

The Cost of Helpfulness

by J.R. Miller

The sermon explores the profound truth that true helpfulness requires personal sacrifice and the lessons learned through suffering.

Scripture: Isaiah 53:5, Matthew 5:4, Luke 6:38, John 15:13, Romans 5:3-5, 2 Corinthians 1:4, Galatians 6:2, Philippians 3:10, 2 Timothy 2:12, 1 Peter 5:10

Topics: "Cost of Helpfulness", "Suffering and Comfort"

Description

J.R. Miller emphasizes that true helpfulness comes at a cost, as every blessing we receive is a result of sacrifice and suffering. He illustrates this through the life of Jesus, whose healings required a giving of His own life force, and he argues that all valuable contributions in life, whether material or spiritual, are born from toil and hardship. Miller points out that those who teach and comfort others must first endure their own trials to gain the authority and empathy needed to truly help. He encourages believers to embrace their sufferings as a preparation for becoming effective ministers of comfort to others. Ultimately, he asserts that the path to being a true helper is paved with personal sacrifice and deep learning.

Transcript

Every blessing that comes to us--is made sacred by its cost. To us it may be given freely; but, before it could be given, a price was paid for it! One cannot be truly helpful to another, except through a consuming of self. Thus the healings wrought by Jesus drew upon his own life. Once, when a poor sick woman had touched the hem of Christ's garment, he said, "Somebody has touched me; for I perceive that virtue is gone out of me." Life went out from him--to become healing in the woman. The same was true in all Christ's other healings. It cost him something to heal the sick.

When we think of it, this is the law of all helpfulness. Anything that is of any real value to us--has cost somewhere, in toil or sacrifice or suffering, according to its worth. The blessings of our Christian civilization have come to us through long generations of hardship, endurance, and patient fidelity. Every good thing we enjoy, has had somewhere its baptism in blood.

Even in the most common things of daily life, we can find price-marks which confirm and attest this law. Every sunbeam that paints a flower or cheers a sick-room, costs a portion of the sun's substance, millions of miles away. Every lump of coal that burns on our grate, and every gas-jet that flames in our room, is a memorial of a plant or tree that grew and fell uncounted ages since, in some primeval forest. The clothing that keeps us warm and adorns our bodies--we get at the cost of fields stripped of their cotton and flax; or

of flocks shorn of their wool; or of silkworms' patient spinning out of their own life on the branches of thousands of trees. The food we eat day by day--comes to us through the dying of animals which give up their life to nourish ours; or through the toil of fruit-gatherers and harvesters in the fields; or at the hands of those who on ships and railways carry the breadstuffs over sea and land, and of those who in our own homes prepare our meals for us.

The books we read, and from whose pages we get so many words and thoughts that are helpful--come to us enriched with strength and thought which have come out of other hearts and lives! We read the smooth, graceful sentences with delight. They impart to us instruction, inspiration, comfort, and courage! Yet we give little thought to the writer, or we think of him as one who wields a facile pen; and it rarely occurs to us--to think of him as having endured or suffered loss, pain, or trial, that he might give to us the words in which we find so much pleasure or help! But the truth is that no strengthening thought comes to us from another, without cost to the author, some time, in some way. Men and women must live deeply, before they can write helpfully. We cannot teach lessons, which we have not learned. We may write flowing sentences, saying things we have read or heard, teaching what we have obtained from books, as did the scribes in our Lord's time; but no heart, in its deep human need, will ever receive much real help from such teaching.

The words that Jesus uttered, reached the people's souls because he spoke as one having authority, and not as the scribes. His words came out of his own heart, throbbing with his own very life-blood. He spoke what he knew, not what he had read or heard. He gave lessons which he had learned in his own deep living. The comforts with which he comforted the sorrowing, he had gotten from God in his own sorrow. Every word he spoke, was the fruit of some experience in his own life, and bore in itself the mark of its cost.

In human measure, the same is true of all those who teach us lessons which help us in life. Mere compilers may aid us through the good thoughts of others, which they gather and bring to us--but they have no help of their own, out of their own life, for us. Only the words which come with the authority of experience, can be real bread to our hunger. Only with the comfort with which we ourselves have been comforted by God--can we really comfort others. Only what we have learned by experience, can we truly teach.

Hence it is that the books which truly help us, must have cost their authors a great deal more than the mere literary labor of their production. Every word that tells of Christian peace, is the fruit of a victory over self in times of sore struggle and trial. Every word that gives comfort, tells of sorrows met and endured victoriously. It is the story of his own experience, that the author has put into his words. It has been said of poets--that what they teach in song they have learned in suffering. All Christians love to read the Hebrew Psalms. In every mood and phase of our heart's feelings, we find in these Psalms, the very words in which to frame our thoughts, and utter our desires. The reason is that these Psalms are the faithful records of what other men thought and felt when they were in experiences like ours. We walk in the paths which their feet broke for us, in the rough wilderness. The blessing we receive--comes out of their pain and tears.

So it is in all literature. Great thoughts, wherever we find them, have been born in struggle and anguish. So it is in all life. We cannot be of use in the world--without cost. What it costs us nothing to give or to do--is not worth the giving or the doing. It is those who sow in tears--who reap in joy. It is he who goes forth and weeps, bearing precious seed--that shall come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him.

One of the blessings of suffering or trial--is that by it we are fitted for becoming more helpful in our ministry to others. The mother who has lost a little child, and has received God's divine consolation, can afterward go to other mothers in like sorrow, and comfort them as she could not have comforted them before meeting her own grief. Now she knows what their grief is--and can enter into their experience. And that is a vital quality in the consoler's art. Without the power of sympathy, we can never give strength or help to one whose heart is breaking. This power one gets through suffering.

It was necessary, even for Jesus, when preparing to be our friend and our helper at all our points of need, to enter into real human life, and live it through to the end, just as we have to live it--in order that he might know all human experience. Because of this we are told that in heaven he is now touched with the feeling of our infirmities, and can understand all that we suffer. Those of his people who are led through suffering, are also being prepared to become helpers of others in the truest and deepest way.

This is one of the compensations of sorrow which is sometimes overlooked by those who are in trouble. They ask why God is afflicting them--and what they have done to deserve such suffering. It would help all such, to endure more patiently were they to remember that God is preparing them to become comforters and guides to others in life's dark paths.

We ought to be willing to be trained for any service to which God would assign us, whatever the cost of the training may be. We are all eager for promotion in life. We are honored when our fellow-men trust us with new and important responsibilities. Men are willing to spend years in hard study, and to endure severe discipline--that they may be able to take certain great positions in life, and perform duties requiring delicacy and skill. When our great Master desires to prepare us for the highest of all arts--that of being comforters of others in their trouble--should we not feel ourselves honored in being called to perform such service for him?

It is a costly promotion, however; for we cannot be a blessing to those who need such ministry--until we, too, have suffered, and have learned the lesson of comfort for ourselves, at God's feet. Hence, if we would be truly and deeply helpful--we must be willing to pay the price of the costly tuition. We must learn deeply and long--before we can teach well. We must listen intently--before we are ready to speak to others. We must be willing to endure temptation, conflict, and struggle with sin, and to get the victory--before we can be succorers of those who are tempted. We must be content to suffer, and must learn to suffer patiently--before we can sing the songs of Christian joy and peace in the ears of the weary. Our own hearts must break, to fit us for giving comfort--for only with heart's blood can we heal hearts. God is ready always to anoint for the holy office of helping their fellow-men, only those who can pay the price.

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