in the bygone days.

We look upon men and women who have attained high culture of mind and spirit. They are intelligent and educated; they are well balanced in their faculties and symmetrical in their development; their character is strong and noble, showing all the features which belong to true manhood or true womanhood; they are

dignified in their deportment, calm and equable in their bearing; they are not hasty in speech nor impetuous in temper; their judgments are never rash; they possess the qualities of patience, contentment and gentleness, combined with courage, righteousness and strength. When we look upon such people, we cannot but admire them and be fascinated by the culture and the majesty and serenity of their lives. We are apt to think of them as highly favored in their original endowment, and in their circumstances and experiences.

But if we knew the story of these lives, we would see--that where now we behold such ripe and beautiful character, was once a battlefield! These men and women began, just as all of us must begin--with their faculties undeveloped, their powers undisciplined and their lives uncultured. They had their hard battles with evil in themselves, and with evil about them. They grew into intelligence through long and severe mental training and years of diligent study. They attained their splendid self-control through painful experiences of conflict with their tongues, their tempers, their original impetuosity, their many innate propensities to evil. Their beauty of Christian character, they reached through the submission of their own wills--to the will of Christ; and of their selfishness and natural resentment and other evil affections and passions--to the sway of the Spirit of divine love. They were not always what now they are. This noble beauty which we so admire--is the fruit of long years of sore struggle, the harvest which has been brought to ripeness by the frosts of autumn, the snows and storms of winter, and the rains and sunshine of spring. Behind of the calmness, the refinement, the strength and the charming culture which we see--is a story of conflict, with many a defeat and many a wounding, and of stern self-discipline, with pain, toil and tears.

We all admire the character of John as it is drawn for us in the New Testament. It seems almost perfect in its affectionateness, its gentleness, its peacefulness. Yet John was not always the saintly man of the Gospel. There is no doubt that he attained this beauty of character, under the transforming influence of Christ's love, through just such sore conflict and self-discipline as all of us must endure to attain Christlikeness. A writer compares the character of this man of love, to an extinct volcano he had visited. Where once the crater yawned, there is now a verdurous cup-like hollow on the mountain-summit; where once the fierce fires had burned, lies now a still, clear pool of water, looking up like an eye to the beautiful heavens above, its banks covered with sweet flowers.

Says Dr. Culross, speaking of the beloved apostle and referring to this old crater now so beautiful, "It is an apt parable of this man. Naturally and originally volcanic, capable of profoundest passion and daring, he is new-made by grace, until in his old age he stands out in calm grandeur of character, and depth and largeness of soul, with all the gentlenesses and graces of Christ adorning him--a man, as I image him to myself, with a face so noble--that kings might do him homage, and so sweet--that children would run to him for his blessing."

So we learn the story of all noble, cultured character. It is reached only through struggle; it is not natural--but is the fruit of toil and conquest; it bears the marks and scars of many a conflict. We often hear people say they would give large sums to have such a person's contentment, or self-control, or sweetness of disposition, or submissiveness to God's will, or power of giving sympathy. These are things that cannot be bought, and that cannot be learned in any school. Such qualities can be gotten only through victorious struggle during years of experience.

We say that Christ gives his disciples this spiritual loveliness, that he renews their natures and transforms their lives, imprinting his own image upon them. This is true; if it were not, there could never be any hope of saintliness in any human life. Yet Christ does not produce this change in us merely by instantaneously

printing his likeness upon our souls--as the photographer prints one's picture on the glass in his camera. He works in us--but we must work out the beauty which he puts in germ into our hearts; he helps us in every struggle--yet still we must struggle; he never fights the battle for us, although he is ever near to help us. Thus the noble things of spiritual attainment, lie away beyond the hills and the rivers, and we must toil far through strife and pain, before we can get them. The old life must be crucified, that the new life may emerge.

The duty of life is, then, to be victorious. Every good thing, every noble thing, must be won. Heaven is for those who overcome; not to overcome is to fail. In war, to be defeated is to become a slave. To be vanquished in the battle with sin--is to become sin's slave; to be overcome by the antagonisms of life--is to lose all. But in the Christian life defeat is never a necessity. Over all the ills and enmities of this world we may be victorious.

Moreover, every Christian life ought to be victorious. Jesus said, "In the world you shall have tribulation: but be of good cheer; I have overcome the world." Nothing will do for a gospel for sinners, which leaves any enmity unconquered, any foe unvanquished. Paul, in speaking of the trials and sufferings that beset the Christian--tribulation, distress, persecution, famine, nakedness, sword--asked, "Shall these separate us from the love of Christ?" That is, "Can these evils and antagonisms ever be so great, that we cannot overcome them and be carried still in Christ's bosom?" He answers his own question by saying triumphantly, "Nay, in all these things--we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us!" We need never be defeated; we may always be victorious. We may be even "more than conquerors"--triumphant, exultant conquerors. "Whoever is born of God, overcomes the world; and this is the victory that overcomes the world, even our faith."

The ideal Christian life is one, therefore, which is victorious over all enmity, opposition, difficulty and suffering. This is the standard which we should all set for ourselves; this is the pattern shown us in the holy mount, after which we should seek always to fashion our life. We need never expect to find a path running along on a level plain, amid sweet flowers, beneath the shade of the trees.

Of course there will be Elims in the long way, for God is very loving--but the road will always be steep and hard. Yet there will never come an experience in which it will not be wrong for us to be defeated. Grace has lost none of its power since New-Testament days. Surely the poor stumbling life so many of us live is not the best possible living for us if we are true Christians. Our Master is able to help us to something far better.

Take temper, the control of the emotion of anger, the government of the tongue. Is there any real reason, any fatal necessity, why we should always be easily provoked, swept away by every slight cause--into unseemly passion and into unchristian speech? No doubt Scripture is true to experience,, when it affirms that the taming of the tongue is harder than the taming of any kind of beast or bird or serpent! No doubt the control of the tongue is the hardest victory to be achieved in all the range of self-discipline, for inspiration affirms that the man who has gotten the complete victory over his speech, is a perfectly disciplined man, "able also to bridle the whole body." Yet victory even here is not impossible. The grace of God is sufficient to enable us to live sweetly amid all provocation and irritation, to check all feelings of resentment, to give the soft answer which will turn away wrath, and to choke back all rising bitterness before it shall break into a storm of passion. Jesus never lost his temper, nor spoke unadvisedly, and he is able to help us to live in the same victorious way!

This is the ideal life for a child of God. We may be more than conquerors. It is not an easy conquest that we may win in a day; in many lives it must be the work of years. Still, it is possible, with Christ to help; and we should never relax our diligence nor withdraw from the battle--until we are victorious. He who in the strength of Christ has acquired this power of self-control, has reached a sublime rank in spiritual culture. The world may sneer at the man who bears injury and wrong without resentment, without anger--but in God's eyes he is a spiritual hero!

Take trial of any kind--pain, misfortune, sorrow. Is it possible to live victoriously at this point of human experience? Many fail to do so; they succumb to every trial, and are overwhelmed by every wave of grief or loss. Many do not make any effort to resist; the faith of their creed, of their hymns, of their prayers--forsakes them; and they meet their troubles apparently as unsupported and unsustained--as if they were not Christians at all.

A novelist describes one in grief as he stands on the shore and gazes at the ship that is bearing away from him the object of his heart's devotion. In his absorbing anguish, he does not observe that the tide is rising. It rolls over his feet--but he is unconscious of it. Higher and higher the waters rise--now to his knees, now to his loins, now to his chest. But all his thought is on the receding ship, and he is oblivious to the swelling of the waves, and at length they flow over his head and he is swept down to death! This is a picture of many of earth's sufferers in sorrow or in misfortune. They are defeated and overborne; the divine promises do not sustain them, because they lose all faith; they hear the words, "You sorrow not--even as others which have no hope," and yet they do sorrow--just as if they had no hope.

But this is not the best that our religion can do for us. It is designed to give us complete victory in all trial. "As sorrowing--yet always rejoicing" is the scriptural ideal for a Christian life. Christ has bequeathed his own peace to his believing ones. We know what his peace was; it was never broken for a moment, though his sorrows and sufferings surpassed in bitterness, anything that this earth has ever known in any other sufferer. The same peace he offers to each one of his people in all trial.

The artist painted life as a sea--wild, swept by storms, covered with wrecks. In the midst of this troubled scene, he painted a great rock rising out of the waves, and in the rock, above the reach of the billows, a cleft with herbage growing and flowers blooming; and in the midst of the herbage and the flowers--a dove sitting quietly on her nest. It is a picture of the Christian's heritage of peace in tribulation. It is thus Christ would have us live in the world--in 'the midst of the sorest trials and adversities--always victorious, always at peace. The secret of this victoriousness is faith--faith in the unchanging love of God, faith in the unfailing grace and help of Christ, faith in the immutable divine promises. If we but believe God and go forward, ever resolute and unfaltering in duty, we shall always be more than conquerors!

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