

Christ's Absences--Spiritual Experience

by John Newton

The speaker reflects on their own spiritual experience, highlighting the importance of waiting for God's presence with patience and living on his faithfulness.

Scripture: Psalm 27:14

Topics: "Spiritual Warfare", "Faithfulness Of God"

Description

John Newton reflects on his recent illness, acknowledging the paradoxical nature of his spiritual journey where he experiences both closeness to God during sickness and distance after recovery. He shares the struggle of maintaining faith and dependence on God amidst life's changes, emphasizing the need to wait patiently for God's presence and rely on His faithfulness. Newton encourages focusing on the written word for encouragement rather than comparing experiences with others, highlighting the ongoing spiritual warfare and the importance of following the path marked by the flock, despite its challenges.

Transcript

May 4, 1773

Methinks it is high time to ask you how you do, to thank you for your last letter, and to let you know, that though necessity makes me slack in writing, yet I can and do often think of you. My silence has been sometimes owing to want of leisure; and sometimes when I could have found leisure, my harp has been out of tune, and I had no heart to write. Perhaps you are ready to infer, by my sitting down to write at last, that my harp is now well tuned, and I have something extraordinary to offer: beware of thinking so, lest you should be sadly disappointed.

Should I make myself the subject, I could give you at present but a mournful ditty. I suppose you have heard I have been ill: through mercy, I am now well. But indeed I must farther tell you, that when I was sick I was well; and since the Lord has removed my illness, I have been much worse. My illness was far from violent in itself, and was greatly sweetened by a calm submissive frame the Lord gave me under it. My heart seemed more alive to him then than it has done since my cough, fever, and deafness have been removed.

Shall I give you another bit of a riddle; that, notwithstanding the many changes I pass through, I am always the same? This is the very truth: "In me, that is, in my flesh, dwelleth no good thing;" so that if sometimes my spirit is in a measure humble, lively, and dependent, it is not I am grown better than I was, but the Lord

is pleased to put forth his gracious power in my weakness; and when my heart is dry and stupid, when I can find no pleasure in waiting upon God, it is not because I am worse than I was before, but only the Lord sees it best that I should feel, as well as say, what a poor creature I am.

My heart was once like a dungeon, out of the reach of day, and always dark: the Lord by his grace has been pleased to make this dungeon a room, by putting windows in it; but I need not tell you, that though windows will transmit the daylight into a room, they cannot supply the want of it. When the day is gone, windows are of little use: when the day returns, the room is enlightened by them again. Thus, unless the Lord shines, I cannot retain to-day the light I had yesterday; and though his presence makes a delightful difference, I have no more to boast of in myself at one time than another; yet when it is dark, I am warranted to expect the return of light again.

When he is with me, all goes on pleasantly: when he withdraws, I find I can do nothing without him, I need not wonder that I find it so; for it must be so of course, if I am what I confess myself to be, a poor, helpless, sinful creature in myself. Nor need I be over-much discouraged, since the Lord has promised to help those who can do nothing without him, not those who can make a tolerable shift to help themselves. Through mercy, he does not so totally withdraw, as to leave me without any power or will to cry for his return. I hope he maintains in me at all times a desire of his presence; yet it becomes me to wait for him with patience, and to live upon his faithfulness, when I can feel nothing but evil in myself.

In your letter, after having complained of your inability, you say you converse with many who find it otherwise, who can go whenever they will to the Father of mercies with a child-like confidence, and never return without an answer--an answer of peace. If they only mean that they are favoured with an established faith, and can see that the Lord is always the same, and that their right to the blessings of the covenant is not at all affected by their unworthiness, I wish you and I had more experience of the same privilege. In general, the Lord helps me to aim at it, though I find it sometimes difficult to hold fast my confidence. But if they speak absolutely with respect to their frames, that they not only have something to support them under their changes, but meet with no changes that require such support, I must say it is well that they do not live here; if they did, they would not know how to pity us, and we should not know how to understand them. We have an enemy at **** that fights against our peace, and I know not one amongst us but often groans under the warfare. I advise you not to be troubled by what you hear of other folk's experience, but keep close to the written word, where you will meet with much to encourage you, though you often feel yourself weary and heavy laden. For my own part, I like that path best which is well beaten by the footsteps of the flock, though it is not always pleasant and strewn with flowers. In our way we find some hills, from whence we can cheerfully look about us; but we meet with deep valleys likewise, and seldom travel long upon even ground.

I am, &c.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/john-newton/christs-absences-spiritual-experience/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net