

Living Complaints

by J.C. Philpot

The sermon explores the experience of a living soul in its pantings and longings after God's manifested favor, highlighting the deep conviction of God's omniscience, groaning under a sense of pain, and panting after God's presence.

Scripture: John 5:44, Galatians 5:25, Philippians 2:3, James 1:11, 3 John 1:9

Topics: "Humility", "Selfish Ambition"

Description

Greek Word Studies delves into the concept of 'kenodoxia', which refers to empty conceit or vain glory, describing the pursuit of personal praise and self-promotion that lacks eternal value. This sermon emphasizes the dangers of seeking empty glory, contrasting it with humility, as seen in individuals like Diotrophes who sought preeminence over others. The Scriptures warn against selfish ambition and empty conceit, highlighting the importance of humility and considering others as more significant than oneself.

Transcript

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"Lord, all my desire is before you; and my groaning is not hidden from you. My heart pants--my strength fails me; as for the light of my eyes, it also is gone from me." Psalm 38:9-10

If I were to say, that a living soul never has desires, groanings, or pantings; that his strength never fails; and that the light of his eyes is never withdrawn, (all which things are contained in the text), I would speak not only contrary to the experience of God's people, but contrary to the express word of truth. But, on the other hand, if I were to say, that the Lord's people are always filled with desires; that they are perpetually groaning after God; that their heart is ever panting after his presence; that their strength is always failing, and the light of their eyes is continually gone, I would speak just as contrary to the teachings of God's Spirit in the hearts of God's people, and contrary to the express word of inspiration.

Change and fluctuation are stamped upon everything in nature; and change and fluctuation are stamped upon everything in experience. Spring succeeds winter, summer spring, autumn summer, and winter autumn. Day follows night, rain comes after drought, and drought succeeds rain. Moons wax and wane; the tides of the ocean ebb and flow. Man is born a babe, grows up a child, becomes a youth, and finally

dies. Thus, change and fluctuation are stamped universally upon nature. And so, in the kingdom of grace--change and fluctuation are perpetually going on; as we read, "Because they have no changes, therefore they fear not God." (Psalm 45:19.)

The Psalms are a manual of Christian experience. In them we see the ebbings and flowings, the changes and fluctuations of living souls; and in them, so far as the Lord may have taught us, do we find from time to time our own experience traced out by the finger of the Spirit.

The Lord's people are very subject to carnality and darkness, to hardness, deadness, barrenness, and lukewarmness; and sometimes there seems to be only just enough life in their souls as to feel these things, and groan under them. Under these feelings, therefore, they cry to the Lord; they cannot bear that carnality and darkness, barrenness and death, which seem to have taken possession of them. They come with these burdens to the throne of grace, beseeching the Lord to revive his work in their hearts.

And how does the Lord answer their prayer? For the most part, not in the way which they expect. He answers them by some heavy affliction, some stroke in providence, or some stroke in grace, which falls very heavily upon them; but the effect is, to stir up their souls, to make them more earnest to thus remove that darkness, deadness, and barrenness under which they have been previously groaning.

David, in this Psalm, is pouring out the feelings of his soul before God; he is lying under a sense of God's displeasure; his sins are brought to view; his iniquities are discovered in all their loathsome and horrible character; his heart is bowed down within him under a discovery of the corruptions of his fallen nature. He cries, "O Lord, do not rebuke me in your anger or discipline me in your wrath. For your arrows have pierced me, and your hand has come down upon me. Because of your wrath there is no health in my body; my bones have no soundness because of my sin. My guilt has overwhelmed me like a burden too heavy to bear. My wounds fester and are loathsome because of my sinful folly. I am bowed down and brought very low; all day long I go about mourning. My back is filled with searing pain; there is no health in my body. I am feeble and utterly crushed; I groan in anguish of heart." Psalm 38:1-8. Here we have the experience of a living soul when sin is laid upon the conscience; when its iniquities are opened up in the light and life of the Spirit's teachings, and it sinks down before God under a feeling sense of its wretchedness and ruin.

But is no other feeling there than of shame, guilt, and sorrow? Are no other sensations alive in the heart than self-loathing and self-aborrence on account of manifested iniquity? Here is the grand distinction between the sorrow of the world that works death, and the sorrow of God's people that works unto life. In carnal, earthly sorrow there is no crying unto the Lord, no panting after his manifested presence, no desires after the light of his countenance; no movings, no breakings, no meltings of heart at his blessed feet--but a dark cloud of sorrow takes possession of the mind, and through this dark cloud no gleam of light breaks. But it is not so where there is the light and life of God in the heart. There, however dark the cloud may be that rests over it, there is divine life in the soul, which heaves up below this overlying load, struggles underneath this burden that presses it down, and cannot be satisfied without some manifestation of the Lord's presence and favor.

This we see in the words of the text. We find David not merely bowed down with a sense of sin and shame, not merely troubled and distressed on account of the workings of inward corruption, and the bringing to light of the hidden evils of his heart; but in the midst of these burdens there is a cry and sigh in his soul that the Lord would appear to and for him--"Lord," he says, "all my desire is before you; and my

groaning is not hidden from you. My heart pants--my strength fails me; as for the light of my eyes, it also is gone from me."

These words then, with God's blessing, I shall take up in the order that they lie before me; and endeavor from them to trace out something of the experience of a living soul in its pantings and longings after God's manifested favor.

I. One strong mark of a quickened man is this--the deep conviction which ever dwells in his conscience, that he is living under the eye of an all-seeing God. "Lord, all my desire is before you." We do not find this deep-seated conviction in the heart of any but those whom the finger of God has touched. Man may naturally recognize an overruling and all-seeing Providence; but it is not deeply rooted in his conscience; he does not live under a feeling sense that the eye of God is upon him. There is no fear of the Lord in his bosom--that "fountain of life to depart from the snares of death." But wherever the Lord shines into the soul, he there raises up, by the light of heavenly teaching, this conviction, which he ever maintains, and which is rather a growing than a decreasing feeling--"God sees me!" This we find in the words before us. "Lord, all my desire is before you." As though David thus appealed to the heart-searching God--"Lord, you can read my heart; Lord, there is not a desire in my soul which your eye does not behold; Lord, there is not a feeling within me that your omniscient eye does not see. Every thought of my heart, every desire of my soul, every feeling in my conscience--all are so open before your heart-searching eye, that I need not tell you what I have been, what I am, and what I desire to be."

Such is the feeling of every living soul in which the Spirit of God dwells. He gives to that soul such a deep sense of God's omniscience and omnipresence, that it knows the eye of God is ever looking into the depths of the heart.

But what were these desires? "Lord," he says, "all my desire is before you." There were then certain desires that were working in David's soul, that were springing up from the bottom of his heart. These desires are such as will be found, more or less, in all living souls.

1. One desire was, for the Lord's manifested favor. David at this time was laboring under a sense of guilt; the corruptions of his heart were laid open and bare; the Lord was manifesting his solemn displeasure against his iniquities; and he was bowed down greatly by a sense of sin upon his conscience. The blessed Spirit raised up in his soul, under these heavy loads, a desire for God's manifested favor. And is not this the feeling of every living soul--earnest breathings after God's manifested favor and mercy? It will not satisfy him to see these things merely in God's word; it will not content him to hear them explained from the mouths of ministers; it will not satisfy him to hear them spoken of as felt in the hearts of God's people. He desires to have a sense of this manifested favor imparted to his own bosom, that it may come powerfully into his own soul that he may receive some sweet testimony of the mercy of God by the shedding abroad of that divine favor in his own heart. He desires thus to have God's mercy manifested to his soul by the discovery of his personal loving-kindness to him as a guilty sinner before him.

And what is all religion that does not stand in the enjoyment of this? It leaves the soul needy and naked, unless from time to time there is some discovery of God's manifested mercy and favor. And what brings us to this point? Is it not guilt, shame, and sorrow? Is it not a feeling sense of our vileness and iniquity before God? Is it not seeing and feeling that "in us, that is, in our flesh, dwells no good thing?"

2. Another desire that was then springing up in David's heart was, for the Lord's manifested presence; that presence in his bosom which makes crooked things straight and rough places plain; that presence which

had so often cheered his heart when drooping down in this valley of tears; that manifested presence, which, like the sun, illumines the soul into which it comes with its heavenly beams, and enables it still to press forward and hope to the end.

3. He desired also to experience the sweet revivings of God in his heart; that he might not be carnal, cold, dead, stupid, lifeless, barren, and unfeeling; but that there might be those gracious revivals in his soul, those divine refreshings, that heavenly dew and unction falling into his heart, whereby he would live under a feeling sense of God's manifested favor, and enjoy that love which alone can cheer the downcast spirit.

4. He desired too that the Lord would bless him from time to time with those discoveries of his saving interest in the love and blood of the Lamb, which alone can purge a guilty conscience; that he might receive the sprinkling of atoning blood upon his heart; feel Jesus to be his surety and sin-bearer; see his name cut deep upon Jesus' heart and worn upon his shoulder; look into his sympathizing bosom, and there see love engraved in living characters--characters never to be erased.

"Lord," he says, "all my desire is before you;" all the cravings of my heart, all the longings of my soul, all the heavings of my bosom; everything that passes to and fro in the secret chambers within. "All my desire is before you." You know it; you see it; for you can read my heart; there is not a single breath of living prayer in me, nor is there a going forth of a single desire, which your eye does not behold.

Now, many of the Lord's people cannot clearly read their names in the book of life; many are the doubts and fears that work in their bosom whether the Lord really has begun a work of grace upon their souls, and whether they truly are among the living family. But this thing they must know--whether at times and seasons they can lie in humility at the footstool of mercy, and appeal to a heart-searching God--"All my desire is before you." They must know whether they ever fell down in humility and brokenness of heart before the divine Majesty, and felt those living desires going out of their bosom into the ears of the Lord almighty; and whether they can, with honesty, uprightness, and godly sincerity, say to God in the language before us, "O Lord, all my desire is before you. You see my heart, and know everything that passes in my troubled breast."

If you can say that, it is a mark of life. If that has been the feeling of your heart from time to time, you find it was the same feeling that worked in the bosom of David. And God saw fit that it should be written by the finger of the Spirit, and placed upon solemn record for the consolation and encouragement of souls in similar circumstances.

II. "And my groaning is not hidden from you." What is implied in this expression, "My groaning!" Do we not groan under a sense of pain? It is the most natural expression of our feelings when we are under acute suffering. The woman in travail, the patient under the keen knife of the surgeon, the man afflicted with some painful internal disease, can only give vent to their distressing feelings by groaning. And is it not so spiritually? When the Lord's people groan, it shows there is some painful sensation experienced within them; and these painful feelings they can only express by groaning aloud before the footstool of mercy. How many things there are that cause pain in a living conscience!

1. One frequent cause of pain is, backsliding from God; and when our base backslidings are laid with guilt upon our conscience, it makes us groan. When a man sees how his covetous heart, his idolatrous nature, his adulterous eye, draws him aside on the right hand and the left, it makes him groan with internal pain. When he sees and feels what a wretch he is; how, when he has been left but five minutes to himself, immediately he has turned aside into some forbidden path; and if he has not fallen into sin, has walked

upon the very borders of temptation; it will make him groan through his internal sensations of guilt and shame before a heart-searching God.

Those who are dead in sin, or dead in a profession, know nothing of the painful sensations that are produced by a sense of the inward backslidings, idolatries, and adulteries of our deeply fallen nature. But whenever God's monitor takes up his abode in the bosom--a conscience made honest and tender in God's fear; and when that living monitor in a man's bosom goes where he goes, stays where he stays, maintains its continual watch, keeps a check-book in which it writes down every transgression of the heart, the lip, or the hand, and brings a solemn reckoning before the eyes of a heart-searching God--it will make him groan.

He will not be able to go to bed with smiles upon his face; it will so haunt him when he comes before God's footstool, that he will be compelled to sigh and groan because he has been what he has been. And thus God's monitor, whose voice never can be silenced, tells him how he has transgressed, and in how many ways he has backslidden from the Lord.

2. But people groan who have to carry hurry burdens. The very laborers, to use a common illustration, who are engaged in the arduous occupation of paving our streets, can hardly bring their mallet down without a groan, so hard is the occupation. And those who have to labor under the corruptions of their nature and the evils of their hearts, will often have to groan on account of the heavy labor that they are thus put to.

3. Groaning also implies a desire to be relieved from the pain endured; as a patient from the keen knife of the surgeon, or a woman in travail from the source of her distress. Thus groans not merely express a sense of inward suffering, but they also testify to a desire for deliverance. Remove the pain, and you remove the groaning; take away the cause, and the groans cease immediately. So that, the silent, or to speak more correctly, the speechless language of groans, signifies there is some deliverance looked for, wanted, or expected.

And do we not find this character stamped upon living groans in the 8th chapter of Romans, where the Apostle says, "We know that the whole creation groans and travails in pain together until now; and not only they, but ourselves also, who have the first-fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for the adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body." (verse 22, 23.)

And then, to show that these groanings after deliverance are not the language of nature, the Apostle traces them up to their heavenly origin. "Likewise the Spirit also helps our infirmities; for we know not what we should pray for as we ought; but the Spirit himself makes intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered." (ver. 26.) How he traces up every living groan to the power of God! It is, he says, the Spirit of God in a sinner's bosom, speaking in him, and for him, interceding in his heart before the footstool of mercy.

Some of the Lord's people are tried because their prayers are not better put together. They have "no language," they say, "to express their desires; when they fall down upon their knees before the Lord, they cannot put sentences together in good order." It is a good thing they cannot. This dove-tailed prayer suits hypocrites, and those whose religion lies on the tip of their tongue, but who know nothing of the work of the Spirit upon the heart. When sentence is nicely fitted into sentence, it suits those whose religion never sinks below their throats! But the prayers of God's people, the sighs and groans that come out of their bosom, are living testimonies that they have something more to come to the Lord with, than lip service--something more weighty to pour out before him than mere head notions and the language of

man. It is the 'feeling desires of their souls' which they are thus obliged, from deep necessity, to pour out before the footstool of mercy in broken cries.

Now David, from soul experience, knew that these groanings were not hidden from God. He knew that the Searcher of hearts, when he looked down from his sanctuary, into his bosom, saw there were groans there. Do you know it? You must know if you have these groans. No man can deceive you on this point.

Some of you, who are the Lord's people, may not have a clear testimony of it; you may not see your names clearly written in the book of life, and not be able to rejoice in the full assurance of faith. But no man can deceive you on this point, neither can you deceive yourself, whether there are not from time to time desires working in your bosom after God; whether there are not from time to time groanings in your soul under a sense of grief and shame; longings in your heart for the appearance of the Son of God. All the people in the world can never beat you out of this.

And if you have experienced something of this feeling you can say with David, "My groaning is not hidden from you." "You know how I groan by day, and how I groan by night! How when I get into bed I have groaned to you! and how when I wake in the morning I have still to groan to you! You know (I can appeal to you, for you are acquainted with all the feelings of my soul), my groanings are not hidden from you." If you can say that, in simplicity and godly sincerity, there is a mark of divine life in your soul. It was in David's heart, and it is in your heart also. And God has recorded it for the encouragement and consolation of those who know something of these things by divine teaching.

III. "My heart pants." There is something here which seems to require a little explanation. The Psalmist, or rather, the Holy Spirit by the Psalmist, brings forward a striking figure. "As the deer" (or stag) "pants after the water-brooks, so pants my soul after you, O God." (Psalm 42:1.) Now, we may fancy for a moment what is intended by that figure. Here is a poor hunted stag flying from the dogs who are fast pursuing him to tear him to pieces; he, overcome by fatigue, all gasping and panting, sees before him a river. How he longs to reach it! and how he pants with agonizing desire to bathe his limbs in that cool stream, and satiate his thirst by drinking its waters!

So spiritually. The Lord's people are often hunted up and down, as David was by Saul, "like a partridge upon the mountains." How often they are hunted by Satan, hunted by their sins! how often pursued by guilt, and how often haunted by shame! How these hell-hounds are perpetually dogging their heels! And those things make them pant after the refreshing streams of the "water of life." These exercises make them desire to drink of the brook of Siloam, and have some draught out of Bethlehem's well. Thus, the very word "pant" implies that the soul is pursued by the enemies of its peace. Being all weary, all thirsty, it longs after the water of life. Is it not so with your soul sometimes?

It is not when you are at ease, when you are settled upon your lees, when you can indulge in carnality and worldly pleasure--you are not then panting after God. But when something takes place that alarms and affrights your soul, something that pursues you as it were on the wings of the wind; and you are exercised, troubled, and distressed in your mind--then it is that you begin to pant after God.

Say we are (where we are frequently) in carnal ease, and temptation attacks us, it seems then as though we had no more power to cope with it, than the very pavement on which we tread; so dark, so dead, so stupid, so lifeless, so weak are we then.

But it is not always so with us. So far as we have the fear of God in our bosoms, there are times and seasons when there is some revival; and these revivals, for the most part, spring from the Lord bringing some affliction, trial, or temptation upon us. These things pursue us, as it were, and hunt us out of every false refuge, until, like the wounded deer, we are made to cry out and pant after those draughts of living water which alone can satiate our thirst. The effect of the painful sensations that the soul labors under is, as David says, "My heart pants."

You see a person sometimes, who has been laboring hard, how he pants, as though he could not get his breath! Is not this so in the experience of the Lord's people? When laboring under hard and heavy burdens, how their breath seems to fail them! When temptations attack them, does it not seem as though they must altogether faint and drop down? They are so overcome with labor that they pant and gasp for breath.

But what do they pant after? They pant after the Lord's manifested presence; they pant after a sense of his loving-kindness shed abroad in their soul; they pant after some sweet testimony that the Lord is their God; they pant after some views of Christ as their Savior; they pant after the application of his atoning blood, and some discovery of his preciousness and beauty to their hearts. Thus they "pant" after HIM.

The word "pant" is expressive of the most earnest and intense desire--a desire that nothing can satisfy but the Lord himself. And thus the Lord's people are distinguished from all other people that dwell upon the face of the earth--that they want the Lord himself, and none but he can satisfy their longing souls. Unless the Lord himself hears their prayer, to them it is of no value; unless the Lord himself is the author of their religion, it gives them no satisfaction; unless the Lord speaks to their souls, it removes no burden; unless the Lord smiles upon them, their trouble and sorrow are undiminished; unless the Lord whispers, they still have to struggle with doubts and fears, and all the turmoil of their troubled bosom.

So that the Lord's people are distinguished by this mark from all others--that they desire the Lord himself to be all to them, and all in them; that he may have all the glory--and they all the sweet and blessed consolations. Others can be satisfied with opinions, notions, speculations, and what they are doing for the Lord. But the people of God, seeing and feeling what they are, and being deeply convinced of their lost and ruined state by nature, must have the Lord himself to be the light of their countenance, their heavenly teacher, their blessed guide, their only Savior, their all in all here, and their all in all hereafter. After these things their hearts pant.

But is it ALWAYS so? Are there no long seasons of carnality and barrenness? when there is no desire, no longing, no hungering, no thirsting, no panting?--but only a long tract of barrenness between these fruitful fields? There are long wastes of dreary wilderness between these 'sips and tastes'--long seasons of spiritual hunger and thirst between these refreshments--long intervals in which the Lord does not appear as the light of their countenance. But, even then, the Lord's people are distinctly marked by this feature--that none but the Lord can satisfy their souls, none but the Lord can speak peace to their hearts, none but the Lord is still their salvation, none but the Lord is still their desire. And when they have him not, they seem to themselves to have no religion worth the name; and feel as destitute, needy, naked, and barren, as if they never had one testimony from the Lord, never known his presence, never basked in the beams of his love.

IV. "My strength fails." And a good thing it did. What made David's strength fail him? It was because he could not in his own strength bear up under the heavy burdens that lay upon his heart. Depend upon it, a

man will bear his burdens as long as he can--he will not give up until he is forced. Man will do all that he can to merit heaven--he will never receive superabounding grace into his heart and conscience until he has known something of the aboundings of sin. No man will ever prize salvation by the merit of Christ, until all his own merits have been scattered like chaff before the wind. No man will ever prize the manifestations of Jesus' dying love to his soul, until he is completely out of love with himself. No man will ever look up to heaven to be saved by a word from heaven, until he has first seen the depths of hell.

So it is a good thing, however painful, for a man's strength to fail him. And it is the Lord's purpose that our strength should fail us, that his strength may be made perfect in our weakness. It is a very painful point to come to in our soul's experience--to have no strength at all--to be where the Lord brings his people, as set forth Psalm 107:12; "He brought down their heart with labor--they fell down, and there was none to help." To be in that place where we must have some deliverance from God, and yet to feel unable to work it in our own souls, must needs be a painful, trying spot. To feel ourselves on the brink of hell, and to know that none but an almighty hand can pluck us thence--to sink in our minds, and know that none but God himself can raise us up and bring us safe to glory--is a very trying place.

But the Lord brings all his people there--sooner or later. He thus weans them from self-strength, self-wisdom, and self-righteousness. He breaks the arm of creature strength, that he may have the honor of laying the everlasting arms underneath the soul--he strips them of everything, that he may have the glory, and we the comfort of being clothed by him from head to foot. So that, however painful it may be to say, "My strength fails me;" it is a spot into which all the Lord's people must come--and come the more certainly and thoroughly as the corruptions of their heart are laid bare.

I doubt not there was a time with the Lord's people here, when all their strength was not completely gone--when they could make some little headway against temptation--could stand against sin--could do something to put away God's displeasure and gain his approval. But what painful lessons have they learned since then! Now they know that nothing but the power of God can keep them every moment from falling--nothing but the hand of God can hold them from running headlong into temptation--nothing but the work of God can bring forth in heart, lip, and life any one fruit or grace of the Spirit! All their strength has so completely failed them, that they have to lie as clay in the hands of the Potter--that he may make them what he would have them to be. And their desire is, to feel the heavenly fingers molding them into vessels fit for the Master's use.

"My strength fails!" I am unable to raise up one divine thought or feeling! "My strength fails me" so completely, that I can never fight against Satan, never overcome the world, never crucify the flesh, never subdue sin, never keep my heart out of temptation, nor temptation out of my heart. "My strength altogether fails me!"

But what is the EFFECT? It glorifies the Lord thereby; it makes this text sweet and precious to our heart; "Help is laid on One that is mighty." And when we can firmly believe that Jesus is our strength, then are we beginning to look up to the Lord to feel his strength made perfect in our weakness. And then we see the object and the blessedness of our own strength failing us, that we may know the power of his resurrection, and give him all the glory of our complete and everlasting salvation!

"My strength fails me." HOW does a man learn this? By having burdens put upon his back, which he cannot carry in his own power--having temptations to grapple with, which he cannot overcome--feeling corruptions working in his heart, which he cannot subdue--finding the cravings of lusts, which he cannot

deny--discovering the whole body of sin and death to be perpetually running after evil, and he unable to control it one moment! He learns it also by his thorough inability to bring into his soul any testimony from God--any one whisper from the Lord's lips--any one smile from his countenance--or any one clear and certain mark that he is savingly interested in the love and blood of the Lamb.

Thus, when he says, "My strength fails me," his strength fails him to do anything that he desires to have done in him and for him--and thus he sinks down before the footstool of mercy a ruined and helpless sinner. But is not this the very time for the Lord to appear? The Lord never appears until our strength fails! When our strength fails, he makes his strength known; when we droop, he raises; when we die, he revives; when we are cast down, he lifts up; and when all things are against us, he shows us that all are for us. Thus, it is absolutely indispensable that the Lord's people should walk in this path--that their strength should entirely fail them--that they may enter into the riches of a Savior's love and blood, and find him suitable and precious to their soul!

V. "As for the light of my eyes, it also is gone from me." There was a time when there was light with you, and others of the Lord's family. There was a time with you when you could see the truths in God's word, and even see they were all yours, and your name in the book of life. But have you not found the light of your eyes gone from you? You see the 'doctrines' as plainly as ever; but cannot feel the 'power of those doctrines'.

There was a time when you could go to God's footstool, see Jesus by the eye of faith, and have the affections of your heart flowing out unto him; could take hold of his strength, believe his word, enjoy his promises, and receive him as made unto you all that your soul desires. But have you not found since with David, "as for the light of my eyes, it is also gone from me?" It is withdrawn. You now "would see Jesus." There was a time when you saw him in every chapter; you could see him in creation, see him in providence, and see him in grace; see him in hearing; see him in prayer; see him as the Son of God standing at the right hand of the Father, interceding for your soul. But light is now gone. Have we not had often since to walk in darkness, when there was no light, unable to see our signs, or read our evidences and testimonies?

There was a time too when you had light to see the path in which you were walking, and had no doubt you were one of the living family--you could see the track in which the Lord was leading you, and believed it would land you safe in glory. Looking also on the path of providence, you saw how the Lord had appeared in this way and that way, and believed all would end well at last. But, alas, alas! a change has come over your soul. Now you have to say, "the light of my eyes is also gone from me!" You cannot see the things you once saw, believe the things you once believed, feel the things you once felt, nor enjoy the things you once enjoyed. The days of darkness are now many. "O that I were as in months past, as in the days when God preserved me; when his candle shined upon my head; and when by his light I walked through darkness." (Job 29:2, 3.)

Is this the case with you? But is your case singular? Is it not to be found in God's word? Is it not to be felt in the experience of God's saints? Are you the only child of God thus? Are you the only believer who cannot see his signs, or read his testimonies? the only living soul who is walking in darkness, and without light? the only one who has lost sweet testimonies and consolations, and mourned after those things he once enjoyed, but fears he shall never enjoy again? Was not Job? was not David? was not Jeremiah? was not Hezekiah here? Here these saints of God were, looking back upon the days that were passed, and wishing those days might once more return. Yes, the Lord himself told his disciples, that they would long

to see one day of the Son of Man. When they were near Jesus, they could look upon him by the eye of sense, as well as by the eye of faith; they could listen to the gracious words that fell from his lips, sit with him at the same table, and look upon his Person. But he was taken from them up to heaven--and then this was the feeling of their hearts, "O that we could see the Lord as once we saw him!" And this is the spot in which many of the Lord's people are. The dearest and most highly favored of the family of God are often brought to this spot, where they can only say, "the light of my eyes, it also is gone from me!"

Is their case, then, so BAD as they think? Have they not fellow travelers who are walking in the same chequered path? fellow mourners who are shedding the same solitary tear? fellow pilgrims tracking the same thorny road, sinking in the same miry clay? If they doubt it, let them read what the Holy Spirit has here recorded, and see whether the feelings of their heart and their experience are not written here as with a ray of light--"Lord, all my desire is before you." Are not these the very feelings of your heart, those of you who know what it is to sigh, cry, and mourn with David under a sense of the hiding of God's face, and the workings of your own wretched heart, full of guilt, sin, and shame? But with it all, there are blessed marks of the life of God at work in your soul. It is better for you to have some of these painful exercises, these perplexing things in your minds, than be at ease in Zion. The Lord might have left you, as he has left thousands of dead professors--at the same level, never sinking, never rising--never ebbing, never flowing--never waxing, never waning. Where they were in January, there they are in December; where they were in 1836, there they are in 1846, and there they will be, if they live, in 1856. They resemble those stone statues we see in the New Road. These have all the features of a man; the lips, the ears, the nose, and the eyes. Come by twenty years hence, you will see the old statue standing where it did--in all the rigidity of marble--a little more dirty and soiled; but still standing there just as it was twenty years ago.

Is not this the picture of a man with a name to live while dead, with the 'doctrines of grace in his head', and none of the 'power of it in his heart'? What was he twenty years ago? Just the same as he is now. Like the statue I have been describing, a little more soiled perhaps and dirty with the corruptions of the world; but just in 1846 what he was in 1826--dead then, and dead now. Is it not better to be a living man molded by the divine fingers, though perhaps rather more dwarfish than these gigantic statues, which look down so frowningly upon us from the stone-cutter's yard? Is it not better to be little and low, but alive to God, than to be one of these tall statues that have merely the outward appearance of a man?

If there is grace in our hearts, there will be more or less of these fluctuations--these movings to and fro of the divine and hidden life. But it is far better, however painful it may be, to have these perplexities and exercises, than to be settled upon our lees, and be at ease in Zion. It is these exercises that keep the soul alive. Remove them, and the man sinks into death. The water of the sea, by ebbing to and fro, is kept fresh and sweet. But shut these waters up in a dock--how stagnant they become! they lose all their freshness, and become little else than a mass of filth and corruption.

So, if you who fear God's name are left without these exercises, without the workings of the Spirit upon your heart, without these movings to and fro, without these ebbings and flowings of divine life in your soul, you would soon be like the stagnant water in the dock--without any pleadings with God in prayer, any breathings of life after him, anything that manifests you as a living monument of God's mercy!

Therefore, however painful, trying, and perplexing--however contradictory to flesh and blood and reason the path may be--yet it is far better to be a living soul, with sharp exercises, cutting temptations, severe afflictions and sorrows, than to be let alone by God--to have no painful exercises, nor pleasurable emotions--no frowns from God's face, nor smiles from his loving countenance--no tears of sorrow, nor

tears of joy--to have nothing from the Lord, but everything from self! To be left--to be left to ourselves--to our pride--to our carnality, to our wickedness!

It is far better to be one of the Lord's poor, tried, tempted family, whom he thus takes in his hand, whom he thus mysteriously and mercifully exercises--than to live as many do, without care or any fear, and never know their state before God until they drop into the burning lake!

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/jc-philpot/living-complaints/>

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