

The School of Suffering

by John Newton

God allows suffering in the lives of His children to mortify sin, manifest the nature and truth of Gospel-grace, and strengthen the graces of the spirit, ultimately preparing them for eternal life with Him.

Scripture: Romans 8:17, 2 Corinthians 12:9, Philippians 3:10, James 1:2, 1 Peter 4:12

Topics: "Suffering And Sanctification", "Gospel Grace"

Description

John Newton preaches about the purpose and benefits of suffering in the life of a believer, emphasizing the importance of enduring trials to grow in conformity to the image of Jesus, manifest Gospel-grace, and strengthen spiritual graces. He highlights how sufferings help believers to be more willing to detach from the world and long for Heaven, guiding them to find true rest and satisfaction in Christ alone. Newton encourages the listener to find comfort and hope in Jesus amidst weaknesses and unworthiness, acknowledging that growth often comes through afflictions sanctified by God.

Transcript

Long and often I have thought of writing to you; now the time is come. May the Lord help me to send a word in season! I know not how it may be with you, but He does and to Him I look to direct my thoughts accordingly. I suppose you are still in the school of the cross, learning the happy art of extracting real good out of seeming evil, and to grow tall by stooping. The flesh is a sad untoward dunce in this school; but grace makes the spirit willing to learn by suffering; yea, it cares not what it endures, so sin may be mortified, and a conformity to the image of Jesus be increased. Surely, when we see the most and the best of the Lord's children so often in heaviness, and when we consider how much He loves them, and what He has done and prepared for them, we may take it for granted that there is a need-be for their sufferings. For it would be easy to His power, and not a thousandth part of what His love intends to do for them should He make their whole life here, from the hour of their conversion to their death, a continued course of satisfaction and comfort, without anything to distress them from within or without. But were it so, should we not miss many advantages?

In the first place, we should not then be very conformable to our Head, nor be able to say, "As He was, so are we in this world." Methinks a believer would be ashamed to be so utterly unlike his Lord. What! the master always a man of sorrow and acquainted with grief, and the servant always happy and full of comfort! Jesus despised, reproached, neglected, opposed, and betrayed, and His people admired and caressed; He living in the want of all things, and they filled with abundance; He sweating blood for

anguish, and they strangers to distress! How unsuitable would these things be! How much better to be called to the honour of experiencing a measure of His sufferings! A cup was put into His hand on our account, and His love engaged Him to drink it for us. The wrath which it contained He drank wholly Himself; but He left us a little affliction to taste, that we might pledge Him, and remember how He loved us, and how much more He endured for us than He will ever call us to endure for Him.

Again, how could we, without sufferings, manifest the nature and truth of Gospel-grace! What place should we then have for patience, submission, meekness, forbearance, and a readiness to forgive, if we had nothing to try us, either from the hand of the Lord, or from the hand of men! A Christian without trials would be like a mill without wind or water; the contrivance and design of the wheel-work within would be unnoticed and unknown, without something to put it in motion from without. Nor would our graces grow, unless they were called out to exercise; the difficulties we meet with not only prove, but strengthen, the graces of the spirit. If a person were always to sit still, without making use of legs or arms, he would probably wholly lose the power of moving his limbs at last; but by walking and working he becomes strong and active. So, in a long course of ease, the powers of the new man would certainly languish; the soul would grow soft, indolent, cowardly, and faint; and therefore the Lord appoints His children such dispensations as make them strive and struggle, and pant; they must press through a crowd, swim against a stream, endure hardships, run, wrestle, and fight; and thus their strength grows in the using.

by these things, likewise, they are made more willing to leave the present world, to which we are prone to cleave too closely in our hearts when our path is very smooth. Had Israel enjoyed their former peace and prosperity in Egypt, when Moses came to invite them to Canaan, I think they would hardly have listened to him. But the Lord suffered them to be brought into great trouble and bondage, and then the news of deliverance was more welcome, yet still they were but half willing, and they carried a love to the flesh-pots of Egypt with them into the wilderness. We are like them: though we say this world is vain and sinful, we are too fond of it; and though we hope for true happiness only in Heaven, we are often well content to stay longer here. But the Lord sends afflictions one after another to quicken our desires, and to convince us that this cannot be our rest. Sometimes if you drive a bird from one branch of a tree he will hop to another a little higher, and from thence to a third; but if you continue to disturb him, he will at last take wing, and fly quite away. Thus we, when forced from one creature-comfort, perch upon another, and so on; but the Lord mercifully follows us with trials, and will not let us rest upon any; by degrees our desires take a nobler flight, and can be satisfied with nothing short of Himself; and we say, "To depart and be with Jesus is best of all!"

I trust you find the name and grace of Jesus more and more precious to you; His promises more sweet, and your hope in them more abiding; your sense of your own weakness and unworthiness daily increasing; your persuasion of his all-sufficiency, to guide, support, and comfort you, more confirmed. You owe your growth in these respects in a great measure to His blessing upon those afflictions which He has prepared for you, and sanctified to you. May you praise Him for all that is past, and trust Him for all that is to come!

I am, &c.

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