

The Ministry of Comfort - Part 1

by J.R. Miller

The realization of immortality gives us a new perspective on life, comfort in troubles, and a deeper understanding of God's love and discipline.

Scripture: 2 Corinthians 1:3

Topics: "Comfort in Suffering", "The Purpose of Trials"

Description

J.R. Miller emphasizes the significance of understanding our immortality and the purpose behind our suffering in 'The Ministry of Comfort - Part 1.' He encourages believers to view troubles as divine messengers that bring blessings and growth, rather than as punishments. Miller illustrates that through trials, we can develop deeper faith, compassion, and a greater capacity to comfort others. He draws on biblical examples, such as Job, to show how faith can endure through suffering and how God's love remains constant even in loss. Ultimately, he calls for a perspective shift, urging us to accept our trials as trusts from God that can lead to spiritual enrichment and comfort for others.

Transcript

The Ministry of Comfort

J. R. Miller, 1898

Glimpses of Immortality

Consciousness of immortality is a mighty motive in life. If we think only of what lies in the little dusty circle about our feet, we miss the glory for which we were made. But if we realize even dimly the fact that we are immortal, a new meaning is given to every joy of our life, to every hope of our heart, to every work of our hands.

The realization of this truth of immortality in our personal consciousness, is partly at least a matter of education. We may train ourselves to think of our life in its larger aspect. We may allow our mind to dwell only on material things, and keep our eyes on the narrow patch of earth on which we walk in our daily rounds. Or we may persist in lifting our thoughts to things which are unseen and eternal. This really is most important in the truest religious training and discipline, and we should lose no opportunity to get glimpses of things which are imperishable.

A literary friend tells of an experience with an optometrist. Her eyes were troubling her, and she asked him if she did not need a pair of new glasses. He replied, after making an examination, that it was rest which her eyes needed, not different lenses. She assured him that this was an impossible prescription, telling him a little of what she must do day by day. After a moment's thought, he asked her if she had not some wide views from her windows. She replied enthusiastically that she had - that from her front porch she could see the noble peaks of the Blue Ridge and from her back window the glories of the Alleghany foothills. "That is just what you need," said the oculist. "When your eyes get tired with your reading or writing, go and stand at your back window or your front porch, and look steadily at your mountains for five minutes--ten will be better. This far look will rest your eyes."

The friend finds in this direction, a parable for her own daily life. "Soul of mine," she says to herself, "are you tired of the little treadmill round of care and worry, of the conflicts with evil, of the struggles after holiness, of the harrowing grief of this world--tired of today's dreary commonplaces? Then rest your spiritual eyes by getting a far vision. Look up to the beauty of God's holiness. Look in upon the throngs of the redeemed, waiting inside the gates. Look out upon the wider life which stretches away illimitably."

It is such an outlook that the thought of immortality gives to us. We live in our narrow sphere in this world, treading round and round in the same little circle. Life's toils and tasks so fill our hands, that we scarcely have time for a thought of anything else. Its secularities and its struggles for bread, keep us ever bent down to the earth. The tears of sorrow, dim our vision of God and of heaven. The dust and smoke of earth's battles, hide the blue of heaven. We need continually to get far looks to rest us, and to keep us in mind of the great world which stretches away beyond our close horizons. The glimpses of eternity which flash upon us as we read our Bible or look into Christ's face, tell us anew that we so easily forget that we are immortal, that our life really has no horizon.

It is very inspiring to think of human life in this way, as reaching out beyond what we call death--and into eternity. Dying is not the end of our life--it is but an incident, a phase or process of living. Dying is not a wall, cutting off our path--it is a gate, through which we pass into larger fuller life. We say we have only three score and ten years to live, and must plan only for hopes or efforts which we can bring within this limit. But, really, we may make plans which will require ten thousand years--for we shall never die.

Life is short, even at the longest. It is but a little which we can do in our brief broken years. We begin things and we are interrupted in the midst of them, before they are half finished. A thousand breaks occur in our plans. We purpose to build something very beautiful, and scarcely have we laid the foundation when we are called to something else, or laid aside by illness, or our life ends and the work remains unfinished. It is pathetic, when a busy man has been called away suddenly--for us to go into his office or place of business or work, and see the unfinished things he has left--a letter half written, a book half read, a picture begun but not completed. Life is full of mere fragments, mere beginnings of things.

If there is nothing beyond death, but little can come of all this poor fragmentary living and doing. The assurance, however, that life will go on without serious break, through endless years, puts a new meaning into every noble and worthy beginning. The smallest things that we start in this world will go on forever.

Paul tells us, at the close of his wonderful chapter on the resurrection, that our labor is not in vain in the Lord. Beyond our narrow horizon, a world of infinite largeness awaits us. Nothing done for Christ shall fail or be in vain. All good things shall live forever. The seeds we sow here which cannot come to harvest in earth's little years, will have abundant time for ripening in the measureless after years. The slowest

ripening fruit will some day become mellow and luscious.

There is comfort in this for those whose life seems a failure here--crushed like a trampled flower under the heel of wrong or sin--broken and torn. There will be time enough in the immortal days for such broken lives to grow into strength and loveliness. Think of living a thousand years, a million years, in a world where there shall be no sin, no struggle, no injustice, no failure--but where every influence shall be inspiring and enriching; for in the immortal life all growth is towards youth, not toward the decrepitude of age.

The truth of immortality gives us a vision also of continued existence in love and blessedness, for those who have passed from us and beyond our sight. We miss them and we ask a thousand questions about them, yet get no answer from this world's wisdom. But looking through the broken grave of Christ, as through a window we see green fields on the other side, and amid the gladness and the joy we catch glimpses of the dear faces which we miss from the earthly circle. The New Testament shows us Jesus Himself beyond death, and He was not changed. He had the same gentle heart. He had not forgotten His friends. Thus it is that looking through the window of Christ's rent tomb--we have a vision of life as immortal and in the truth of immortality we find boundless inspiration, comfort for every sorrow, and gain for every loss.

Why Trouble Comes

There is always a mystery in sorrow. We never can understand for certain, why it comes to us. We cannot but ask questions when we find ourselves in the midst of trouble. But many of our questions must remain unanswered until earth's dim light becomes full and clear in heaven's glory. "What I do--you cannot now understand," said the Master; "but you shall understand hereafter."

Some godly people make the mistake of supposing, when any trouble comes upon them, that they have displeased God in some way and that He is punishing them for it. This was the thought in the minds of the disciples, when they asked the Master for whose sin, his own or his parent's, a certain man had been born blind. Jesus answered that the blindness had been sent for no one's sin--but for an occasion of good and blessing, for an opportunity of revealing the mercy and gentleness of God. When we have sorrow or suffering, our question should not be, "What have I done that God is punishing me for?" but, "What is the mission of this messenger of God to me?"

If we would always greet pain or trouble in this way, with welcome, reverently, in Christ's name--we would be in an attitude for receiving whatever blessing or good God has sent to us in it. There is no doubt that whatever trouble comes to us--that it comes from God on an errand of love. It is not some chance thing breaking into our life, without purpose, without intention. It is a messenger from God, and brings blessings to us. Our trouble is God's gift to us. No matter what it may be--duty, responsibility, struggle, pain, unrequited service, unjust treatment, hard conditions--it is that which God has given to us. No matter through whose fault or sin it may have come to us, when the trouble is ours--we may say it is a gift of God to us. Then being a gift from God, we may be sure that it has in it a divine blessing. As it comes to us, it may have a stern aspect, may seem unkindly, even cruel--but folded up in its forbidding form, it carries some treasure of mercy.

It is easy to find illustrations of this truth. The world's greatest blessings have come out of its greatest sorrows. Said Goethe, "I never had an affliction which did not turn into a poem." No doubt the best music and poetry in all literature had a like origin, if we could know its whole story. It is universally true that poets "learn in suffering what they teach in song." Nothing really worth while in life's lessons, comes easily

without pain and cost.

Readers who find in certain books of Christian experience words which are bread to their spiritual hunger, which cheer and strengthen them, which shine like lamps on their darkness, showing them the way, do not know what it cost the writer to prepare these words, how he suffered, struggled and endured, in order that he might learn to write the sentences which are so full of helpfulness. This is one of the rewards of suffering--the power to light the way for other sufferers.

Many of the beneficences which have brought greatest good to the world have been the fruit of a bitter sorrow or a loss which seemed overwhelming. When Dr. Moon of Brighton was at the very ripeness of his powers and the summit of his achievements, he became totally blind. It seemed a terrible calamity that a man so brilliant, fitted to be so helpful to humanity, should have his career of usefulness thus ruthlessly ended. For a time his heart was full of rebellious thoughts; he could not and would not submit. He could see no possible goodness, nothing but unqualified misfortune, in the darkening of his eyes which had put an end to his career among men. But in his darkness, he began to think of others who were blind and to ponder the question whether there might not be some way by which they could be enabled to read. The outcome of his thought was the invention of the alphabet for the blind, which is now used in nearly every country and in every language, by means of which three or four million of blind in all parts of the world can read the Bible and other books. Was it not worth while for one man's eyes to be darkened, in order that such a blessing might be given to the blind of all lands?

In personal experience, too, countless of life's sweetest blessings and joys are born of sorrows. For many a man the things of earth on which he has set his heart are blighted, that his affections may be lifted to things heavenly and eternal. There are many who never saw Christ--until the light of some tender human beauty faded before their eyes, when, looking up in the darkness, they beheld that blessed Face beaming its love upon them.

A writer tells of a little bird which would not learn to sing the song its master would have it sing, while its cage was full of light. It listened and learned a snatch of this, a trill of that, a polyglot of all the songs of the grove--but never a separate and entire melody of its own. Then the master covered its cage and made it dark; and now it listened--and listened to the one song it was to learn to sing, and tried and tried and tried again until at last its heart was full of it. Then, when it had caught the melody, the cage was uncovered and it sang the song sweetly ever after in the light.

As it was with the bird, so it is with many of us, God's children. The Master has a song He wished to teach us--but we will not learn it. All about us earth's music is thrilling, and we get but a note here and there of the holy strain that is set for us. Then the Master makes it dark about us, calling us aside to suffer, and now we give heed to the sweet song He would teach us--until we can sing it through to the end. Then when we have once learned it in darkness, we go out into the light and sing it wherever we move.

When we think thus of troubles, as bearers of God's best blessings to us, they begin to wear a more helpful aspect to our thought. They come not to us lawlessly, breaking into our life with their loss, anguish, and terror--without God's permission. They do not come laden with hurt and marring, for us. They come as God's servants, and they bear in their hands divine blessings. They come not as avenging messengers to inflict punishment--but as angels of love to chasten us, perhaps to cure us of follies and sins, to lead us nearer to God, to bring out in us more beauty of Christ. No trouble of any kind ever comes to us--but it brings us something which will be a blessing to us, if only we will accept it.

But we must receive these divine messengers reverently, with hospitable welcome, as of old men received and entertained angels who came to their doors. Too often sorrow's gifts are not accepted, the messengers are not welcomed, and they can only turn and bear away again the blessing which they had brought in love--but which we would not take.

It is a serious thing to have troubles come to us, and not be graciously welcomed by us. We turn Christ Himself from our doors when we refuse to admit what He sends to us, though it be a sorrow or a loss. We thrust away heavenly treasures, shutting our heart against them. The only true way to deal with trouble--is to open our door to it as coming from God on an errand of love, its hands filled with priceless gifts for our true enriching.

God disciplines us for our good

"Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness." Hebrews 12:10

Affliction is not accidental. It does not break wildly and lawlessly into our life. No matter what its immediate cause or source--it is under God's direction. There is no 'chance' in the universe. This is our Father's world, and all things and all events are under His control. We need not fret ourselves over scientific laws or the inferences from them, for God is greater than His own creation and is never hindered in His purposes of love by the outworking of the laws He has established, which in any case are but His ways of working. Jesus spoke of the terrible cruelty and wrong which culminated in His death on a cross as "the cup which My Father has given Me."

It is comforting to think of trouble, in whatever form it may come to us--as a heavenly messenger, bringing us some blessing from God. In its earthly aspect it may seem hurtful, even destructive; but in its spiritual outworking, it yields blessing.

Take the matter of chastening. It is always painful--but we know that the object of our Father is our good, the correction in us of things that are wrong, and the bringing out in us of qualities of divine beauty, which otherwise would not be developed. The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews puts it very plainly in a remarkable passage. He reminds us that we are God's sons, and exhorts us not to regard lightly the chastening of the Lord, nor to faint when we are reproved by Him: "The Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son . . . God deals with you as with sons."

Referring to our acceptance of the chastening of earthly parents, he says: "We have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live! Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness." The wisest and most loving earthly father may not always chasten either wisely or lovingly--but whatever chastening our heavenly Father may minister to us, we know that He has in mind only our good, our profit. Then follow these words which interpret for us the purpose of all the trials that God sends into our life: "No discipline seems pleasant at the time, but painful. Later on, however, it produces a harvest of righteousness and peace for those who have been trained by it."

The teaching is clear and positive. Painful in the human experience as it must always be, we know that in its outcome, chastening always works good. We do not know how much we owe to suffering. Many of the richest blessings which have come down to us from the past, are the fruit of sorrow or pain. Others sowed

in tears--and we gather the harvest in joy. We should never forget that redemption, the world's greatest blessing--is the fruit of the world's greatest sorrow. In our own personal life, it is true that in all chastening our Father's design is our profit, and that suffering rightly endured, yields the fruit of righteousness.

"He prunes every branch that produces fruit--so that it will produce more fruit." John 15:2. Take the process of pruning--the figure which our Lord Himself uses. The gardener prunes the branches--but not without wise purpose. The Master's words, referring to this process in spiritual husbandry, are rich in their comfort for those on whom the knife is doing its painful work.

For one thing, we are told that the Father is the gardener. We know that our Father loves us and would never do anything unloving or hurtful. We know that He is infinitely wise, that He looks far on in our life, planning the largest and the best good for us, not for today only--but for all the future, and that what He does is certainly the best that could be devised. In every time of sharp pruning, when the knife cuts deep and the pain is sore, it is an unspeakable comfort to read, "My Father is the gardener."

Another inspiring thought in all such experience, is that it is the fruitful branch which the Father prunes. Sometimes godly people say when they are led through great trials, "Surely God does not love me, or He would not so sorely afflict me." But it takes away all the distressing thoughts about our trouble, to read the Master's words, "He prunes every branch that produces fruit." It is not punishment to which we are subjected--but pruning, and it is because we are fruitful that we are pruned.

Still another comfort here is revealed in the object of the pruning--"He prunes every branch that produces fruit--so that it will produce more fruit." The one object of all God's pruning, is fruitfulness. The figure of pruning helps us to understand this. When one who knows nothing of such processes sees a man cutting away branch after branch of a tree or vine, it would seem to him that the work is destructive. But those who understand the object of the pruning--know that what the gardener is doing, will add to the vine's value and to its ultimate fruitfulness.

Dr. Marvin R. Vincent tells of being in a great hothouse where luscious clusters of grapes were hanging on every side. The owner said, "When my new gardener came he said he would have nothing to do with these vines unless he could cut them clean down to the stalk; and he did, and we had no grapes for two years--but this is the result." There is rich suggestiveness in this interpretation of the pruning process as we apply it to Christian life. Pruning seems to be destroying the vine. The gardener appears to be cutting it all away. But he looks on into the future and knows that the final outcome will be the enrichment of its life and greater abundance of fruit.

There is another Scripture teaching which many Christians seem to forget in time of trial. It is this--that every trouble which comes into the life of a believer, enfolds in its dark form, some gift from God. There are blessings which it would seem can be given only in pain and earthly loss, and lessons which can be learned only in suffering. There are heavenly songs we can never learn to sing while we are enjoying earth's ease. We can be trained for gentle ministry only in the school of loss and trial. In our short-sightedness we dread the hard things of life and would thrust away the bitter cups. If only we knew it, these unwelcome experiences bring to us rich gifts and benefits. There are blessings we never can have, unless we are ready to pay the price of pain. There is no other way to reach them--but through suffering.

There is a quite common misconception regarding answers to prayer, a misconception which would be corrected if we understood better the meaning of trouble as it comes into our life. In our time of suffering or sorrow, we cry to God for relief, asking Him to take away that which is so hard for us to endure. We do not

remember that this very trial is a messenger of good from God to us. When we ask our Father to free us from the painful experience, we do not realize that we are really asking Him to recall an angel of mercy who has come with rich gifts in his hands for us.

What should our prayer be in such a case? There is no harm in our asking even earnestly and importunately that the suffering may pass--but we should always ask reverently, leaving it to God to decide what is best. Then the prayer should be, that if the trouble is not taken away we may be strengthened to endure it--and may not fail to receive its blessing. This is the promise, indeed, which is made. We are not told that God will either remove our burden or carry it for us. If there is a blessing in it for us, it would not be a kindness to lift it off. The assurance is, however, that He will sustain us as we bear our load.

This may disappoint some who turn to God with their trouble, thinking only of relief from it. But when we remember that God has a design in the trouble, a loving purpose, we know we cannot afford to lose it. To be freed from it would be to miss the good which is in it for us. We grow best under weights. So in love and wisdom God leaves the load on our shoulder that we may still carry it and get through it the gift which He sends us in it. He then gives us strength to bear it--strengthens us under its weight.

We have the same teaching in the word "comfort" itself, whose meaning is oftentimes greatly misunderstood. Many people looking for comfort in sorrow, expect that the bitter cup will be taken away or at least that its bitterness will be alleviated. But the word comfort is from a root which means to strengthen. Hence it contains no promise that in any way the burden will be made lighter, or the grief less poignant. God comforts us--by giving us strength to endure our trial. For example, when we turn to Him in bereavement, He does not restore our beloved, nor make the loss appear less--which could be done only by making us love less, since love and grief grow on the same stalk--but gives us new revealing of His own love to fill the emptiness, and to put into our heart new visions of the life into which our friend has gone, to help us to rejoice in his exaltation to a state of eternal blessedness.

We have an illustration of the divine comforting in the way our Lord Himself was helped in His great sorrow. As He entered the bitter experience, He prayed that the cup of suffering might pass, yet praying submissively. The prayer was not answered in the form in which it was made. Instead of relieving Him of His suffering, strength was ministered to Him, and as we listen we find the intensity of His supplication subsiding into sweet acquiescence. Thus He was comforted, and passed through all the bitter trial of the cross without one other cry for relief, His heart filled with perfect peace. It is thus that usually God's comfort comes to His people--not in the lifting off of their weight of sorrow or pain--but in strengthening them for victorious endurance.

It is well that all who are called to suffer should get a clear and definite conception of the meaning of trouble, that they may know how to meet it. Since it comes always bearing some gift of love, some blessing from God--we should receive it as God's messenger, with reverence, with a welcome in our heart, though it brings pain or grief, and should be ready to take from it whatever benefit it brings. The reason many people find so little comfort in their troubles, is because they do not accept them as sent from God, nor expect to receive blessing from them. They think only of getting through them in the best way they can, and then of getting over them at length, as nature's slow processes brings healing.

But there is a better way. God's comfort can keep the heart sweet and unhurt in the midst of the sorest trials, and bring the life through the darkest hours, shining in transfigured beauty. A genial author writes: "Strangely do some people talk of getting over a great sorrow--overleaping it, passing it by, thrusting it into

oblivion. Not so. No one ever does that, at least no nature which can be touched by the feeling of grief at all. The only way is to pass through the ocean of affliction solemnly, slowly, with humility and faith, as the Israelites passed through the sea. Then its very waves of misery will divide and become to us a wall on the right side and on the left, until the gulf narrows and narrows before our eyes, and we land safe on the opposite shore."

Love in Taking Away

One of the finest examples of comfort in sorrow given in the Scriptures, is in Job's case. In quick succession had come the messengers of misfortune and disaster, telling him of troubles and losses, last of all reporting the death of all his children. When this climax of sad tidings was reached, Job tore his garments, fell down upon the ground and worshiped. Instead of losing sight of God under the crushing blows which had fallen upon him, as so many people do at first, in time of great sorrow--he turned at once to God, falling at His feet in reverence and homage. His faith failed not. Everything had been taken--all his earthly blessings had been stripped off. Yet in his grief and bereavement he said, "Naked I came from my mother's womb, and naked I will depart. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised."

It is easy enough to say that God gave, and then to bless His name. God is always giving, and we readily see goodness and love in His gifts. It would have been easy for Job, as his prosperity increased, adding to his possessions, covering his fields with flocks, to say, "It is God who gives all this," and then to add, "Blessed be His holy name." It would have been easy as, one by one, his children came, bringing gladness and brightness into his home, to praise God for them, and to say, "The Lord gave--blessed be name of the Lord."

But it was not so easy now, when all this prosperity had vanished, and when his children lay dead, to put the new chord into the song and say, "The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised." Yet that is just what Job did. It was the Lord who had given him all that had made his life happy--and it was the same Lord who now had taken everything away--the same Lord and the same love.

There seems to have been in the stricken father, a trust which was not shaken by all the calamities which had fallen upon him in such swift succession. He was kept in perfect peace. He had received good at God's hands in countless ways, and when trouble and disaster came--he saw no reason to change his thoughts of God as his friend. He did not complain, nor blame God--but accepted the losses of property and now the sudden smiting down of his children, with unquestioning confidence. It was the same Lord, and the same love, that had first given--and now had taken away.

There is immeasurable comfort in this truth, for all who are called to give back again, the gifts which God has bestowed upon them. God is a giving God--but He is also a God who sometimes takes away, and, in taking away, He has not changed in His character, nor in His feeling toward us, His children. He loves us just as truly and as tenderly when He takes away the things or the people we love, as He did when He gave them into our hands. They were sent to us in love, and for our good they came with their blessing for our life. Then the taking away is also in love, and has good and a blessing in it.

This is true, for example, of the friends we have. We are sure of the goodness which gives them to us. They bring divine blessings from God. We say of them, "The Lord gave--blessed be the name of the Lord." We have no doubt whatever concerning the goodness of God in giving our friends to us. But by and by they are taken from us. One of every two friends must some day see the other called away, and must

stand, bearing an unshared grief, by the other's grave. Can we finish Job's song of faith then and say, "And the Lord has taken away; may the name of the Lord be praised." Can we believe that there is as true and holy love in the taking away--as there was in the giving?

It is not necessary that we be able to discover or to see clearly the goodness in the experience of loss or sorrow. It is here that faith comes in. We believe in God as our Father, and we may trust His goodness, even when it seems to be tearing down what awhile ago it built up, when it takes from us what on a day bright with love and blessing, it gave. The simplest faith is that which asks no questions--and does not care to know the reasons for God's ways. Ofttimes we cannot find reasons--God does not show us why He does this or that.

Yet while we may not be able fully to understand, we may conceive of elements of goodness even in the taking away. For one thing, we know it is better for our friends in that home of love into which God calls them, than it ever could have been here. The true thought of Christian dying, is that it is a phase or process of life. The sorest misfortune that could come to any Christian--would be never to die! There are developments of life which can be reached only by passing through the experience of dying. Happy as our Christian friends may have been here, and rich and beautiful as was their life--we know that they have entered sweeter deeper joy, and that their life is fuller and richer where they now are with Christ. True love in its very essence is unselfish, and it ought to mean much to us in reconciling us to our loss--to know that our friends have been taken into larger blessedness. We ought to rejoice in their new happiness and in the greater honor which is shown to them, in their entering into heaven.

Then they are kept safe and secure for us, in the home of God. We really have not lost them, although they have been taken out of our sight. They lose nothing of their beauty or their excellence of character in passing through death. The things in them which made them dear to us in this world, they will have when we shall see them again. Indeed, they will have grown into rarer beauty and into greater dearness when we find them again.

We know, further, since God is love, that when He takes our friends into richer life, He will send compensation to us, too, in some way. Even the loss and the sorrow will yield their gain and their ministry of good, unless by our attitude of mind and heart, we miss the blessing. It is possible for us to fail to get the good which God sends, shutting our heart against it. But there is no doubt that in every loss, a gain is offered to us. When God takes away one blessing--He gives another. Perhaps the withdrawal of the human object of love--makes more room in the heart for God Himself. Or the taking away of the strength which has meant so much to us, trains us to more dependence on God, thus bringing out in us qualities of which hitherto we had been unaware. Or the sorrow itself deepens our spiritual life and enriches our experience, giving us a new power of sympathy through which we may become better comforters and helpers of others.

Then the taking of our earthly loved ones from our side through the gates of blessedness, makes heaven more real to us, because they now walk there. Thus, in many ways, does new blessing come in place of what has been taken away.

Once more, we know too that God never really takes away from us, out of our life, any gift or blessing that He bestows. The flower we love, may fade--but the flower is in our heart and is ours forever. A picture is lent to you for a little while and then is removed--but while it hung on your wall and you gazed at it, it found its way into your heart, and now none can ever take it from you. Your friend walked with you a few or many

days, and then vanished as to his human presence--but the threads of his life are so inextricably entangled with yours, that he and you can never be really separated. What God takes away, is but the form which our eyes can see. This He keeps for us for a time until it has grown into fuller beauty and until we have grown, too, into larger capacity for love and for appreciation, and then He will give it back to us.

So it is only for a little while that God takes from us our loved ones. We shall have them back again, made into immortal beauty. The hopes we mourn as having perished, are yet in Christ's hands. He will keep them safe for us and at length will give them back to us in radiant and imperishable loveliness. In this life we see only the beginnings of our good things--we see them only in bud and blossom; the full fruit, the ripeness we shall not get until we enter the eternal and better life. One of the surprises of heaven, will be our finding there the precious hopes, joys, and dreams which seemed to have perished on earth--not left behind--but all carried forward and ready to be given into our hands the moment we get home.

Trouble as a Trust

One wrote to a friend who for some time had been a sufferer, "God must love you very dearly, to trust so much pain and sorrow to your care." The thought of suffering as something entrusted to us by God, is a very suggestive one. We may not be accustomed to think of it in this way. Yet there is no doubt that every trouble which comes to us is really a trust, something committed to us to be accepted by us, used as a gift of God, and then accounted for.

It is thus, indeed, that all life comes to us. Nothing is our own to use for ourselves only. We receive our gifts and talents, not to be spent on ourselves or as we please--but to be increased by proper use, held for the honor of the Master, employed for the benefit of the world, and then returned to our Lord when He calls for the accounting.

Money is to be regarded likewise as a trust--not our own--but our Master's, to be used for Him in doing good to others. The same is true of all blessings that we receive. We dare not use any of them, even the smallest, for our own pleasure or comfort alone; if we do--they cease to be blessings to us. Even divine mercy, the greatest of all God's gifts, which is granted so freely to every penitent, can become ours only on condition that we shall dispense it to others. When we ask to be forgiven, we must pledge our Father that we will be forgiving. The forgiveness we receive is not for ourselves only--but is a trust to be used, to be given out again to others.

This is the law of all life. Everything which is put into our hands, from the tiniest flower which blooms in our window--to the infinite gift of eternal life--all are entrusted to us that we may share their beauty and benefit with those about us. They are bestowed upon us, not as a treasure to be selfishly used--but as blessings to be dispensed to others. To try to keep any blessing altogether for ourselves, is to lose it; we can make its blessing really our own--only by holding it and using it for the good of others.

Suffering in every form comes under the same principle. It is a trust from God. It may have, and doubtless has, its peculiar meaning for us. But we must listen for its message. It brings in its dark folds some gift of God expressly for us--but not for us to hold selfishly or to absorb in our own life. Whatever is spoken to us in the darkness of sorrow, we are to speak out in the light. What we hear in the ear as we listen in the hour of grief or pain--we are to proclaim upon the housetops. What is revealed to us in the darkened room, when the curtains are drawn--we must go and tell others in their hours of need and trial. In all trouble--we are stewards of the mysteries of God.

Pain is wonderful revealer. It teaches us many things we never could have known, if we had not been called to endure it. It opens windows through which we see, as we never saw before--the beautiful things of God's love. But the revealing is not to be hidden in our own heart. If we try thus to keep them, we shall miss their blessing; only by declaring them to others, can we make them truly our own and get their treasure for ourselves. Only what we give away, can we really hold forever.

No doubt God's children are oftentimes called to suffer in order that they may honor God in some way. This is illustrated in the case of Job. Satan sneeringly asks, "Does Job fear God for nothing? Have not you made a hedge about him, and about his house, and about all that he has on every side? You have blessed the work of his hands, and his substance is increased in the land. But put forth your hand now, and touch all that he has--and he will renounce you to your face."

It was necessary that this challenge of Satan's should be met and disproved, and hence the great trials through which Job was called to pass. His sufferings were not for the cleansing of his own nature, or the correction of faults in his character--but in order that he might show by his unshaken faith that his serving of God was not for earthly reward--but from true loyalty of soul.

Oftentimes the primary reason why godly men are called to suffer, is for the sake of witness they may give to the sincerity of their love for Christ and the reality of divine grace in them. The world sneers at religious profession. It refuses to believe that it is genuine. It defiantly asserts that what is called Christian principle is only selfishness, and that it would not stand severe testing. Then, godly men are called to endure loss, suffering or sorrow, not because there is any particular evil in themselves which needs to be eradicated--but because the Master needs their witness to answer the sneers of the world.

This suggests how important it is that all who claim to be Christ's followers shall guard most carefully the manner of their witnessing when they are passing through any trial. They do not know how much depends upon the victoriousness of their faith and joy in the hour of pain. Suppose that Job had failed, that he had not retained his integrity in the time of his sore trial; how Satan would have triumphed! But may it not be that in some sickness or loss or sorrow of ours, a like importance attaches to our faithfulness and submission, to our victoriousness, and that our failure would bring grief to the heart of Christ and cause the adversary to reproach God's name?

Then, whatever the unknown and inscrutable reason may be why we are called or permitted to suffer, there is always a duty of witnessing from which we cannot be exempted. Yet do many people think of this? We all understand that we are to confess Christ in our life before men, in our conduct, our words, our disposition, in our business, in our conflict with evil. But are we accustomed to think of a duty of confessing Christ in time of sorrow or trial? Too often those who in all other experiences are loyal to Christ, seem to break down in times of trouble, their faith failing. There is nothing in the way they endure pain or loss to show that they have any support or help which those who are not Christians do not have. No light from heaven seems to break into their earthly darkness. No unseen hand appears to come to them in their struggle, to hold them up. The comforts of God do not have any meaning for them. The voices of hope have no cheer for them.

But it is not thus that the friends of Christ should testify for their Master in their times of trial. The divine promises cover every experience. We are assured of the presence of Christ with us in every dark path, in every lonely way. We are clearly taught that the love of God never fails His children, that it is as true and tender in times of affliction--as it is in times of gladness, that it is the same when blessings are taken

away--as when they are given. We know that all things work together for good to those who love God. It is made plain in the Scriptures, that no tribulation can harm us if we abide in Christ, that we shall be preserved blameless through the most terrible trials, if our faith in Christ does not fail. Many of life's events are full of mystery--we cannot understand them, nor can we see how they are consistent with God's love and wisdom. But we have the most positive assurance that some time we shall understand, and that in everything we shall see divine goodness.

With such comforts for every experience, we should never be cast down, however great are our trials. We should let the divine consolations into our heart, and believe them implicitly. We cannot but feel the pangs of grief--God will never blame us for our tears--but in our deepest afflictions our faith should not fail, and the songs of joy should not be choked. People are looking upon us and, and consciously or unconsciously, watching to see what Christ can do for us in our sore stress. To witness truly for Him we must suffer victoriously, be more than conquerors through Him that loved us.

We say that we believe on Christ and in the immortal life; what does our believing do for us? Do we endure our trials in such a radiant way, that those who see us are led to believe in Christ and to seek His love and help for themselves? If trouble is something committed to us as a trust, we must accept it reverently and submissively, we must endure it patiently and sweetly, we must take the divine comfort and let it sustain and strengthen us, and we must pass through it songfully, unhurt, with life enriched. Thus shall our trouble honor Christ and be a blessing to others.

There is a strange story of Abraham which illustrates one way in which trial must be endured if in it we would honor God. The old patriarch was bidden to take his son, his only son, the son of his love and of promise, and offer him on an altar as a burnt offering. The record says that God gave this command to Abraham to prove him, that is, to see if his faith would endure the test. And God was not disappointed in His friend. After it was all over, the angel of the Lord said to Abraham, "Because you have done this thing, and have not withheld your son... in blessing I will bless you."

Abraham accepted his trial as a trust from God, was faithful, and did not fail God. Then who can tell what a blessing his faithfulness has been to the world through the centuries? Other people have been taught by Abraham's example, to give their children to God unquestioningly, willing that He should use them as He will, in whatever form of service will best honor Him and most greatly bless the world.

We are always in danger of selfishness in times of grief or sorrow. We are apt to forget our duty to those about us. Some godly people drop out of their hands the tasks of love which filled them in the days of joy, and feel that they cannot take them up again. Some allow their life to be hurt, losing its sweetness, its joy, its zest. There are those who are never the same after a sore bereavement or a keen disappointment. They never get back again their winningness of spirit, their interest in others, and their enthusiasm in duty. They come out of their trial, self-centered, less joyous as Christians, less ready to do good.

But not thus should trouble affect us, if we accept it as a trust from God. Not only should we endure it victoriously, sustained by Christ--but we should emerge from it ready for better service and for greater usefulness than ever before. We are told that Jesus was made perfect through suffering. He learned in His own experience of sorrow, how to sympathize with His people in their sorrows, and how to comfort them. One of the reasons for trouble, is that in it we may be prepared for helping others in their troubles. Sorrow is a school, and we meet it as we should, only when we learn the lessons and go out fitted for being a richer blessing in the world.

The problem of all true living is not to miss pain or trial--but in all experiences, however hard or bitter, to keep our heart ever sweet, and our ministry of good, and helpfulness ever uninterrupted. The keenest suffering should make us only the gentler in spirit, and send us out to be yet more loving and thoughtful--a benediction to everyone we meet.

In one of Paul's epistles, we are taught that God's comfort also is given to us in trust. We do not receive it for ourselves only--but that we may give it out again to others. To the Corinthians, the apostle wrote in an outburst of joyous praise: "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, the Father of mercies, the God of all comfort; who comforts us in all our affliction, that we may be able to comfort them that are in any affliction, through the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God." Thus the intention of our heavenly Father, when He finds us in sorrow and ministers comfort to us, is not merely to get us through the trial, to strengthen us to endure for ourselves the pain or loss--but also to prepare us for being comforters of others.

When we have been helped to say, "Your will be done," in some great trial, and have been enabled to go on rejoicing in tribulation, we have a secret which we must tell others. We must go to those whom we find in grief or trial, and sitting down beside them, let them know what God did for us when we were in like experience, giving them the words of God which have helped us.

When we pray for comfort in sorrow, it should be with this motive--that we may get a new blessing to take to others. To ask to be comforted merely that we may be able to endure our own pain or grief is to pray selfishly. But when we pray that God would teach us the lessons of comfort that we may teach them again to others that He would help us to overcome that we may help others to be victorious, our prayer pleases Him and will be answered.

Thus our lesson gathers itself all into this: We are "stewards of the mysteries of God. ... It is required in stewards that a man be found faithful." When God sends us pain or sorrow--we are to be faithful. We are to accept our trust with love and to think of it as something of God's, which is committed to us. However heavy the burden, it is a gift from God and has a blessing in it for us. We must never forget that in our hardest trial--we have something of God's in our hands, and must treat it reverently and get from it whatever good God has sent to us in it. Then we must think of it also as something which is not for ourselves alone--but which we are to share with others.

It is a law among physicians, that whatever new discovery in medical science one makes--he must communicate it to the whole profession, that all may use the new knowledge for the alleviation of suffering or the saving of life. It should be a law of Christian life, that every good or blessing one may receive from God, any new revealing of truth, any new lesson, should be used for the helping of others in the name of Christ.

Some Blessings of Sorrow

It may seem strange to some, to speak of the blessing of sorrow. We would say at first thought, "Surely nothing good can come from anything so terrible!" Yet the Word of God assures us, and the experience of the ages confirms the assurance--that many of the richest and best blessings of life, come out of affliction.

One of the most striking visions of heaven granted to the revelator on Patmos, was that of a glorified company who seemed to surpass all the other blessed ones in the splendor of their garments and the radiant honor of their state. They were arrayed in white robes, carried palms in their hands, and stood

nearest to the Throne and the Lamb. We would have said that these were the children of joy, that they had come up from earth's scenes of gladness, that their condition in life had been one of exceptional ease and freedom from trouble, that they had never known a care or a grief. But when the question was asked, "Those who are arrayed in the white robes, who are they, and whence came they?" the answer was, "These are those who have come out of the great tribulation." They were the children of earth's sorrow. They had been brought up in the school of trial.

This vision would seem to teach us that those redeemed ones who on earth have had the most affliction; in heaven attain the highest honor. Their robes are whitest, indicating surpassing purity. They bear palm branches, emblems of victory, showing that they have overcome in life's struggles. They are nearest Christ, too, among the glorified, verifying the promise that those who suffer with Him shall also reign with Him.

The Scriptures contain many words which receive confirmation in this glimpse within the gates. We are told that we must through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God. The way into a life of spiritual blessedness, is through pain. In the messages to the seven churches we have glimpses of great privileges, blessings, and honors which are within the reach of the followers of Christ. One shows us the tree of life in the paradise of God. In another we see a crown of life waiting to be put upon the head of him who is faithful. In another the lifting of the veil reveals to us hidden manna, and a white stone, with a new name written on it. In another it is power that is promised, authority to rule. Other of these visions show us white garments and the name written in the Book of Life, an honored place in the Temple of God, and, last of all, a seat beside Christ on His Throne. But all of these heavenly prizes are shown to us--beyond a field of struggle, and he who would win them must first fight the battle and be a victor. "To him that overcomes," runs the promise in every case. Not to overcome would be to miss the prize. Not to have the trial and the struggle would be to stay in lower, lesser blessedness.

We do not know what we owe to our sorrows. Without them we would miss the sweetest joys, the divinest revealing, and the deepest experiences of life. Afflictions are opportunities. They come to us bearing gifts. If we can accept them--they leave in our hand heavenly treasures. Not to be able to receive the bearer of the blessings--is to miss the blessings and to be poorer all the rest of our days.

Many of the finest things in character are the fruits of pain. Many a Christian enters trial, cold, worldly, unspiritual, with the best possibilities of his nature still locked up in his life, and emerges from the experience a little later, with spirit softened, mellowed, and spiritually enriched, the lovely things brought out. A photographer carries his picture into a darkened room that he may bring out its features. He says the light of the sun would mar the impression on the sensitized plate. There are features of spiritual beauty which cannot be produced in a life in the glare of human joy and prosperity. God brings out in many a soul its loveliest qualities--when the curtain is drawn and the light of human joy is shut out.

Sanctified afflictions soften the harshness and sharpness of one's character. They consume the dross of selfishness and worldliness. They humble pride. They temper worldly ambitions. They quell fierce passions. They show to us the evil of our own heart, revealing our weaknesses, faults, and blemishes--and making us aware of our spiritual danger. They discipline the wayward spirit. Sorrow draws its sharp ploughshare through the heart, cutting deep and long furrows, and the heavenly Sower follows with the seeds of godly virtues. Then by and by fruits of righteousness spring up. Sorrow has a tenderizing influence. It makes us gentle and kindly toward each other. It has been said that "The last, the best fruit which comes to late perfection, even in the kindest soul, is tenderness toward the hard, forbearance

toward the unforbearing, warmth of heart toward the cold, and philanthropy toward the misanthropic." In no other school do our hearts learn the lessons of patience, tolerance, and forbearance so quickly--as in the school of suffering. Harsh feelings are softened, and kindly charity takes the place of resentment. Many a household is saved from disintegration, by a grief which bows all hearts before God and wakes up the slumbering affections.

Ofttimes, indeed, sorrow is one of the secrets of happy home life. It is a new marriage when young parents stand, side by side, by the coffin of their first born. Grief is like a sacrament to those who share it, with Christ beside them. Many homes have been cured of harshness of spirit and sharpness of speech, and saved from pride, coldness, and heedlessness, by a sorrow which broke in upon the careless household life. Most of us need the chastening of pain to bring out the best of our love.

Another of the blessings which come from trial, is the finding of one's soul. It was in his great distress that the prodigal "came to himself." Many people walk in a dream, as it were, until in some trouble they are aroused to see the reality of spiritual things. They are happy in their earthly gladness, satisfied with their human ambitions, unaware meanwhile of the flitting nature of this world and of the eternal stability of the spiritual world. They are living in a dream, as it were. Then sorrow breaks in upon them. One who is very dear is lifted out of the circle and glorified. At once revealing comes. They see how mistakenly they have been living, and how perilously.

One tells of a company of tourists on the Alps who were overtaken by night, and after groping in the deep darkness for a time were compelled to settle down and wait until morning. A thunderstorm arose during the darkness and a vivid lightening flash showed them that they had stopped on the very edge of a precipice. Another step forward and they would have fallen to their death. The lightning flashes of sorrow oftentimes reveal to Christian people the peril in which they are living, and lead them to turn to safer paths. Many a redeemed one in glory will look back to the time of a great grief as the time of seeing God, which led to penitence and faith.

Another result of sorrow, when it is accepted, is in preparing us to be better messengers of God to others. Jesus Himself was made ready to be a sympathizing and helpful Friend by His human sufferings. He understands our grief because in His own life He was acquainted with grief. He is able to be a comforter to us because He Himself was comforted. Paul tells us that the reason God comforts us in our trouble--is that we may become comforters of others in their afflictions. We have a new power with which to bless others, when we have come from an experience of grief. An emptied heart is a wonderful sympathizer in other's bereavements. The power to be a true helper of those who are in trouble, a binder up of broken hearts--is the most divine of all enduements. Surely, then, it is worth while to pay any price of pain or suffering, in order to receive the divine anointing for such sacred ministry.

True comfort has a strange power to heal, to bind up hearts' wounds, to turn sorrow into joy. The Christian home which has been broken by bereavement, under the wise tuition of Christ, and the gentle influences of the divine love, is made to have a deeper happiness than ever it had before. The truth of immortality brings back the missing ones, as it were, and they sit again in their old places. The vacant chairs seem filled once more, and the love of the absent ones appears as real and as tender as it did when they were here. Christian faith nullifies the sad work of death, and binds again the broken ties.

Comfort in God's Will

A great secret of comfort lies in our heartfelt prayer, "Not my will--but Yours, be done." When we can say this and abandon ourselves and all in our life which causes perplexity or care, into the hands of divine wisdom and love, the struggle is over and the peace of God is already keeping our heart in quietness and confidence. This was the secret of the comfort which came to our Lord Himself in Gethsemane. He was face to face with the most terrible experience any soul ever met in this world. The record says He was exceeding sorrowful, even unto death. "Being in agony He prayed." The Holy Sufferer pleaded that the cup of bitter anguish now being held to His lips might pass from Him. Never was more intense prayer offered to the Father. But amid the anguished pleading, was heard the self restraining word of submission, "Not My will--but Yours, be done." There was something more important than the granting of the suppliant's request--it was that the purpose of God for Him that hour should go on unhindered.

It is interesting to trace the course of the Gethsemane prayer, and to see how the note of submission gains the ascendancy over the pleading for relief, until at length the struggle ends in acquiescence and perfect peace. The first supplication was, "O My Father, if it is possible, let this cup pass away from Me: nevertheless, not as I will--but as You will." A little later Jesus returned again to His pleading and we hear this petition from His lips: "O My Father, if this cannot pass away, unless I drink it--may Your will be done." The fierceness of the struggle in the Sufferer's soul, was being mastered by the spirit of submission to the divine will. Soon the agony was over. The victory had been won. We have at least an echo of the comfort which filled the heart of Jesus in His word to Peter, a little later, when that warm hearted but rash disciple had drawn his sword to resist the betrayal and the arrest of his Master: "The cup which the Father has given Me, shall I not drink it?" There was no word no of supplication for the passing away of the cup. Jesus had made way for His Father's will--and was comforted.

There is no other way by which true comfort can come to any heart in time of sorrow but by acquiescence. So long as we cannot say, "Not my will--but Your be done," the struggle is still going on, and we are still un comforted. Comfort is peace, and there is no peace until there is acquiescence in the will of God. Whatever the sorrow, therefore, if we would find divine comfort--we must seek to bring our will into complete harmony with our Father's will.

There are reasons why we should do this in every grief or sorrow. One is that God has a plan and a purpose for our life. There is something He would make of us, and something He would have us do. What this divine thought for our particular life is, the divine will discloses. Every time we resist this will and refuse to accept it at any point, we mar the beauty and completeness of our own life. God's purpose for us runs through whatever sorrows or sufferings there may be in our lot. In all our experiences, God's will for us is the bringing out of His image in us. Only by acquiescence in the divine will, can we have our life fashioned after this heavenly pattern.

Another reason why we should let God's will work without resistance, without complaining, in our life--is that God is our King, and has a sovereign right to reign over us. Lack of submission is rebellion. Not only should our submission be complete, without condition and without reserve, in the smallest as well as in the greatest matters; it should also be cheerful and songful. Chafing and murmuring grieve God. The moment we recognize the will of God in either a duty or a sorrow--we should accept it with delight. In no other way can we please God and have His blessing of peace.

Another reason for submitting to the divine will in time of trouble, is that God always seeks our good. He is our Father, and would never send into our life anything which would harm us, nor take from us anything which would leave us poorer or less blessed. We are sure, too, that His wisdom is perfect, and that He

knows what really is good for us. We ourselves do not know. We cannot follow the influence of this or that in our life, nor know where such and such a course would lead us. We have no wisdom to choose our own lot, and we would far better let God decide for us what is best.

The thing we are so eager to get, it may be, would do irreparable hurt to our truest life. The joy we so desire to keep, and which we think indispensable to our happiness, perhaps has done its full work for us and in us, and would better now be taken away. God knows what is best for us, and His will is not only perfect wisdom--but also perfect love. To resist it is to do harm to our own life; to reject it and insist upon having our own way--would be to choose evil, not good, for ourselves.

It does not seem to us that sorrow can be the bearer of blessing to us. Yet there is no doubt that every grief or pain which comes, brings a blessing wrapped in its dark folds. There is a marginal reading of a verse of one of the Psalms, which tells us that our burden is a gift--God's gift to us. Every burden which is laid upon us, however it may have become ours, carries, folded up in it, a gift of God. God's gifts are always good. To refuse to accept the burden--would be to reject a gift of love from our Father and to thrust away a blessing sent for the enrichment of our life.

Diamonds are sometimes found in the center of rough stones. It is said that the first discovery of diamonds in South Africa was in some pebbles which were tossed about on the ground by passing feet. A scientific man came upon a group of boys using some of these stones for marbles, and his keen eye detected the gem that was wrapped up in the rough encrusting. So it is that the stern and severe experiences which we call sorrows, conceal within their forbidding exterior, diamonds of God's love and grace. We do not know how we are robbing ourselves, when we refuse to accept the trials which come to us in God's providence. Acquiescence in the divine will is taking into our life the good which our Father is offering to us.

There are those who are called to long years of suffering or of sorrow. It is a comfort for such to think of their pain or grief as a friend sent to accompany them on the way. Mrs. Gilchrist wrote of Mary Lamb, "She had a lifelong sorrow, and learned to find its companionship not bitter." When the sufferer learns to think thus of the pain or the sorrow which stays and does not depart--the bitterness is turned to sweetness and the life finds blessing, inspiration, uplift, purifying in the sacred companionship.

Or it may be that the will of God would take from us something very dear which we would like to keep. We should always remember that God's love is the same, whether He is putting new gifts into our hands, or taking away those we have learned to cherish. The good things which mean so much to us are His, not ours. They have only been lent to us for a time, and for a specific purpose. When their mission is finished God, recalls them, and we may be sure there is blessing in the recalling.

A beautiful story is told of a devout Jewish home in which were twin boys who were greatly beloved. In the absence of the father both boys suddenly died. When the father returned, no knowing of the sorrow in his home, the mother met him at the door and said,

"I have had a strange visitor since you went away."

"Who was it?" asked the father, not suspecting her meaning.

"Five years ago," his wife answered, "a friend lent me two precious jewels. Yesterday he came and asked me to return them to him. What shall I do?"

"Are they his?" asked the father, not dreaming of her meaning.

"Yes, they belong to him and were only lent to me."

"If they are his, he must have them again, if he

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