

**BALM
FOR
WOUNDED
SPIRITS**

WRITTEN BY

WILLIAM S. PLUMER

**BALM
FOR
WOUNDED
SPIRITS**

WRITTEN BY

WILLIAM S. PLUMER

Copyright © Monergism Books

Balm for Wounded Spirits

by William S. Plumer

Table of Contents

- [1. There Are Many Wounded Spirits](#)
- [2. Many Sources of Sorrow](#)
- [3. Examples of Great Sufferers](#)
- [4. Our Trials Are from God](#)
- [5. Behavior under Sore Trials](#)
- [6. Two Dangerous and Opposite Errors](#)
- [7. Borrowing Trouble](#)
- [8. The Fountain of Consolation](#)
- [9. True Comforts](#)
- [10. Benefits of Affliction](#)

1. THERE ARE MANY WOUNDED SPIRITS

"It is better to go to a house of mourning than to go to a house of feasting, since that is the end of all mankind, and the living should take it to heart. Grief is better than laughter, for when a face is sad, a heart may be glad. The heart of the wise is in a house of mourning, but the heart of fools is in a house of pleasure." Ecclesiastes 7:2-4

I freely confess to a growing sympathy with my suffering fellow men. The heart of the wise is in the house of mourning. Often is the heart made better by sorrow and sadness.

On earth are always many stricken hearts. The children of sorrow are numbered by the million. The family of the afflicted, for multitude, stands next to the family of man. It never dies out. It is constantly receiving new accessions. We come into the world with a cry, we pass through it in tears, and we leave it with a groan. At the age of one hundred and thirty, Jacob exclaims: "Few and evil have been the days of the years of my life."

That the wicked should have many sorrows, should surprise no one. God's Word says it shall be so. Their course of life naturally brings about that result. Destruction and misery are in their ways. A mirthful exterior often conceals a rankling wound. Even in laughter their heart is sorrowful. How can it be otherwise? For Jehovah curses their blessings (Mal. 2:2).

But the righteous are not exempt. "God had one Son on earth without sin—but never one without affliction."

"In this wide world, the fondest and the best
Are the most tried, most troubled and distressed."

Well, be it so. Night makes the stars shine, and sorrow gives luster to many a character. The Lord deals faithfully with His people. He never promised them ease or exemption from affliction. Jesus said: "In the world you shall have tribulation; but be of good cheer: I have overcome the world."

"The path of sorrow, and that path alone,
Leads to the land where sorrows are unknown;
No traveler ever reached that blessed abode,
Who found not thorns and briars in the road."

Genuine sonship with God never exists where men are not brought under the rod of correction (Heb. 12:8).

Even where gaunt poverty never knocks at the door, nor persecution plies her implements of torture, nor sickness consumes the flesh, yet in some form affliction invades every dwelling of the saints.

It greatly perplexes some to see the apparent confusion which seems to reign on earth. The wisest of mere men said: "All share a common destiny—the righteous and the wicked, the good and the bad, the clean and the unclean, those who offer sacrifices and those who do not. As it is with the good man, so with the sinner; as it is with those who take oaths, so with those who are afraid to take them. This is the evil in everything that happens under the sun: The same destiny overtakes all. The hearts of men, moreover, are full of evil and there is madness in their hearts while they live, and afterward they join the dead" (Ecc. 9:2-3).

Sometimes things are even more perplexing, for a wicked man may for a long time seem to have uninterrupted prosperity, while his godly neighbor experiences sad reverses. Asaph had sore travail of soul on this very matter. He became envious at the foolish when he saw the prosperity of the wicked. They were not troubled as other men, neither were they plagued like other men. But when he saw the doom that awaited them, he ceased to envy them (Ps. 73).

Waters of bitterness have always been given to the righteous (2 Tim. 3:11-12). See how Paul fared: "When we were come unto Macedonia our flesh had no rest, but we were troubled on every side; without were fightings, within were fears." Indeed such has been the common lot of God's people. Read history.

Nor do afflictions commonly diminish with age. In fact, some of them are usually much increased as we go on in life. So said the Preacher (Ecc. 12:1-5). In the 90th Psalm, Moses teaches the same thing. Our outward man perishes, and so we should faint if our inward man were not renewed day by day (2 Cor. 4:16). Owen says: "If it be so that in the daily decays of the outward man, in all the approaches of its dissolution, we have inward spiritual revivals and renovations, we shall not faint in what we undergo. And without such continual renovations we shall faint in our distresses, whatever other things we may have, or whatever we pretend to the contrary."

Blessed is the man that behaves well in affliction. Rough seas and stress of weather make good seamen. Long wars and hard battles make good soldiers. Hall says: "Every man looks fair in a time of prosperity, but the main trial of the Christian is in suffering." Let us cultivate the spirit of those lines now so famous:

"I ask not that my course be calm and still;
No, here too, Lord be done your holy will;
I ask but for a quiet, child-like heart;
Though thronging cares and restless toil be mine,
Yet may my heart remain. forever thine—
Draw it from earth and fix it where you art.

"I ask you not to finish soon the strife,
The toil, the trouble of this earthly life;
No, be my peace amid its grief and pain.
I pray not, grant me now your realm on high;
No, before I die, let me to evil die,
And through your Cross my sins be wholly slain."

2. MANY SOURCES OF SORROW

All languages abound in words expressive of different kinds or degrees of affliction. In English we have adversity, agony, anguish, anxiety, bereavement, burden, calamity, discomfort, discouragement, disease, distress, disturbance, grief, infirmity, losses, misfortunes, misery, pain, perplexity, sadness, sickness, sorrow, suffering, torment, trial, tribulation, trouble, vanity, vexation and wretchedness.

Men often differ in their estimates of the strength of these words. Their use is much governed by individual preference, or by local practice. In some communities the word *trouble* is commonly used to express bodily ailment, yet by all correct usage some of these words are stronger than others.

Adversity describes a general condition—the opposite of prosperity. We speak of a calamity as great, of a trial as sore, of an affliction as severe, of anguish as acute, of agony as intense, of a loss as heavy, of a burden as grievous. A calamity may be averted, sorrows soothed, losses repaired, discomforts removed, disturbances settled, pains relieved, sufferings ended; grief subsides, agony is over, distress passes away, trials cease. These are samples of the use of words. But the present aim is not to define words, but rather to indicate the number and variety of terms used on the subject of affliction. This is a world of sorrows. This is a valley of tears.

"There is no flock, however watched and tended,
But one dead lamb is there!
There is no fireside, howso'er defended,
But has one vacant chair.

"The air is full of farewells to the dying,
And mournings for the dead;
The heart of Rachel, for her children crying,
Will not be comforted!"

Sometimes our afflictions respect the state of our own minds. One says: "Why are you cast down, O my soul, and why are you disquieted within me?" Our blessed Redeemer said; "My soul is exceeding sorrowful, even unto death." In fact, "the sufferings of His soul, were the soul of His sufferings."

Sometimes our afflictions respect our bodies. All have many weaknesses, many sicknesses. The weeping prophet says: "He has made my skin and flesh grow old. He has broken my bones." "Our skin is hot as an oven, feverish from hunger."

A good name is rather to be chosen than great riches. It is like precious ointment. The most virtuous put the highest estimate upon it; yet often is it put in jeopardy. It was a godly man, typically representing the Redeemer, who said, "Reproach has broken my heart." "There is one who speaks like the piercings of a sword." "Slander is the revenge of a coward"—and there are many cowards.

I once saw a boy with a beautiful bird, which he had caught in his trap. It was tethered with a ribbon. Its captor was delighted with his prisoner. Presently, when he was not thinking, away went the red bird and nice ribbon. The boy wept. So riches take to themselves wings and fly away towards heaven. They are not forever. The sudden **loss of property** is a great affliction, and probably tries one's virtues as sorely as the sudden acquisition of wealth.

Our lives themselves are often in peril. We are crushed before the moth. No man knows what moment he may die by the assassin or the mob, for "the wicked plots against the just, and gnashes upon him with his teeth." In all its stages our life is but a vapor. We do all fade as a leaf. We are like grass. The wind passes over it, and it is gone. Many are dying every day. "You carry them away as with a flood."

Often our friends are the sources of our grief. Sometimes they die, and we lament for them, as David for Jonathan. Sometimes they are

sick, and then we are grieved, as was Paul for Epaphroditus. Sometimes we see them going down into the depths of poverty, and we cannot help them. They will heed no advice until it is too late. Sometimes they become cold, and are even turned into strangers or enemies, and we say: "Yes, my own familiar friend, in whom I trusted, who ate of my bread, has lifted up his heel against me."

Many a time our enemies are lively and numerous and strong. They command much influence, they are fierce and cunning and unscrupulous. They are God's sword. David was not the only man who has cried out: "My eye waxes old because of all my enemies. Lead me, O Lord, in Your righteousness, because of my enemies."

Then, too, our labors seem unproductive of any very great or good results. We labor in vain and spend our strength for naught. We often in bitterness cry like Moses: "May the favor of the Lord our God rest upon us; establish the work of our hands for us—yes, establish the work of our hands." But still all seems to be passing away like water spilled upon the ground.

Our studies are often perplexing. Many, like the sorrowful Asaph, say they cannot see through providence. When they think to understand some hard question, it is too painful for them, and involves them in perplexity.

Or perhaps our families are broken up, or unpromising, or ungodly, or great sufferers. Then let us say, like David: "Although my house be not so with God [as I could wish], yet He has made with me an everlasting covenant, ordered in all things, and sure."

3. EXAMPLES OF GREAT SUFFERERS

Someone has said that the lives of very bad men and of very godly men are the most instructive—the former warning us and putting us

on our guard, and the latter encouraging us to imitate their example. Inspired men seem to have thought the same thing—at least, the Scriptures seldom delineate an average person—but they speak freely of Cain and Abel, of Moses and Pharaoh, of David and Saul, of Apollos and Simon Magus.

In like manner, they give us striking examples of great sufferings. We might dwell at length on the afflictions of Christ, for He was the greatest sufferer—preeminently "the man of sorrows and acquainted with grief." But His cup contained in it the wine of the wrath of God for our sins imputed to Him. The sword of Jehovah awaked against His fellow and smote Him. He bore the sin of many, and "our sufferings do not deserve to be spoken of on the same day on which we speak of His sorrows."

A lengthened account of the afflictions of Job, of David, of Jeremiah, and of Paul might very pertinently here be given; but the reader is probably quite familiar with their history—at least, he can soon read it in the Scriptures. These men were illustrious examples of what divine grace can do in sustaining God's chosen, and in giving them a blessed victory.

No chapter of human history is more instructive and inspiring than the history of the glorious **martyrs** who have suffered cruel deaths for their unswerving adherence to the cause of Christ. When Paul would sum up the grand achievements of holy confidence in God through Christ, he speaks of those "who shut the mouths of lions, quenched the fury of the flames, and escaped the edge of the sword; whose weakness was turned to strength; and who became powerful in battle and routed foreign armies. Women received back their dead, raised to life again. Others were tortured and refused to be released, so that they might gain a better resurrection. Some faced jeers and flogging, while still others were chained and put in prison. They were stoned; they were sawed in two; they were put to death by the sword. They went about in sheepskins and goatskins, destitute, persecuted and mistreated-- the world was not worthy of

them. They wandered in deserts and mountains, and in caves and holes in the ground." Hebrews 11:33-38

Glory be to God for giving us such examples of heroic and triumphant sufferings. No trial is likely to come on any child of God in our day except such as the saints have already triumphed over.

I think it is Henry Kirke White who says that "there are sorrows and there are misfortunes which bow down the spirit beyond the aid of all human comforts. . . . There are afflictions, there are privations, where death and hopes irrecoverably blasted leave no prospect of retrieval." In such cases, dry sorrow drinks up the blood and spirits, and would utterly consume us but for the amazing interpositions of divine mercy. But God is the God of all comfort, and He can make all grace abound to us.

I once heard an eloquent discourse on the power of divine grace to sustain and comfort in great affliction. The preacher has been for years very favorably known on both sides of the Atlantic. He still lives to love and be loved by thousands. He illustrated his subject by the recital of some incidents in the life of one whom he had personally known. His statement was substantially as follows:

While I was a student at Hampden Sidney College, there was a young man in the county of Prince Edward who was afflicted with one of the most painful of all the diseases to which the human frame is liable. It was a spinal infection of the most aggravated character. Being entirely dependent on others for support, it became necessary to make some permanent arrangement which would secure for him the constant attention he required. Through the intervention of some benevolent people connected with the institution, he was transferred to one of the rooms of Union Theological Seminary, and an arrangement was made by which the students of the Seminary, in turn, waited on him, day and night. After he was transferred to their care, I often visited him, and had

abundant opportunity of knowing what he suffered and how he bore the painful visitation to which he was subjected.

So contorted was he by his malady that he could not lie in a horizontal position, but was propped up by pillows placed under his head and shoulders; and he was so bent that usually his chin rested on his bosom. At times, it gave him acute pain to partake of his necessary food. In some way the optic nerve was implicated, and so keenly sensitive did he become to the light that it was necessary to exclude it, as far as possible, from his room. A close curtain was drawn across the single window behind his bed, and by night a shaded lamp was all that was permitted in his room. As an additional precaution, he often wore a bandage over his eyes, lest an accidental ray should pierce him with new anguish.

And yet, amidst all these complicated and bodily distresses, such was his patience and serenity of spirit, so hopeful and even cheerful was he in the tone of his conversation, so quick was his sympathy in all that concerned others, that his room, so far from being a place of gloom or in any way repellent, was an attractive resort to the students of the Seminary and to his friends in the neighboring college. He never murmured, but he often gave thanks. Though it gave him pain to partake of his daily food, yet heavenly manna brought strength and refreshment to his trustful spirit. For long years no sight of green fields or blue sky greeted his shaded eyes, but visions of beauty, infinitely transcending the fairest of earthly prospects, were disclosed to the eye of faith.

Thus racked and consumed with bodily pains, and thus replenished and comforted by divine grace, he lingered on, until at a late hour one night, while absorbed in study, I was stopped by hearing the tolling of the bell, which announced that his weary, worn and emaciated body was at rest, and that his patient, unmurmuring spirit was among the just made perfect.

The preacher added: "We hear of those who say they would dispense with religion during life, if they could be sure of its supports in a dying hour; but I ask, What would have been the condition of this man, during these long years of pain and destitution, but for the supports and consolations of the gospel of Christ?"

Now, dear reader, when you are inclined to think yourself the greatest of sufferers remember this young man, or one of old who cried: "Is there any sorrow like unto my sorrow?"

4. OUR TRIALS ARE FROM GOD

"Affliction comes not forth of the dust, neither does trouble spring out of the ground." Job 5:6

To a godly man, such doctrine is a great comfort. It is for a joy that God's government over evil is as perfect and constant as it is over good. "When disaster comes to a city—has not the Lord caused it?" (Amos 3:6). Thanks be to God for so clear a revelation on this point.

The rebellion had broken out. Ahithophel was among the insurgents. Absalom had many friends. David was a fugitive from his own house. He is fleeing for his life, and a man of the house of Saul comes forth and rails at him. At this, one of David's friends is highly incensed, and says: "Why should this dead dog curse my lord, the king? Let me go over and cut off his head!" But David was of quite another mind. He knew that when Israel left Egypt, not a dog wagged his tongue (Ex. 11:7). He knew that Shimei had been let loose upon him as a part of his humiliation, and he said to Abishai, "Let him curse, because the Lord has said unto him—Curse David. If the Lord has told him to curse me, who am I to stop him?" (2 Sam. 16:9-10).

Surely, we should never forget that all our trials are by the appointment of God, who numbers the very hairs of our heads. Without Him, not a sparrow falls to the ground. He controls even *chance* itself. He cuts short the life of the guilty Ahab by a bow drawn at a venture, just as certainly as if it had been aimed at his person. "We may throw the dice—but the Lord determines how they fall." (Prov. 16:33).

Satan could do nothing against Job until he obtained permission from God. He is the god of this world—but only so far as Jehovah chooses to lengthen his chain. The Most High says to His Church, "I have refined you but not with silver; I have chosen you in the furnace of affliction" (Isa. 48:10); and, "I will leave in the midst of you an afflicted, poor people, and they shall trust in the name of the Lord" (Zeph. 3:12).

"Though He brings grief, He will show compassion, so great is His unfailing love. For He does not willingly bring affliction or grief to the children of men" (Lam. 3:33). This truth was a great comfort to dear Dr. Nevins in his sore bereavements. It may well encourage every humble soul. Owen says, "God never afflicts nor grieves men, but it is for some other reason and cause than merely His own will." God no more rejoices in misery, than He does in iniquity. There is a cause for all the sorrows He sends. His justice or His love requires every stroke of His rod or His sword. He never acts inconsistently with His wisdom, His holiness, or His goodness. He never acts capriciously, but has good cause for all His decisions and actions. The fact that He is over and above all, acting with sovereign authority, shows how fit it is that He give no account of His matters to us, who are but worms, and vile worms at that. Sin is the cause of all our misery. To cure this, and rescue us from its power, God mercifully and lovingly chastens us—yes, chastens us severely.

It impairs not the quality of the gold to put it in the fire. It only takes away its dross, and at the same time shows the genuineness of the metal tried. This is the very form of thought in the mind of the

man of Uz, when he said, "When He has tried me, I shall come forth as gold."

Let us therefore promptly admit that we deserve all our afflictions, and say, "Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for His compassions never fail" (Lam. 3:22) Yes, after our sharpest trials, let us freely say, as the Jews when returned from Babylon, "You our God have punished us less than our iniquities deserve" (Ezra. 9:13); or as the Church in all ages has said, "He has not dealt with us after our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities" (Ps. 103:10).

Let us also submit entirely to the sovereign will of God, saying, "Why does a living man complain, a man for the punishment of his sins?" (Lam. 3:39). The child that falls into the arms of fatherly correction does by that act diminish the force of the stroke. Let us never forget that rebellious thoughts are sinful, and that the least sin is a greater evil than all our sorrows.

Let us constantly plead God's tender mercies and hide ourselves under the shadow of His wings. Like as a father pities his children, so the Lord pities those who fear Him.

I believe it is Paul Gerhardt who sings of the sufferings of Christ, and then adds:

"And if the pure and sinless One
Could thus to sorrow know,
Shall I, who so much ill have done,
Resist the cross? O Thou
In whom does perfect patience shine,
Whoever would fain be counted thine
Must wear your likeness now.
"Yet, Father, each fresh aching heart
Will question, in its woe,
If you can send such bitter smart

And yet no anger know.
How long the hours beneath the cross!
How hard to learn that love and loss
From one sole Fountain flow!"

5. BEHAVIOR UNDER SORE TRIALS

It pleases God sometimes to remove our loved ones very suddenly. If they are fully prepared for the change—it is ignoble in us to wish that they had suffered long or severely, merely to prepare us for the separation. But sometimes God calls into eternity those in whom we much love—but in whose piety we had little or no confidence. Sometimes those who make no profession of faith in Christ are taken out of the world with little or no warning. If we know their lives to have been wicked—such cases produce anguish.

The Scriptures provide sufficiently for all such cases. They tell us of Aaron's sons who for great wickedness were by God's just judgment taken out of the world in an awful manner. And yet they tell us how well that godly man behaved. The record is not long, but it is very much to the point: "And Aaron held his peace." He loved his sons. His heart yearned over them. He saw their wickedness. He knew that God was righteous. He could not understand the dark providence. But grace was given him not to say a word.

David, too, lost a son in mature years, and in an awful manner, fighting against his father's lawful authority. He had been a petted and spoiled child. Early in life he had committed fratricide and fled to Arabia, where he was sheltered by his heathen grandfather. After some time through the influence of that bloody intriguer, Joab—David consented to his return. Absalom was a very lovely person, and resorted to all the arts of an unprincipled demagogue. At length he headed an open rebellion, and died by the manifest judgment of

God. When the news reached the ears of his royal father, "the king was much moved, and went up to the chamber over the gate and wept; and as he wept, thus he said—O my son Absalom, my son, my son Absalom! would God I had died for you. O Absalom, my son, my son!"

It is a question of the most serious character, how shall we behave in these sore, sudden afflictions? The question ought to be answered fairly and fully.

Whatever be the cause of our sorrow, we should ever guard against excessive and inordinate grief. There is not a word in the Bible going to favor a settled dejection of mind. There is no emotion, however lawful in itself, that does not become sinful when indulged to an inordinate degree. When cheerfulness runs into levity, when industry becomes greediness, when sobriety degenerates into sourness, or sadness into a voluntary melancholy—we always commit sin. No lawful degree of sorrow works death. It seems strange that good people can allow themselves to afflict all around them. If we cannot rejoice in our circumstances, let us at least delight ourselves in the Lord our God. Where we have fears, even strong fears, respecting the eternal happiness of our deceased friends, we should still behave ourselves wisely in a perfect way. Take these hints for your guidance:

1. When Samuel bore the sad message to the venerable Eli respecting the doom of his guilty sons, the godly man said: "It is the Lord; let Him do what seems Him good." Job was involved in great uncertainty about the salvation of his children, and yet in all that matter "he sinned not, nor charged God foolishly."

2. God has a right to do what He will with His own. He never takes any except those He gave. He is the rightful and righteous proprietor and sovereign of us and of our lives, of our children and of their lives. His kingdom rules over all.

3. God is the best, purest, kindest, most loving Being in the universe. His counsels are of old faithfulness and truth. If HE is not to be trusted at all times and in all cases, confidence is at an end forever.

4. The judge of all the earth will do right. He never errs, is never unkind. He is merciful and gracious, abundant in goodness and truth.

5. Beware that you sin not by rebellious thoughts and murmurings. One unworthy thought concerning God is more to be dreaded than any loss we can sustain in the death of our loved ones.

6. Your case is not peculiar. Other good people of every generation have had like trials. Scott, the commentator, tells of a noble lady whose wicked son went from bad to worse, until he was sentenced to death on the scaffold. He stubbornly refused to have a spiritual adviser, or even to listen to prayer, until he was swung off on the gallows. Then, the rope breaking, he fell to the ground, and before he was again suspended, he asked a little season for prayer. This was the only symptom he ever gave of a disposition to repent. Yet his pious mother was never heard to complain of the hardness of her lot. If God supports others, He can bear you up in like circumstances. Cast your burden upon Him.

7. We know not what change may take place, even in the dying hour. The thief converted on the cross is a wonderful instance of the amazing grace of God. Respecting your departed friends, you may cherish every hope that is justified by the largest promises and provisions of God's Word.

Whatever may be the case, let every soul hear and obey the command, "Be still, and know that I am God." Quietness of soul in trying circumstances is a binding duty and a good sign of a gracious state.

6. TWO DANGEROUS AND OPPOSITE ERRORS

"I have refined you but not in the way silver is refined. Rather, I have refined you in the furnace of suffering." Isaiah 48:10

The rays of the sun soften wax, but harden clay. Very different effects are produced on men by the same event. The gospel is preached. Some believe; others despise and wonder and perish. To some, the glad tidings are a savor of life unto life; to others a savor of death unto death.

It is just so with afflictions. To some, sadness is sanctified, and their moral character is thereby improved. As Daniel expresses it, they are purified and tried and made white. This effect always follows where afflictions are received with meekness, reverence, submission and true humility. Though the conduct of such is not exactly all it should be, yet it is in the main right, and God declares His approval of it in many parts of Scripture.

"Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness. I say to myself—The Lord is my portion; therefore I will wait for him." The Lord is good to those whose hope is in him, to the one who seeks him; it is good to wait quietly for the salvation of the Lord. It is good for a man to bear the yoke while he is young. Let him sit alone in silence, for the Lord has laid it on him. Let him bury his face in the dust—there may yet be hope. Let him offer his cheek to one who would strike him, and let him be filled with disgrace. For men are not cast off by the Lord forever. Though he brings grief, he will show compassion, so great is his unfailing love. For he does not willingly bring affliction or grief to the children of men." Lamentations 3:22-33

It was when the church said, "I will look unto the Lord; I will wait for the God of my salvation; my God will hear me," that she was able to rise higher, and say, "Do not gloat over me, my enemy! Though I have fallen, I will rise. Though I sit in darkness, the Lord will be my light. Because I have sinned against him, I will bear the Lord's wrath, until he pleads my case and establishes my right. He will bring me out into the light; I will see his righteousness" (Mic. 7:8-9).

The pious Mr. Jay somewhere speaks of losing both our *comforts* and our *afflictions*. We lose our comforts by the providence of God removing them; but we lose our afflictions when we do not view them aright, nor act wisely under them. Errors respecting a time of trial are of two kinds that seem quite diverse from each other, but really are based in the same principle of unbelief. Against them both we are warned in the Old Testament, and also in the New. "My son, despise not the chastening of the Lord; neither be weary of His correction." "My son, do not take the Lord's discipline lightly, or faint when you are reprov'd by Him; for the Lord disciplines the one He loves, and punishes every son whom He receives" (Prov. 3:11; Heb. 12:5). To despise God's chastisements is to be hard and unfeeling under them, to indulge the spirit of contempt. God complains of such, "Why should you be stricken any more? You will revolt more and more" (Isa. 1:5). This is both a very wicked and a very dangerous line of conduct. While there is hope, a good father chastens his child; but when all hope is lost and he discards him, he chastens him no more. The other error consists in being weary, in fainting, or in impatience under the rod of divine correction. One says there is no hope, when every good ground of expectation is left to him. The former hardens his heart in pride, and says, "I don't care for it; I will make my heart as hard as adamant." The latter says, "My punishment is greater than I can bear;" and he melts away and dies. One is stiff-necked and defiant; the other is broken-hearted, encourages a puling sensibility and is pleased with nothing.

It was Pharaoh who said, "Who is Jehovah, that I should obey Him?" It was Belshazzar who said, "I will ascend into heaven, I will exalt my throne above the stars of God." Such desperation often cries out in its agony, but when relieved from pressing distress, repeats its former follies. Such conduct is considered very daring. Its seeming submission is feigned or deceptive, as when Agag said, "The bitterness of death is past!" (1 Sam. 15:32).

But the disposition to pining and impatience is perhaps much more common, and by man more readily exercised. Jonah was a godly man, but at one time had much need of severe discipline. Even in his attempted flight to Tarshish, where he suffered so much, he was not cured of his disposition to prescribe to the Almighty. How foolishly he behaved about that gourd. He said, "It is better for me to die than to live." And God said to Jonah, "Do you well to be angry for the gourd?" And he said "I do well to be angry, even unto death" (Jonah 4:8-9).

Let us see to it that we avoid both these errors: that we yield ourselves to God. What can be more reasonable?

"Is resignation's lesson hard?
Examine, you shall find
That duty calls for little more
Than anguish of the mind."

Who has hardened himself against God and prospered? Or who has unbelievably pined away in affliction and been the better for it? Some have destroyed health so as lead to insanity and then to death. Let us never forget that the judge of all the earth will do right, and that all opposition to His will, whatever form it may assume, is criminal, and leads to misery and shame.

"When the sky is dark and lowering,
When your path in life is drear,

Upward lift your steadfast glances,
'Mid the maze of sorrow here.

"From the beaming fount of gladness
Shall descend a radiance bright;
And the grave shall be a garden,
And the hours of darkness, light.

"For the Lord will hear and answer,
When in faith His people pray;
Whatever He has appointed
Shall but work you good always.

"E'en your very hairs are numbered,
God commands when one shall fall;
And the Lord is with His people,
Helping each and blessing all."

7. BORROWING TROUBLE

Many have a sinful desire to see into the future. Rather than not know what was coming, men have resorted to astrology, palm reading, witchcraft, spiritualism and the wildest conjectures. This disposition is still common.

Some spend much time in these wild imaginations, none of which will ever be realized.

But in sad moods, men's minds go to the other extreme, and take gloomy views of all the future. Then they anticipate many calamities. It is in mercy that God has hid from our view coming events. We often misunderstand things that have already occurred. Still more frequently do we make a frightful thing of what is now passing before us. But could we, with our narrow capacities, look

into the future so as to tell the general course of providence towards us in years to come—we would be very wretched. It was a peculiar bitter ingredient of the sufferings of our blessed Lord, that He foresaw all His trials (Luke 12:50).

But we know not what shall be on the morrow, and on many accounts it is best for us not to indulge in idle anticipations.

1. We have something else to do. Our duties are pressing, solemn, numerous. If we can meet the responsibilities of the present hour, that will be as much as we can reasonably expect. Sufficient unto the day is the evil thereof.

2. When great trials come to true Christians, they have a promise of assistance according to their necessities. "As your days, so shall your strength be." Dying grace is seldom given except to *dying* believers. To them it is never denied.

3. By idle anticipations, we greatly enhance our sufferings. Porteus says: "He who foresees calamities, suffers them twice over!"

4. We are positively forbidden to pry curiously into the future. "The secret things belong unto the Lord our God, but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law" (Deut. 29:29). Our great wisdom is found in entire submission to the sovereign will of God in all coming events.

5. There is no end to the torment we may thus inflict upon ourselves. Seneca was right when he said: "The state of that man's mind who feels so intense an interest as to future events, must be most deplorable." Johnson says: "Many philosophers imagine that the elements themselves may be in time exhausted; that the sun, by shining long, will effuse all its light; and that, by the continual waste of aqueous particles, the whole earth will at last become a sandy desert. I would not advise my readers to disturb themselves by

contriving how they shall live without light and water." Sometimes folly seems to know no bounds.

6. A good writer says: "You may live through tomorrow. Then be prepared for it, prosecute your plans, pursue your business, be industrious and enterprising. But be not unmindful that there is another branch of the alternative. You may *not* live through tomorrow. Be prepared equally for that. Tomorrow may introduce you into the presence of God, may close the account of life, may withdraw the offer of mercy, may cut short the opportunity of salvation. What if it shall? Are you ready for that interview and that reckoning?"

A similar error is committed by those who spend their time in trying to discover how they shall be delivered from distresses now pressing upon them. Mordecai was a godly man. He greatly feared God and trusted Him also. He was persuaded that enlargement and deliverance would come. He thought the queen might be the instrument of rescue to God's chosen people. But he was not sure. He told his cousin that at present the finger of providence seemed to point to her. At the same time he freely told her that if she entirely declined, ruin would overtake her and her house, while it should be seen that God would not forsake His ancient people.

One very proper way of disposing of such temptations respecting the future, is to dwell much on the eternity which is before us. What is all time? What are all the trials of time? It will not be long until every living man will look back on the worldly things which made him glad or sorrowful—and see and say that they are things of nothing. The wicked and the righteous in a future state will alike wonder that such vanities could ever have engrossed their attention. Let any thoughtful man even here say, "What importance will I attach to this or that event—to this or that possession a thousand years from this time?" and he will at once see how idle are his intense feelings.

"Eternity! you pleasing dreadful thought!
Through what variety of untried being,
Through what new scenes and changes must we pass?
The wide, the unbounded prospect lies before me;
But shadows, clouds and darkness rest upon it."

Then let us gird up the loins of our minds, stand in our lot,
cheerfully committing everything to the God of all grace and mercy.
We see not, but He sees what is coming, and has made full
provision for it. Let us sing:

"I see not a step before,
As I tread the days of the year;
But the past is still in God's keeping,
The future His mercy will clear;
And what seems dark in the distance
May brighten as I draw near.

"So I go on, not knowing—
I would not if I might;
I would rather walk with God in the dark
Than walk alone in the light;
I would rather walk with Him by faith
Than walk alone by sight.

"My heart shrinks back from trials
Which the future may disclose;
Yet I never had a sorrow
But what my dear Lord chose;
So I send the coming tears back
With the whispered words, 'He knows.'"

8. THE FOUNTAIN OF CONSOLATION

The Scripture abounds in passages which exactly suit the people of God in all their afflictions. He who knows and believes them is thoroughly furnished for every trial. Many have thought it well to make a collection of these precious things for their own use. It is right to do so. In the hope of inciting Zion's pilgrims to such a work, the following list is given, not as the best that could be made, but as an encouraging sample of what can be done in this way:

"The Rock—His work is perfect; all His ways are entirely just. A faithful God, without prejudice, He is righteous and true."
Deuteronomy 32:4

"The Lord is compassionate and gracious, slow to anger and full of faithful love. He will not always accuse [us] or be angry forever. He has not dealt with us as our sins deserve or repaid us according to our offenses. For as high as the heavens are above the earth, so great is His faithful love toward those who fear Him. As far as the east is from the west, so far has He removed our transgressions from us. As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear Him. For He knows what we are made of, remembering that we are dust." Psalm 103:8-14

"God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

"Thanks be unto God for His unspeakable gift" (2 Cor. 9:15).

"Come unto Me, all you that labor and are heavy laden, and I Will give you rest" (Matt. 11:28).

"Him who comes to Me, I will never cast out" (John 6:37).

"Peace I leave with you, My peace I give unto you: not as the world gives, give I unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid" (John 14:27).

"Because I live, you shall live also" (John 14:19).

"More than that, I also consider everything to be a loss in view of the surpassing value of knowing Christ Jesus my Lord. Because of Him I have suffered the loss of all things and consider them filth, so that I may gain Christ and be found in Him, not having a righteousness of my own from the law, but one that is through faith in Christ—the righteousness from God based on faith." Philippians 3:8-9

"Of Him are you in Christ Jesus, who of God is made unto us wisdom, and righteousness, and sanctification, and redemption" (1 Cor. 1:30).

"The blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin" (1 John 1:7).

"By one offering He has perfected forever those who are sanctified" (Heb. 10:14).

"I have satiated the weary soul, and I have replenished every sorrowful soul" (Jer. 31:25).

"You shall be sorrowful—but your sorrow shall be turned into joy" (John 16:20).

"We know that all things work together for good to those who love God, to those who are the called according to His purpose" (Rom. 8:28).

"To me to live is Christ, and to die is gain" (Phil. 1:21).

"We know that we have passed from death unto life, because we love the brethren" (1 John 3:14).

"But I know my living Redeemer, and He will stand on the dust at last. Even after my skin has been destroyed, yet I will see God in my

flesh. I will see Him myself; my eyes will look at [Him], and not as a stranger. My heart longs within me." Job 19:25-27

"The Lord will perfect that which concerns me" (Ps. 138:8).

"I am sure of this, that He who started a good work in you will carry it on to completion until the day of Christ Jesus" (Phil. 1:6).

"Though He slays me, yet will I trust in Him" (Job 13:15).

"Let all who put their trust in You rejoice; let them ever shout for joy, because You defend them" (Ps. 5:11).

"My beloved is mine, and I am His" (Song 2:16).

"Sing, O heavens, and be joyful, O earth; and break forth into singing, O mountains: for the Lord has comforted His people, and will have mercy upon His afflicted" (Isa. 49:13).

"For I am already being poured out like a drink offering, and the time has come for my departure. I have fought the good fight, I have finished the race, I have kept the faith. Now there is in store for me the crown of righteousness, which the Lord, the righteous Judge, will award to me on that day--and not only to me, but also to all who have longed for his appearing" (2 Tim. 4:6-8).

"Though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil, for You are with me; Your rod and Your staff they comfort me" (Ps. 23:4.)

"Into Your hand I commit my spirit; You have redeemed me, O Lord God of truth" (Ps. 31:5).

"O death, where is your sting? O grave, where is your victory? The sting of death is sin, and the strength of sin is the law. But thanks be to God, who gives us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ" (1 Cor. 15:55-57).

"We believe that Jesus died and rose again and so we believe that God will bring with Jesus those who have fallen asleep in him" (1 Thess. 4:14).

"I am the resurrection and the life" (John 11:25).

"Blessed and holy is he who has part in the first resurrection: on such the second death has no power" (Rev. 20:6).

"I was senseless and ignorant; I was a brute beast before you. Yet I am always with you; you hold me by my right hand. You guide me with your counsel, and afterward you will take me into glory. Whom have I in heaven but you? And earth has nothing I desire besides you. My flesh and my heart may fail, but God is the strength of my heart and my portion forever." Psalm 73:22-26

"There remains a rest for the people of God" (Heb. 4:9).

"He who overcomes shall inherit all things, and I will be his God, and he shall be My son" (Rev. 21:7).

"We know that if our earthly house of this tabernacle were dissolved, we have a building of God, a house not made with hands, eternal in the heavens" (2 Cor. 5:1).

"And God shall wipe away all tears from their eyes; and there shall be no more death, neither sorrow nor crying: neither shall there be any more pain: for the former things are passed away" (Rev. 21:4).

"He has said, I will never leave you, nor forsake you" (Heb. 13:5).

"The grace of our Lord Jesus Christ be with you all. Amen" (Rev. 22:21).

9. TRUE COMFORTS

Are you afflicted? Beware of bad comforts and comforters. It is always dangerous to betake ourselves to broken cisterns, which can hold no water. This is a common error. To this course many will tempt you. When by their sins Israel brought on themselves the divine judgments in the shape of wars and public enemies, instead of humbling themselves under the mighty hand of God, and asking Jehovah, their King, to deliver them, they were much inclined to go to Assyria or Egypt for horsemen.

There are always weak or bad men who officiously offer advice which it is dangerous to follow. They may not give as wicked counsel as did Job's wife; but perhaps it is not much better. **Whatever leads us to light thoughts of sin, or to hard thoughts of God; whatever inclines us to lean to our own understanding, or to make light of God's heavy strokes—is sinful.** We cannot safely lean on any arm but that of the Almighty.

What, then shall the afflicted do? The answers are many; such as—

1. If your affliction is such that human sympathy can either soothe or alleviate it, ask the aid and kindness of true Christian friends. It is both lawful and natural to do so. Job, though a great man and a great believer, said: "Have pity upon me, have pity upon me, O you my friends, for the hand of God has touched me." He had before said: "To him who is afflicted, pity should be shown from his friends." Paul, the great apostle, tells us how the visits and sympathy of his friends refreshed him. Even our blessed Master called on His disciples for sympathy in His great agony. Christian love is often a great healer.

2. But we need divine sympathy also—even the compassions of God Himself. This is manifest in many ways, but preeminently in and by Jesus Christ. On this matter, both Testaments speak the same language. By the evangelical prophet, the Lord says: "In all their affliction He was afflicted, and the angel of His presence saved them; in His love and in His pity He redeemed them; and He bore

them, and carried them all the days of old" (Isa. 63:9). In the New Testament we are assured of the same blessed sympathy: "For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are--yet was without sin" (Heb. 4:15).

3. It is always wise to roll our burden over on the arm of the Almighty. He is stronger than man. He is mighty to save and strong to deliver. "Cast your burden upon the Lord, and He shall sustain you. He shall never allow the righteous to be moved" (Ps. 55:22).

4. Then the more of sanctified suffering we have, the more real comfort are we sure to possess, even in this life. Paul expressly says: "As the sufferings of Christ abound in us, so our consolation also abounds by Christ" (2 Cor. 1:5). The blessed apostle was so in love with Christ that one of his strong desires was "to know Him and the power of His resurrection and the fellowship of His sufferings, being made conformable unto His death" (Phil. 3:10).

5. Not only does God increase our blessed experiences by calling us to trial, but He thus prepares us to help others. For He "comforts us in all our tribulation, that we may be able to comfort them which are in any trouble, by the comfort wherewith we ourselves are comforted of God" (2 Cor. 1:4). Think of that, and give thanks.

6. Paul presents a very striking view of the trials of God's people, when he speaks of himself (and so of others) as "filling up that which is behind of the afflictions of Christ" (Col. 1:24). That is very remarkable language. It cannot mean that Christ did not suffer all that was necessary for atonement, for the Scripture expressly says that He did. It probably presents Christ to us as a mystical person, of which He, the head, had already suffered His part, and now His members, as joined with Him, should suffer their part.

7. All these afflictions are designed to prepare the way for great, very great and unspeakable joys at the time that eternal mercy has

selected for glorious manifestations. This doctrine was known in the Church a thousand years before Christ: "You caused me to experience many troubles and misfortunes, but You will revive me again. You will bring me up again, even from the depths of the earth. You will increase my honor and comfort me once again" (Ps. 71:20-21).

8. Nor is there a saint in heaven, even though he may have died a martyr, who now wishes that his sufferings on earth had been less. Indeed the martyrs wear a very glorious crown. See Rev. 7:9-17. Then, let each of us humbly say:

"I dare not choose my lot;
I would not, if I might;
O choose for me, my God;
So shall I walk aright.

"O take my cup, and it
With joy or sorrow fill,
As best to You may seem;
Choose You my good and ill."

10. BENEFITS OF AFFLICTION

If the trials of God's people were without any benefits, their case would indeed be sad. But all their experience unites with God's Word in declaring that from all their sorrows comes much of the "peaceable fruit of righteousness." One apostle is very bold and says, "My brethren, count it all joy when you fall into divers trials, knowing that the trying of your faith works patience" (Jas. 1:2-3). And Paul says, "We glory in tribulations also, knowing that tribulation works patience; and patience, experience; and experience, hope; and hope makes not ashamed" (Rom. 5:3-5).

Let us look at some particulars:

1. We are naturally giddy and thoughtless about the most weighty concerns. Folly is bound up in the natural heart, and our trials make us sober and thoughtful (Lam. 3:28). It is only fools that put away serious thoughts. The power of reflection chiefly distinguishes a man from a brute. The habit of reflection eminently distinguishes a wise man from a fool.

2. Affliction enables us to keep in view our latter end, by presenting to us distinctly eternity. Anything is good for us that reminds us that time is short, that life must soon close—and that all beyond is boundless, shoreless eternity. Cecil says that mankind are divided into two great sects—Timists and Eternists. Reader, to which of these do you belong?

3. I am not sure that anyone can state the mental process by which the effect is produced; but in some way trouble is almost certain to remind us of our sins. It was so in the case of Joseph's brethren. "We are verily guilty," they cried. Trouble made David say, "Remember not the sins of my youth, nor my transgressions."

4. One of the great ingredients of true piety is humility—deep and sincere humility. Both Testaments greatly commend this grace. Affliction is suited to humble us, and, if we are truly pious, it will thus do us good. Jeremiah says affliction has this effect (Lam. 3:20).

5. Affliction puts us to praying. It so affected Jonah. He was asleep in the ship, but at prayer in the whale's belly. An apostle says, "Is any afflicted, let him pray" (James 5:13). By Asaph, God says, "Call upon Me in the day of trouble: I will deliver you, and you shall glorify Me" (Ps. 50:15).

6. Affliction teaches us the vanity of this world, and weans us from it. How effectually it does this, daily experience teaches. It writes vanity of vanities on all things below the skies. It made even a great

statesman exclaim, "What shadows we are, and what shadows we pursue."

7. Affliction is a great expounder of Scripture. Luther said, "Three things make a good theologian—meditation, temptation, and prayer." And more than twenty-five hundred years before Luther, David said, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I might learn Your statutes. The law of Your mouth is better unto me than thousands of gold and silver" (Ps. 119:71-72).

8. The great object of affliction is to promote purity of heart. Paul expressly says that the Lord chastens us that "we might be partakers of His holiness" (Heb. 12:10).

9. Of course, affliction has a reclaiming effect on wanderers. "Sufferings are the only relics of the true cross, and when divine grace turns them to our good, they almost perform the miracles which blind superstition ascribes to the false one." David says, "Before I was afflicted I went astray; but now have I kept Your word." God says, "I will go and return unto My place until they acknowledge their offence, and seek My face: in their affliction they will seek Me early" (Hos. 5:15).

10. Affliction teaches us quietness and submission. It gives us the blessed temper of a weaned child. It hushes our perturbations. It teaches us that God will have His way. O yes,—

"These weary hours will not be lost,
These days of misery,
These nights of darkness, tempest tossed—
Can I but turn to Thee;
With secret labor to sustain
In patience every blow,
To gather fortitude from pain,
And holiness from woe."

11. Sanctified affliction leads us to trust in God. It strengthens our faith, and faith is a great grace. "As gold answers all things, so faith gives the soul propriety in all the rich consolations of the gospel, in all the promises of life and salvation, in all needful blessings; it draws virtue from Christ to strengthen itself, and all other graces." It sings:

"My times are in Your hand!
Many or few my days,
I leave with Thee—this only pray,
That by Your grace I, every day
Devoting to Your praise, May ready be
To welcome You,
Whene'er You come to set my spirit free."

12. In like manner, affliction improves all our holy principles. Leighton says, "Those graces that would possibly grow heavy and unwieldy by too much ease, are held in breath, and increase their activity and strength by conflict. Divine grace, even in the heart of weak and sinful men, is an invincible thing. Drown it in the waters of adversity, it rises more beautiful, as not being drowned indeed, but only washed; throw it into the furnace of fiery trials, it comes out purer, and loses nothing but the dross, which our corrupt nature mixes with it." O, it is a great thing to be a Christian, tried and taught and trained for war and glory—for war on earth and for glory beyond the skies.

"There the saints like suns are radiant,
Like the sun at dawn they glow;
Crowned victors after conflict,
All their joys together flow;
And secure they count the battles
Where they fought the prostrate foe."

MONERGISM BOOKS

Balm for Wounded Spiritse by William S. Plumer, Copyright ©
2020

All rights reserved under International and Pan-American Copyright Conventions. By payment of the required fees, you have been granted the non-exclusive, non-transferable right to access and read the text of this e-book on-screen. No part of this text may be reproduced, transmitted, downloaded, decompiled, reverse engineered, or stored in or introduced into any information storage and retrieval system, in any form or by any means, whether electronic or mechanical, now known or hereinafter invented, without the express written permission of Monergism Books.

ePub, .mobi & .pdf Editions May 2020. Requests for information should be addressed to: Monergism Books, PO Box 491, West Linn, OR 97068