

The Blessing of Weakness

J.R. Miller (1840-1912)

My strength is made perfect in weakness.

We are not accustomed to think of *weakness* as a condition of blessing. The *law of the cross* lies deep in spiritual life.

All the best things in human life are really hints and gleams of the divine life. Paul could well afford to keep his “*thorn*” with its burdening weakness, because it made him far more the object of divine strength. Weakness always makes strong appeal to divine strength. We think of suffering or feebleness as a misfortune. It is not so, however, if it brings us nearer to the heart of the Father. Blessed is weakness, for it draws to us the strength of God!

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, God 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; 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, 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.

Do not allow our “*thorn*” to fret us; to resist, and complain; to lose faith and lose heart – to spoil our life. 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.

He said unto me, “My grace is sufficient for you: for My strength is made perfect in weakness.” Most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me. Therefore I take pleasure in infirmities, in reproaches, in necessities, in persecutions, in distresses for Christ’s sake: for when I am weak, then am I strong (II Corinthians 12:9-10).

The blessing of weakness is that it nourishes dependence on God. When we are strong, or deem ourselves strong, then we are really weak, since then we trust in ourselves. When we are consciously weak, though, knowing ourselves unequal to our duties and struggles, then we are strong, because then we look to God for His strength.

Too many people think their weakness is a barrier to their usefulness, or make it an excuse for doing little with their life. Instead of this, however, He will transform our weaknesses into strength. He says His strength is made perfect in weakness; that is, what is lacking 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 life – 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. So it is always: out of weakness and suffering, and from crushed, broken lives comes the blessing which renews and heals.

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!

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 occupy this place without sore cost in pain and sacrifice. All that is beautiful and worthy in life – must be won in struggle. We can make life easy, in a way – if we will – by shirking its battles; but in this way we never can enjoy anything really *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, nor learn the secret of the sea. “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 Him.

In all of these things we may be “*more than conquerors through Him Who loved us.*” The grace of Christ can take the most unlovely life and change it into beauty. *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 musicality 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 needs never to be overwhelmed by it. We cannot help weeping; Jesus wept, and tears are sacred when love for our friends and love for Christ mingles in them; but our tears must not be rebellious. “*May Your will be done*” must breathe through all of 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 and not caring for life anymore. Yet, 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.

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 a guide and helper to others, and prepared especially to be comforters of those whom we find passing through affliction.

Even the things which seem to be failures and defeats in our lives – through the love and grace of Christ – will prove in the end to be successes and victories. Many a good man fails in a worldly sense, and yet in the spiritual realm is more than conqueror.

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