

## The Blessing of Weakness

By J. R. Miller, 1894

WE are not accustomed to think of *weakness*—as a condition of blessing. We would say, "Blessed is *strength*. Blessed are the strong." But Bible beatitudes are usually the reverse of what nature would say. "Blessed are the meek." "Blessed are you when men shall reproach you." The *law of the cross* lies deep in spiritual life. It is by the crucifying of the flesh—that the spirit grows into beauty. So, "Blessed are the weak—for they shall have God's strength," is a true scriptural beatitude, although its very words are not found in the Bible.

Weakness is blessed—because it insures to us more of the sympathy and help of Christ. Weakness ever appeals to a gentle heart. We see illustrations of this truth in our common human life. What can be more weak and helpless than blindness? Here is a blind child in a home. Her condition seems pitiable. She gropes about in darkness. She is unaware of dangers that may beset her, and cannot shield herself from any harm which threatens her. The windows through which others see the world—to her are closed, and she is shut up in darkness. She is almost utterly helpless. Yet her very weakness is her strength. It draws to itself the best love and help of the whole household. The mother's heart has no such tender thought for any of the other children—as for the blind girl. The father carries her continually in his affection and is ever doing gentle things for her. Brothers and sisters strive in all ways to supply her lack. The result is that no other member of the family is sheltered so safely as she is, and that none is half so strong. Her very *helplessness* is the secret of her *strength*. Her closed eyes and outstretched hands and tottering feet appeal resistlessly to all who love her, inspiring them to greater thoughtfulness and helpfulness towards her—than anyone else in the household.

This illustrates also—God's special thought and care for the weak. All the best things in human life, are really hints and gleams of the divine life. The heart of Christ goes out in peculiar interest toward the weak. Paul could well afford to keep his "thorn" with its burdening weakness, because it made him far more the object of divine sympathy and help. So weakness always makes strong appeal to the divine compassion. We think of suffering or feebleness as a misfortune. It is not altogether so, however, if it makes us dearer and brings us nearer to the heart of Christ. Blessed is weakness, for it draws to itself the strength of God!

Weakness is blessed, also—because it saves from spiritual peril. Paul tells us that his "thorn" was given to him to keep him humble. Without it he would have been exalted over much and would have lost his spirituality. We do not know how much of his deep insight into the things of God, and his power in service for his Master, Paul owed to this torturing "thorn." It seemed to hinder him and it caused him incessant suffering—but it detained him in the low valley of humility, made him ever conscious of his own weakness and insufficiency, and thus kept him near to Christ whose home is with the humble.

Spiritual history is full of similar cases. Many of God's noblest servants have carried "thorns" in their flesh all their days—but meanwhile they have had spiritual blessing and enrichment which they never would have had, if their cries for relief had been granted. We do not know what we owe to the sufferings of those who have gone before us. *Prosperity* has not enriched the world—as *adversity* has done. The best thoughts, the richest life lessons, the sweetest songs that have come down to us from the past—have not come from lives that have known no privation, no adversity—but are the fruits of pain, of weakness, of trial. Men have cried out for emancipation from the bondage of hardship, of sickness, of infirmity, of self-denying necessity; not knowing that the thing which seemed to be hindering them in their career—was the very making of whatever was noble, beautiful, and blessed in their life.

There are few people who have not some "thorn" rankling in their flesh. In one it is an infirmity of speech, in another an infirmity of sight, in another an infirmity of hearing. Or it may be lameness, or a disease, slow but incurable, or constitutional timidity, or excessive nervousness, or a disfiguring bodily deformity, or an infirmity of temper. Or it may be in one's home, which is cold, unloving, and uncongenial; or it may be in the life of a loved one—sorrow or moral failure; or it may be a bitter personal disappointment through untrue friendship or love unrequited. Who has not his "thorn"?

We should never forget that in one sense our "thorn" is a "messenger of Satan," who desires by it to hurt our life, to mar our peace, to spoil the divine beauty in us, to break our communion with Christ. On the other hand, however, Christ himself has a loving design in our "thorn." He wants it to be a blessing to us. He would have it keep us humble—and save us from becoming vain; or he means it to soften our hearts and make us more gentle. He would have the uncongenial things in our environment discipline us into heavenly-mindedness, give us greater self-control, help us to keep our hearts loving and sweet amid harshness and unlovingness. He would have our pain teach us endurance and patience, and our sorrow and loss teach us faith.

That is, our "thorn" may either be a blessing to us, or it may do us irreparable harm—which, it depends upon ourselves. If we allow it to fret us; if we chafe, resist, and complain; if we lose faith and lose heart—it will spoil our life. But if we accept it in the faith that in its ugly burden, it has a blessing for us; if we endure it patiently, submissively, uncomplainingly; if we seek grace to keep our heart gentle and true amid all the trial, temptation, and suffering it causes—it will work good, and out of its bitterness will come sweet fruit. The responsibility is ours, and we should so relate ourselves to our "thorn" and to Christ, that growth and good, not harm and marring, shall come to us from it. Such weakness is blessed only if we get the victory over it, through faith in Christ.

"But He said to me, 'My grace is sufficient for you, for my power is made perfect in weakness.' Therefore I will boast all the more gladly about my weaknesses, so that Christ's power may rest on me. That is why, for Christ's sake, I delight in weaknesses, in insults, in hardships, in persecutions, in difficulties. For when I am weak—then I am strong." 2 Corinthians 12:9-10. There is a blessing in weakness, also, because it nourishes dependence on God. When we are strong, or deem ourselves strong, we are really weak,

since then we trust in ourselves and do not seek divine help. But when we are consciously weak, knowing ourselves unequal to our duties and struggles, we are strong, because then we turn to God and get his strength.

Too many people think their weakness a barrier to their usefulness, or make it an excuse for doing little with their life. Instead of this, however, if we give it to Christ, he will transform it into strength. He says his strength is made perfect in weakness; that is, what is wanting in human strength he fills and makes up with divine strength. Paul had learned this when he said he gloried now in his weaknesses, because on account of them the strength of Christ rested upon him, so that, when he was weak, then he was strong—strong with divine strength.

The people who have done the greatest good in the world, who have left the deepest, most abiding impression upon the lives of others, have not been those whom the world called the strong. Much of the world's best work has been done by the weak, by those with broken lives. Successful men have piled up vast fortunes, established large enterprises, or won applause in some material way; but the real influence that has made the world better, enriched lives, taught men the lessons of love, and sweetened the springs of society, has come largely, not from the strong—but from the weak.

I walked over a meadow and the air was full of delicious fragrance. Yet I could see no flowers. There was tall grass waving on all sides—but the fragrance did not come from the grass. Then I parted the grass and looked beneath it, and there, close to the earth, hidden out of sight by the showy growths in the meadow, were multitudes of lowly little flowers. I had found the secret of the sweetness—it poured out from these humble hiding flowers. This is a picture of what is true everywhere in life. Not from the great, the conspicuous, the famed in any community, comes the fragrance which most sweetens the air—but from lowly lives, hidden, obscure, unpraised, which give out the aroma of unselfishness, of kindness, of gentleness. In many a home it is from the room of an invalid, a sufferer—that the sweetness comes, which fills all the house. We know that it is from the cross of Christ, that the hollowing influence flowed which all these centuries has been *refining* and *enriching* and *softening* the world's life. So it is always—out of weakness and suffering, and from crushed, broken lives—comes the blessing which renews and heals the world.

"The healing of the world  
Is in its nameless saints."

We need only to make sure of one thing—that we do indeed bring our weakness to Christ and lean on him in simple faith. This is the vital link in getting the blessing. Weakness itself is a burden; it is chains upon our limbs. If we try to carry it alone—we shall only fail. But if we lay it on the strong Son of God—and let him carry us and our burden, going on quietly and firmly in the way of duty—He will make our very weakness, a secret source of strength. He will not take the weakness from us—that is not his promise—but he will so fill it with his own power that we shall be strong, more than conquerors, able to do all things through Christ who strengthens us!

This is the blessed secret of having our burdening weakness, transformed into strength. The secret can be found only in Christ. And in Him—it can be found by every humble, trusting disciple.

We ought not to allow ourselves to be beaten in living. It is the privilege and duty of every believer in Christ to live victoriously. No man can ever reach noble Christian character, without sore cost in pain and sacrifice. All that is beautiful and worthy in life—must be won in struggle. The crowns are not put upon men's heads through the caprice or favoritism of any king; they are the reward of victorious achievement. We can make life easy, in a way, if we will—by shirking its battles, by refusing to grapple with its antagonisms; but in this way we never can make anything *beautiful* and *worthy* of our life. We may keep along shore with our craft, never pushing out into deep waters; but then we shall never discover new worlds, not learn the secret of the sea. We may spare ourselves costly service and great sacrifices, by saving our own life from hardships, risks, and pain—but we shall miss the blessing which can come only through *the losing of self*. "No cross—no crown" is the law of spiritual attainment.

"He who has never a conflict—has never a victor's palm,  
And only the toilers—know the sweetness of rest and calm".

Therefore God really honors us, when he sets us in places where we must struggle. He is then giving us an opportunity to win the best honors and the richest blessing. Yet he never makes life so hard for us, in any circumstances, that we cannot live victoriously through the help which he is ready to give.

This lesson applies to **temptation**. Not one of us can miss being tempted—but we need never *fail* nor *fall* in it. Never yet was a child of God in any terrible conflict with the Evil One, in which it was not possible for him to overcome. There is a wonderful word in one of Paul's Epistles, which we should write in *letters of gold* on our chamber walls: "No temptation has overtaken you except what is common to humanity. God is faithful and He will not allow you to be tempted beyond what you are able, but with the temptation He will also provide a way of escape, so that you are able to endure it.

These are sublime assurances. Not one need ever say, "I *cannot* endure this temptation, and *must* yield and fall." This is never true. We need never fail. Christ met the sorest temptations—but he was always victorious; and now this tried and all-conquering Christ is by our side as we meet and endure our temptations, and we cannot fail when he is with us. It is possible, too, for us to so the meet temptations, as to change them into blessings. A conquered sin becomes a new strength in our life. We are stronger because every conquest gives us a new spirit of life; the strength we have defeated becomes now part of our own power.

Victoriousness in speech is among the hardest of life's conquests. The words of James are true to common experience, when he says that the tongue is harder to tame than any kind of beast or birds or creeping things or things in the sea; indeed, that no man can tame it. Yet he does not say that we need not try to tame our tongue. On the other hand he

counsels us to be slow to speak and slow to anger. A Christian ought to learn to control his speech. The capacity for harm in angry words, is appalling. No prayer should be oftener on our lips than that in the old psalm, "Set a guard over my mouth, O Lord; keep watch over the door of my lips."

The hasty word in an uncontrolled moment—may leave sore wounding and pain in a gentle heart, may mar a sweet friendship, may set an innocent life on a career of evil. Also, the hurt in him who speaks ungoverned words, is scarcely less sore. The pain that quickly follows their utterance, is terrible penalty for the sin. There is oftentimes a cost, too, in results, which is incalculable. Lives have been shadowed, down to their close, by words which fell in a single flash from unlocked lips! Moses was not the only man who has been shut out of a land of promise—by reason of one unadvised word. It is better to suffer wrong in silence—than to run the risk of speaking in the excitement of anger.

One writes: "A single word spoken under the influence of passion, or rashly and inconsiderately spoken, may prove a source of abiding pain and regret. But the suffering of an act of injustice, of wrong, or of unkindness, in a spirit of meekness and forbearance, never renders us unhappy. The remembrance of a sinful or even a hasty word, is not infrequently the cause of very deep mortification. The reflection that our words manifested a weakness, if not a lack of moral and spiritual balance, humiliates us. It is a wound to our self-respect, and the consciousness that the regret is now unavailing adds a sting to the pain. But in the feeling that in our exercise of the meekness and forbearance inspired by the love of Christ we went further than we were bound to go, is not often a cause of distress. In a review of the act—we do not feel that we wronged ourselves by making too large a sacrifice, or that our failure to resent the injury and to attempt to retaliate was a mistake. Reason and conscience approve the course, and it is a source of satisfaction and comfort."

The lesson applies also to whatever in our environment makes life hard. Sometimes we find ourselves in places and conditions of living, in which it seems impossible for us to grow into strength and beauty of character. This is true of many young people in the circumstances in which they are born—and in which they must grow up. They find about them the *limitations of poverty*. They cannot get the education they seem to need—to fit them for anything better than the most ordinary career. They envy other young people who have so much better opportunities. But these limitations, which seem to make fine attainments impossible, oftentimes prove the very blessings through which nobleness is reached. *Early hardship* is the best school for training men. Not many of those who have risen to the best and truest success, began in easy places.

Sometimes it is *poor health* which appears to make it impossible for one to live grandly, at least to do much in the world. But this is not an insuperable barrier. Many people who have been invalids all their life, have grown into rare sweetness of spirit, and have lived in the world in a way to make it better, and to leave influences of blessing behind them when they went away. Many a "shut in" has made a narrow room and a *chamber of pain*—the center of a heavenly life, whose blessings have gone far and wide. At least, there is no condition of health in which one cannot live victoriously in one's spirit, if not

physically. One can be brave, cheerful, accepting one's limitations, praising God in sickness and in pain, sure always that what God wills is best, and that he who sings his little song of joy and praise in his prison—is pleasing God and blessing the world.

Sometimes that which makes life hard is in one's own *temperament*. Passions are strong; temper seems uncontrollable; the affections are embittered, so that meekness and gentleness appear to be impossible; or the disposition is soured so that one finds it hard to be loving and sweet. The fault may be in one's early training, or the unhappy temper may be inherent. None of us come into the world saints, and oftentimes there are tendencies in one's childhood home, or in one's early years which give the wrong *bias* to the life. A few years later one awakes to find the nature misshapen, distorted, with the unlovely elements prominent and dominant.

Must one necessarily go through life to the end thus marred, with disposition spoiled, quick tempered, with appetites and passions uncontrollable? Not at all. In all these things we may be "more than conquerors through Him that loved us." The grace of Christ can take the most unlovely life—and change it into beauty. Godliness is impossible to none, where the grace of God is allowed to work freely and thoroughly.

Many people find in their own homes the greatest obstacle in the way of their becoming beautiful and gentle in life. Home ought to be the best place in the world in which to grow into Christlikeness. There all the influences, should be inspiring and helpful. It ought to be easy to be sweet in home's sacredness. Everything good ought there to find encouragement and stimulus. All home training should be towards "whatever things are lovely." *Home should be life's best school*. What the conservatory is to the little plant or flower which finds warmth, good soil, and gently culture there, growing into sweet loveliness; home should be to the young life that is born into it, and grows up within its doors. But not all home-life is ideal. Not in all homes, is it easy to live sweetly and beautifully. Sometimes the atmosphere is unfriendly, cold, cheerless, chilling. It is hard to keep the heart gently and kindly in the bitterness which creeps into home-life.

But no matter how sadly a home may fail in its love and helpfulness, how much there may be in it of sharpness and bitterness, it is the mission of a Christian always to be sweet, to seek to overcome the hardness, to live victoriously. This is possible, too—through the help of Christ.

These are only illustrations of this lesson. Many of us find ourselves in *uncongenial conditions* in which we must stay, at least for the time. But, whatever the circumstances, we may live Christianly. God will never allow us to be put in any place in which, though the help of his grace—we cannot be godly and beautiful Christians. *Limitations*, if we rightly use them, only help to make our life more earnest, more beautiful. A writer calls attention to the fact that every musical string is musical, because it is tied at both ends and must vibrate in limited measure of distance. Cut the string, and let it fly loose, and it no more gives out musical notes. Its musicalness depends upon its limitations. So it is with many human lives; they become capable of giving out sweet notes, only when they are compelled to move in restraint. The very hardness in their condition, is that which

brings out the best qualities in them, and produces the finest results in character and achievement.

This lesson applies also to experiences of misfortune, adversity, or sorrow. Paul speaks of himself in one place as "sorrowful—yet always rejoicing." His *life* could not be crushed, his *joy* could not be quenched, his *songs* could not be hushed. We must all meet trial in some form—but one need never be overwhelmed by it. Yet it is very important that we should learn to pass through our sorrow as Christians. Do we meet it victoriously? We cannot help weeping; Jesus wept, and tears are sacred when love for our friends and love for Christ mingle in them. But our tears must not be rebellious. "May Your will be done" must breathe through all our sobbings and cries, like the melody of a sweet song in a dark night of storm.

**Sorrow** hurts some lives. It embitters them. It leaves them broken, disheartened, not caring more for life. But this is not the *Christian* way. We should accept sorrow, however it may come to us, as bringing with it a fragment of God's sweet will for us, as bringing also some new revealing of divine love. We should meet it quietly, reverently, careful not to miss the blessing it brings to us. Then we should rise up again at once, and go on with our work and duty. Some hands are left hanging down after grief has come. "I do not care any more for life," men are sometimes heard to say. "I have no interest in my business, since my wife died. I want to give it all up." But that is not victorious living. *Sorrow* absolves us from no duty, from no responsibility. Our work is not finished because our friend's work is done. God's plan for our life goes on—though for the life dearest to us, it has ended. We rise the morning after the funeral, and find the old tasks waiting for us, clamoring for our coming, and must go forth at once to take them up. "Let us dry our tears and go on," wrote a godly man to his friend, after a sore bereavement. That is the true Christian spirit.

We ought to live more earnestly than ever, after grief has touched our heart. Our life has been enriched by the experience. Tears leave the *soil of the heart* more fertile. The experience of sorrow teaches us many lessons. We are wiser afterward, more thoughtful, better fitted to be guide and helper to others, and prepared especially to be comforters of those whom we find passing through affliction. Instead, therefore, of letting our hands hang down in despairing weakness, we should rise up quickly, fresh from our new anointing, and hasten on to the duty which waits for us.

Thus all Christian life should be victorious. We should never allow ourselves to be defeated, in any experience which may come to us. With Christ to help us, we need never fail—but may ever be more than conquerors. Even the things which seem to be failures and defeats in our lives—through the love and grace of Christ—if only we are faithful—will prove in the end to be successes and victories. Many a good man fails in a worldly sense, and yet in the moral and spiritual realm is more than conqueror. There is no real failure—but in sin. Faithfulness to Christ is victory, even when all is lost.

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