

# Difficulties of the Ministry--Intimacy With Christ

by John Newton

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*John Newton's sermon discusses the challenges of ministry and the vital relationship with Christ that sustains believers through suffering.*

**Scripture:** Psalm 46:1, Romans 5:3, 2 Corinthians 12:9, James 1:2, 1 Peter 5:6

**Topics:** "Spiritual Growth", "Perseverance"

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## Description

John Newton preaches about the necessity of enduring hardships and trials as a Christian, emphasizing that through afflictions, the power of God's grace is made manifest in our lives. He encourages the listener to embrace the challenges that come with serving in the Gospel ministry, as they are essential for gaining the experience and compassion needed to minister effectively. Newton reminds that humility is crucial for spiritual growth and usefulness, and that God's love and guidance will sustain us through the storms of life, even when we face persecution and difficulties.

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## Transcript

January 16, 1775.

Dear Sir,

The death of a near relative called me from home in December, and a fortnight's absence threw me so far behind-hand in my course, that I deferred acknowledging your letter much longer than I intended. I now thank you for it. I can sympathize with you in your troubles; yet, knowing the nature of our calling, that, by an unalterable appointment, the way to the kingdom lies through many tribulations, I ought to rejoice, rather than otherwise, that to you it is given, not only to believe, but also to suffer. If you escaped these things, whereof all the Lord's children are partakers, might not you question your adoption into his family? How could the power of grace be manifest, either to you, in you, or by you, without afflictions? How could the corruptions and devastations of the heart be checked without a cross? How could you acquire a tenderness and skill in speaking to them that are weary, without a taste of such trials as they also meet with? You could only be a hearsay witness to the truth, power, and sweetness of the precious promises, unless you have been in such a situation as to need them, and to find their suitableness and sufficiency. The Lord has given you a good desire to serve him in the Gospel, and he is now training you for that service. Many things, yea, the most important things, belonging to the Gospel ministry, are not to be

learned by books and study, but by painful experience. You must expect a variety of exercises; but two things he has promised you,--that you shall not be tried above what he will enable you to bear, and that all shall work together for your good.

We read somewhere of a conceited orator, who declaimed upon the management of war in the presence of Hannibal, and of the contempt with which Hannibal treated his performance. He deserved it; for how should a man who had never seen a field of battle be a competent judge of such a subject? Just so, were we to acquire no other knowledge of the Christian warfare than what we could derive from cool and undisturbed study, instead of coming forth as able ministers of the New Testament, and competently acquainted with the ta nohmata, with the devices, the deep-laid counsels and stratagems of Satan, we should prove but mere declaimers. But the Lord will take better care of those whom he loves and designs to honour. He will try, and permit them to be tried, in various ways. He will make them feel much in themselves, that they may know how to feel much for others, according to that beautiful and expressive line, *Haud ignara mali, miseris succurrere disco.* (Not ignorance of evil things, but suffering teaches me to succor.)

And as this previous discipline is necessary to enable us to take the field in a public capacity with courage, wisdom, and success, that we may lead and animate others in the fight, it is equally necessary for our own sakes, that we may obtain and preserve the grace of humility, which I perceive with pleasure he has taught you to set a high value upon. Indeed, we cannot value it too highly; for we can be neither comfortable, safe, nor habitually useful, without it. The root of pride lies deep in our fallen nature, and, where the Lord has given natural and acquired abilities, it would grow apace, if he did not mercifully watch over us, and suit his dispensations to keep it down. Therefore I trust he will make you willing to endure hardships, as a good soldier of Jesus Christ. May he enable you to behold him with faith holding out the prize, and saying to you, *Fear none of those things that thou shalt suffer; be thou faithful unto death, and I will give thee a crown of life.*

We sail upon a turbulent and tumultuous sea; but we are embarked on a good bottom, and in a good cause, and we have an infallible and almighty Pilot, who has the winds and weather at his command, and can silence the storm into a calm with a word whenever he pleases. We may be persecuted, but we shall not be forsaken; we may be cast down, but we cannot be destroyed. Many will thrust sore at us that we may fall, but the Lord will be our stay.

I am sorry to find you are quite alone at Cambridge; for I hoped there would be a succession of serious students to supply the place of those who are transplanted to shine as lights in the world. Yet you are not alone; for the Lord is with you, the best counsellor and the best friend. There is a strange backwardness in us (at least in me) fully to improve that gracious intimacy to which he invites us. Alas I that we so easily wander from the fountain of life to hew out cisterns for ourselves; and that we seem more attached to a few drops of his grace in our fellow creatures, than to the fulness of grace that is in himself. I think nothing gives me a more striking sense of my depravity than my perverseness and folly in this respect: yet he bears with me. and does me good continually.

I am, &c.

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