

# Beauty for Ashes: Part 2: The Remedy for Heart Wanderings

by G.D. Watson

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of great self-abasement, determination, looking to Jesus, and perseverance in overcoming heart wanderings and cultivating a deeper relationship with God.*

**Scripture:** Hosea 14:4, Micah 7:7, John 14:26, Romans 8:14, 2 Corinthians 12:9, Galatians 5:16, Ephesians 4:30, Philippians 3:13, Colossians 3:2, 1 Thessalonians 5:19

**Topics:** "Spiritual Growth", "Heart Renewal"

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## Description

G.D. Watson preaches about remedies for heart wanderings, emphasizing the importance of great self-abasement before God, determination to get right at any cost, looking to Jesus alone for deliverance and comfort, never yielding to discouragement, constant sorrow for sin, making failures occasions for higher ascent, self-denial, spiritual industry, perseverance, independent obedience to God, keeping the mind stayed upon God and His kingdom, and cultivating intimate communion with the Holy Spirit.

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## Transcript

I. GREAT SELF-ABASEMENT -- I mention, as the first remedy for heart wanderings, great self-abasement before God; that the evil which the soul has fallen into is to be squarely faced and acknowledged without palliation, or excuse, or self-defense; that self must be utterly dethroned; that God must be honored; that His truth must be magnified at the expense of self-annihilation. It is a great gift from God that any backslider will have the grace to repent and confess and return to Jesus; but for this divine gift which God puts in the heart of the wanderer the soul would never return to Him. The gift of repentance is just as truly divine and a token of God's favor as the gift of the Holy Ghost. It takes grace to acknowledge our faults, to turn against ourselves and to show ourselves no quarter.

II. DETERMINATION TO GET RIGHT AT ANY COST -- Another remedy is a fixed determination to get right with God and with our fellows at any cost. We are going to the Judgment Day, and we need to have a Judgment-Day righteousness in our souls here. This determination to get right may involve only an apology to a little child, or a friend, or the confession of a mistake; it may involve great restitution; it may involve a loss of wealth, and what the world calls honor and reputation; it may involve the loss of friends; it may involve abject poverty, going to the State prison, or banishment; it may involve sufferings which may tear the heart into a thousand tatters and melt the eye with grief; but if it involves everything the imagination can conceive, the loss and pain themselves are infinitely better than to have the frown of God

and the flames of hell. This world, and even the Church, is often a poor judge of human character. Many who are esteemed to be great and good may spend eternity in hell; and many who have died in prison and on the block, and been cursed as the vilest of wretches, will be found in eternity to have so gotten right with God that they will stand with the angels in bliss. God alone knows who really love Him; He alone can judge His creatures. When the soul seeks nothing in the universe but the smile of God, and fears nothing in the universe but offending Him, it will gladly consent to pay any price to get perfectly right with Him.

III. LOOKING TO JESUS ALONE FOR DELIVERANCE AND COMFORT -- Next to this fixed determination to get right is the steady, constant looking to Jesus alone for all deliverance and comfort. The soul never knows in how many ways it leans on creatures for comfort, until it is so situated as to be utterly denied creature consolation; and then it sees that in Jesus there is a sufficiency for all its needs. It takes an almost inexpressible degree of mortification to get the soul to where it seeks its happiness only from God. The infinite love and compassion of Jesus stretches out before the soul into an ever-widening ocean, in proportion to the felt need of the soul. In times of trouble and distress and loneliness, we only damage ourselves and delay God's work by seeking sympathy and comfort from one another. God is our best Friend; and although we have sinned against Him immeasurably, and grieved His Spirit with many a blemish and sin, and wounded His tender love infinitely beyond our conception, yet He is always the first to forgive. We may think of the most extravagant compassion from any earthly relation, of father, mother, sister, brother, husband, wife, or friend; we may think of the charity of good people, of sanctified people, of the very best of saints and then ascend up to that immense charity which the angels in heaven have, and think of all the compassion of all the saints, through all their bright ages of love; and yet millions of miles out and beyond the farthest limits of all these loves and compassions, there stretches away the boundless, inconceivable compassion of Jesus toward the soul that has grievously sinned against Him.

There's a wideness in God's mercy

Like the wideness of the sea;

There's a kindness in His justice

Which is more than liberty.

There is no place where earth's sorrows

Are more felt than up in heaven;

There is no place where earth's failings

Have such kindly judgments given.

For the love of God is broader

Than the measure of man's mind;

And the heart of the Eternal

Is most wonderfully kind.

Pining souls, come nearer Jesus,

And, oh, come not doubting thus;

But with faith that trusts more bravely

His huge tenderness for us.

The most marvelous promises in the Bible are offered to souls who have wandered from God, if they will return. The Lord says He is "married to the backslider"; He represents Himself as bending with a mourning heart over souls that have wandered into sin, by saying: "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim (Hosea 11:8) "Return unto me, and I will return unto you, saith the Lord of hosts" (Malachi 3:7). "I will heal their backsliding, I will love them freely ... I will be as the dew unto Israel: he shall grow as the lily ... his branches shall spread, and his beauty shall be as the olive tree, and his smell as Lebanon" (Hosea 14:4-6). The soul must fix its gaze for deliverance and restoration and comfort alone on Jesus. It may receive much consolation, encouragement and help from the Church and loved ones and the saints; but it should not expect anything, except from God. This is the surest and shortest road to solid comfort.

IV. DETERMINATION NEVER TO YIELD TO DISCOURAGEMENT -- Another remedy is a fixed determination never to yield to discouragement. However huge the trial, however cloudy the sky, the soul must settle it that all discouragement is from the Devil, and is always injurious. Faber says, in speaking of how to view our faults, that discouragement necessarily brings with it a greediness for consolation. The more we are discouraged, the more we fly to something that will solace and soothe us; and this being in a hurry to get comfort will bring back a self-life again into everything and unnerve us for the struggle toward thorough mortification. He says, again, that "share in our faults must be wiped out by a cheerful, hopeful sorrow, which rests the case entirely in the will of God; and that we are to regard all our failures with a quiet sinking into God." The psalmist says: "Why art thou cast down, o my soul? and why art thou disquieted within me? hope thou in God: for I shall yet praise him." Discouragement is the very opposite of presumption. If Satan has tempted the soul in presumption, he then opens the artillery of discouragement; and thus he attacks the soul, not only to make it sin, but with the counterpart to keep it in sin. In every emergency in Christian conflict, hopefulness is the open door to victory. Millions of saints in heaven can very well remember when they were passing through the identical trials of temptations and repentances which are now taking place in human souls, and could they but speak to us, they could give us such a transcript of their lives as would, in many cases, exactly fit us.

V. A CONSTANT SORROW FOR SIN -- Another remedy is to cultivate a feeling of constant sorrow for sin. There are two kinds of sorrow for sin; one works death, the other life. After the elements of guilt and depravity and remorse have been entirely purged away, there should be a deep tenderness of pervading, thoughtful sorrow for sin. Paul had this constant sorrow for having persecuted the saints. It did not in the least weigh him down, but put wings to his devotion. And although Jesus knew no sin in Himself, yet, in taking upon Himself the sin of the world, He spent His life in a continual sorrow for sin. It lay upon His heart as an afflicted child lies upon its mother's breast. Faber says that "the sorrow for sin was ever in the soul of Jesus, even amid the fires of His beatific vision." It was in Him as a lifelong, quiet, supernatural fountain of love, and argues that this same sorrow in us is our safeguard from wanderings. Sorrow for sin as a fixed fact in the soul is the only parallel in our lives for the constant sorrow that Jesus had for the world. It consists in a growing hatred of sin, and a growing sensitiveness of the conscience as to what sin is. As we gaze upon the refulgent glory of God, it strengthens our vision to more clearly detect what is imperfect and unworthy. Abiding sorrow for sin will give no resting-place for the self-life to put its root. We grow in a divine sadness, but with such humility and faith that it does not allow of disquietude. True sorrow

for sin as a fixed grace in the soul is affectionate more than self-incriminating. It is a quiet fountain of tenderness, which inclines to prayer; and though it is a sorrow, it is at the same time a supernatural sweetness. This very grief for offending God draws the soul closer to God. This is the principle Jesus referred to when He said that those who had much forgiven would love much. It lives by the fountain of Jesus' blood; it weeps silent tears; it embraces the compassion of God with an inexpressible longing. This affectionate sorrow for sin delivers the soul from many spiritual dangers; it throws a tenderness into the whole character; it makes us deep and flexible to the least touch of God; it takes out all our harshness; it makes us charitable toward all others. Constant sorrow for sin keeps the heart melted, so that there is not an ache or a calamity in one of Christ's members which does not awaken our sympathy and make us more keenly alive to the dangers of this world and the advantages of being in heaven.

VI. MAKE FAILURES THE OCCASIONS FOR HIGHER ASCENT -- Another remedial step is a fixed determination to make all our failures the occasions for a higher ascent in grace. It may sound like a paradox -- but the spiritual life is full of paradoxes -- that we are to make our falls stepping-stones to our ascensions into greater altitudes of grace. This has been done in tens of thousands of lives. It has happened that those who have suffered the greatest declensions of grace, being thoroughly aroused, girded themselves with such a spirit of mortification and heroic faith that, as St. Paul intimates, they "revenge themselves" by a self-oblation and a closer cleaving to God; which they would never have done but for their failures. This is the best way to be avenged on the Devil for all his malice and damage to us. It is in this way that God can make absolutely all things in heaven, earth or hell, in success or failure -- all things -- work together for our good. This is the way the Holy Ghost led Samson when he was inspired to pray that he might be avenged on the Philistines for the loss of his two eyes. God heard his prayer, and enabled him to slay more of the Lord's enemies in his death than in his life; so that his great calamity, and even his sin in revealing the Lord's secret, was made a stepping-stone to perhaps a greater victory than he otherwise might have achieved. But it must be remembered that this greater victory was through the condition of his perfect humiliation and repentance. It is only when the heart turns in perfect loyalty of love to God that the Holy Ghost makes everything work for its own good. Let us determine to make every fault, every blemish, every mistake in our lives a spur to more humility and closer walk with God. This is the most divine use we can make of them.

VII. SELF-DENIAL -- Another remedy against backsliding is self-denial. This is the very essence of all spiritual victory. Just as self-indulgence grows on us in a thousand imperceptible ways, so self-denial should encircle our entire lives. The doctrine of fasting in connection with prayer is not only not much practiced, but even some holiness writers have written against fasting; but if the examples of all the saints in the Scriptures and in the history of the Church are worth anything we see that they reached their highest degree of spiritual strength through fasting, abstinence and self-denial in the bodily appetites, in mental pleasures, in social ease and of all worldly gratifications. One writer has inquired: "Who ever saw a real fat, overfed person noted for deep spirituality?" Tens of thousands of Christians are constantly eating too much, talking too much, gratifying their whims and their pleasures in such measure as to grieve the Holy Ghost and lay foundations of much secret sin, if not terrible outward falls. Luxurious ease and self-indulgence are the \*ratsbane in the lives of thousands of American Christians.\*(Rat poison, especially arsenic trioxide [from Rat + Bane] --Am. Herit. Dict.) I have come to believe that the doctrine against fasting is a delusion of the Devil. In ages gone by, asceticism went to extremes; but in this age, it is sadly rare to find true, heroic self-denial. St. Peter tells us that we are to "arm ourselves with the principle of self-denial." This principle of self-denial is to extend to the use of our senses, guarding our eyes, our words, our manners, our social behavior and our plain and modest attire -all extravagance in any direction

that would give the body or the intellect power over the interior spirit. If we look upon self-denial as a hard, irksome thing, over which our nature whimpers and whines, it shows we have not yet entered the real crucifixion of self. When we pass certain points in grace, self-denial will have a secret joy and heavenly sweetness attending it which far exceeds in peace and joy all the over-indulgence of nature. When we break down on self-denial, we drift in our spiritual life.

VIII. SPIRITUAL INDUSTRY -- Another safeguard is spiritual industry. Perhaps there is no greater or more incorrigible vice in religious lives than spiritual laziness. It is a sort of omnipresent evil, like a satanic gravitation, that pervades every atom of life and pulls everything toward a center of idle repose. Religious laziness is the moth of Christian life. It eats up the garments of spiritual experience; and when we attempt to clothe ourselves for real conflict, we find our garments crumbling to pieces, having been eaten through with the insidious moth of idleness. How much time have we lost in our lives by late sleeping, lounging, gadding, useless visitations and long and worthless conversation! How much of our time has been more than wasted! Let us heartily repent, and set ourselves like a flint against this demon of idleness; let us rise earlier and spend more time in prayer, in reading spiritual books, doing good works of every kind; let us have a righteous hatred of everything slovenly and slouchy and silly. Let us deeply resolve to be always industrious. Wesley's motto was, "Never be unemployed, and never be triflingly employed." St. Alphonso vowed that he would never knowingly waste a moment. We can always find something to do in reading, or writing, or praying, or conversing to a definite spiritual end, or attending all our ordinary work in a spirit of meditation. Many think that a life of great spiritual industry would prove tiresome; but the opposite is the case. When the mind is always occupied with something divine or useful, it brings a restful and sweet quietness in the life which nothing else can do, and also takes the hurry and impetuosity out of the soul. Lazy people are the ones who have to run to catch a train. Idle people, who work by fits and spurts, are always tired; and for every half-hour's work they want two hours' rest. Preachers who preach one sermon a week complain of sore throats and want long summer vacations; while those who are filled with holy love preach every night with a clear voice, and make a recreation out of conventions and camp meetings. We must not only be industrious, but be so in spiritual things, or we decline in grace.

IX. PERSEVERANCE -- The old fashion of virtue perseverance is a good medicine to keep all hearts from wandering. Perseverance is the backbone of spiritual life, out of which grow the ribs of all other virtues. Perseverance is the cure for those souls whose experience consists in spasmodic blessings. There is a good deal of superstition in the lives of most Christians. They rely upon some instantaneous blessing which they receive in a crisis of prayer, and then expect that blessing to run through life, like a sort of wound-up machine. With them life consists of great droughts, with intermittent freshets. The droughts kill all their crops, and the great, instantaneous freshets wash away their fences and cut great trenches in their land. Could these souls once get the true idea of constant, unvarying perseverance, it would serve like a divine inundation, which gently waters the ground without washing the seed out. Perseverance is the remedy in seasons of great discouragement and temptation and loneliness: Whatever your failure has been -- though all things in heaven and earth seem against you; though your difficulties seem insurmountable; though your falls have been so numerous as to wear out the patience of your best friends and exhaust the charity of great saints; though every virtue seems to have left your soul -- yet if you have perseverance, the omnipotent God will lay hold upon that single disposition of your will and pull you through to everlasting victory. God will always pull us through, -- if we have enough fiber in our being to endure the pull. God takes delight in doing things for us that other people despaired of ever seeing done. You will find thousands of saints in heaven who have said, with Micah, "I will look unto the Lord; I will wait for the God of my salvation: my God will hear me. Rejoice not against me, O mine enemy: when I fall, I

shall arise; when I sit in darkness, the Lord shall be a light unto me. I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against him, until he plead my cause, and execute judgment for me: he will bring me forth to the light, and I shall behold his righteousness" (Micah 7:7-9). Perseverance is the axletree on which the sphere of a Christian life revolves.

X. INDEPENDENT OBEDIENCE TO GOD -- Independent obedience to God is another remedy for heart wanderings, because it causes toughness to the moral fiber. Thousands have waned in their spiritual life because they limited their obedience to the mere standard of other Christians, or to the conservative opinions of other saints. God never duplicates the spiritual life in any two persons, and everyone who walks with Him will be called upon to say and do and experience things somewhat unlike them, or any other person.

To save His children from aping each other, He will resort to terrific methods of separating and individualizing them; for He is determined that they shall obey Him, and not each other. There is a realm of Christian counsel and uniformity of faith and practice; yet, within this range, the Holy Ghost ordains that all who are made perfect shall follow in an individual orbit. No saint perfectly obeyed God in the world that did not have to say things and do things that nobody else on earth exactly agreed with.

If you perfectly obey God, you will have to do some things outside of the judgment or tastes or fancies of your best friends. Nobody on earth could have been found to sanction the offering up of Isaac. Joseph's family did not agree with the imprudence of his dreams. If Paul had consulted the eleven apostles, he never would have done the things he did. Daniel went against the advice of all the old, sober heads in refusing the king's meat and wine. Perfect obedience must be independent, calm, settled and fearless.

Some years ago, I knew a minister who felt a gentle impression from the Spirit to anoint the sick and pray for them and to teach divine healing. He allowed a conservative spirit, and the influence of some holy men who had some prejudice against divine healing, to hold him back. In after years he discovered that this failure of independent obedience on that point had weakened his faith and obedience on other lines; and, after much chastisement from God, he vowed everlasting and independent and fearless obedience on all lines where the will of God was intimated to him.

How many thousands of souls have weakened in faith by not obeying God on some point, great or small, just because it did not meet the sanction of the circle of friends in which they moved! I do not wonder that the old writers in the Church called prudence a "diabolical virtue," when they saw how many souls it hindered. There is a divine prudence which has lightning in its eye and heroism in its step and courage in its features and is always sanctioned by the outcome of God's providences.

He that makes a path in the air for all the birds and a channel in the earth for all the streams of water has ordained the line of obedience for each and every child of His; and if we yield ourselves up in boundless humility and persevering prayer and utter abandonment to the Holy Ghost, He will lead us along His line; and He will never lead another soul to take just the track He gives us. The fear of fanaticism has prevented thousands from independent obedience. Some may ask, "How shall I know that I am not going into fanaticism under the delusion of obedience?"

If, on any line of obedience, however singular it may be to others, you have a lowly spirit, a sweet and tender flow of love, an eye single to pleasing God and not yourself, and a boundless charity for others who do not follow your example, you may know that you are led of God. But if, on any individual leading, you feel an impetuous, hasty, harsh and uncharitable disposition -- if you feel something within you that seems

to push you in a hurry, or makes you denunciatory of others, or makes you want to force others to do as you do -- then you may know it is the Devil. It is impossible to be too independent and all-fearless as long as the soul is kept in an ocean of lowly, tender and disinterested love.

XI. KEEP THE MIND STAYED UPON GOD AND HIS KINGDOM -- Another remedy for weak and flagging obedience is to keep the mind stayed on God and the things of His kingdom. There can be no greater safety in the spirit-life, to keep out the ingress of evil things, than for the mind to be always in a state of divine recollection and meditation. The intellect cannot do this of its own power; but if the spirit-nature is possessed by the Holy Ghost, then the inner spirit, uniting itself to the intellect, can keep it almost constantly on God or His attributes, or the operations of His grace, or the mysteries of His providence, or the revelations of His Word.

Nothing can be more dangerous than sinful wanderings of thought. As all outward sin must necessarily be committed first in the mind, so, on the other hand, all enlargements of grace, all the altitudes of devotion or progress in experience must first take place in a spiritual thinking of the mind. Our thoughts are architects, which fashion all the bright, glittering castles of grace in which we find our true habitation in the kingdom of God. We should be careful not to think too much of the past.

About the only good thinking of the past can do for us is to serve for the deepening of our humility over its sinfulness, and the widening of our thankfulness because of the overwhelming mercies from the Lord. But in the fullness of the Spirit, we are not to think of the past in such a way as to be disheartened, or to pine over its loss, or to be entangled with it; we are to be detached from all things in the past, as a bird may be supposed to be detached from last year's nest, which it flies by, unheeding its empty and dilapidated state, because its whole nature is filled with the glory of the present summer.

We are not to expect some magic wand to pass over our heads, which will compel us to high and divine thoughts; but we must form a fixed habit of keeping the mind on the things of God. We are to keep Christ in the mind, and let our imaginations fly away to Him in Paradise. We are to think of the traits of His character; of His relation to the Father and Holy Spirit; think of what God is now doing for us; think of the saints and angels in heaven; think of the divine presence as an all-pervading atmosphere; think of the coming of Jesus and the things of His millennial kingdom; think of thousands of things pertaining to our future in the heavenly world, until the whole of life becomes an unbroken, calm, sweet vision of the supernatural world and supernatural beings.

This habit of deep, divine thoughtfulness will work wonderful effects in our lives. It will put a slow, measured gentleness in our words and manners; it will shut off everything loud and boisterous, and rash and impatient; it will keep our inner senses opened to the whispers of the Holy Ghost or the touch of our guardian angel; it will make prayer easy at any time of the day; it will wean us from the visible and sensuous things of the world; it will make God and heaven bright realities to us; it will put a calmness in our features, a sweetness in our expressions and a delicate polish in the actions of the soul.

Our thoughts make up the overwhelming part of our lives; what we think, we are, or else will soon become. So let us determine to keep our mind open to all the domes of celestial things. Let us go to sleep every night thinking of God or Jesus, and wake up every morning with the thought of God in our mind. This can be done, and is the safeguard against the entrance of evil things; for even to the most diligent in this direction there will still be enough mental lapses and evil suggestions injected by demons to form a daily trial and to drive us to prayer. The apostle speaks of "casting down imaginations ... and bringing into

captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ."

Appropriate to this head, I will quote some verses from Faber:

How shalt thou bear the cross that now

So dread a weight appears?

Keep quietly to God, and think

Upon the eternal years.

Thyself unbraiding is a snare,

Though meekness it appears;

More humbling is it far to thee

To face the eternal years.

Brave quiet is the thing for thee,

Chiding thy scrupulous fears!

Learn to be real, from the thoughts

Of the eternal years.

Bear gently, suffer like a child,

Nor be ashamed of tears;

Kiss the sweet cross, in thy heart

Think of the eternal years.

Pass not from flower to pretty flower;

Time flies, and judgment nears;

Go! make thy honey from the thought

Of the eternal years.

He practices all virtue well

Who his own cross reveres,

And lives in the familiar thought

Of the eternal years.

XII. CULTIVATE INTIMATE COMMUNION WITH GOD -- The climax of all remedies is to cultivate intimate communion with the Holy Spirit -- recognize the Holy Spirit as having charge of you, and of your life, and of

all your temporal and social and spiritual affairs. Behave toward the Holy Spirit as you would toward Jesus were He visibly with you. Talk to Him; make love to Him; make Him your constant companion in everything in life -- in the infinitesimally small, as in great things. Ask Him to reveal the Father and the Son to you; ask Him to show you every duty, to reveal to you things to come. Make Him your real, intimate Friend; listen to His voice; expect Him to impress you with the daily will of God. Form a habit of prompt and unquestioning obedience to His tender impressions upon your heart. Let the Holy Spirit be an invisible ocean of spotless light in which you bathe. Leave all your infirmities and sorrows or tears, and all your vicissitudes of temperament and life, into His personal power. Be always craving a deeper, stronger union with Him. Remember that perpetual progress alone will prevent retrogression. Appreciate one smile or reproof from the Holy Spirit more than all the applause of angels or men. Accept every correction and reproof that He speaks into your mind; love His rebukes infinitely more than the praises of others. Remember, it is the great work of the Holy Ghost to impart the Christ-life, to unfold the divine personalities in our spirit, and expect Him to do great things in this direction; He will work marvels if we firmly expect them. The love of God our Father, the grace of our Lord Jesus Christ, and the communion of the Holy Ghost, be with you all. Amen.

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