

Being a Comfort to Others

by J.R. Miller

To be a comfort to others means to be a source of strength, encouragement, and support to those around us, often through acts of kindness, empathy, and selflessness.

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 13:4

Topics: "Selflessness", "Comforting Others"

Description

J.R. Miller emphasizes the profound impact of being a comfort to others, illustrated by a soldier's selfless gratitude towards his nurse rather than seeking recognition for himself. He highlights that true heroism often lies in quiet acts of kindness and self-forgetfulness, as seen in the lives of devoted mothers and siblings. Miller points out that our character and the love we embody are crucial in providing comfort, urging that our actions should reflect the beauty of love as described in 1 Corinthians 13. He encourages believers to cultivate a spirit of kindness and graciousness, making their presence a source of comfort to those around them. Ultimately, he calls for Christians to embody Christ's love, becoming a blessing in their homes and communities.

Transcript

Just after the death of Queen Victoria, this beautiful story was told: She was visiting the wounded soldiers who had been brought back from South Africa. She was specially distressed by the suffering of one man who had been terribly hurt. "Is there nothing that I can do for you?" asked the Queen. The soldier replied, "Nothing, your Majesty, unless you would thank my nurse for her great kindness to me."

The Queen turned to the nurse, and said, with tears in her eyes, "I do thank you with all my heart, for your kindness to this poor wounded son of mine."

There was something exquisitely beautiful in the soldier's unselfish thought of the nurse who had been such a comfort to him in his sufferings. His gratitude was so great, that he sought even the Queen's honoring for her--rather than for himself.

There is a beautiful charm in such self-forgetfulness as this, such entire elimination of one's self, in thinking of others. There are those who reach this rare beauty of spirit. There are mothers who live for their children so utterly--that they seek only their good, their happiness, never asking anything for themselves, never sparing themselves any cost or sacrifice--to serve them. There is in many a home an unmarried sister who devotes herself to the comfort and good of the other members of her household with

complete unselfishness, ministering to them in countless ways, with never a thought of rest, ease, or advantage for herself. Then, outside the circle of home, where we seem to have no right to expect service of love, there are those who live to do good, to give cheer, to be a comfort to others.

There really is no higher attainment in life--than that of being a blessing to others in one's own place. Every noble-spirited young person is ambitious to live well and helpfully, to do something worth while. But not all the really heroic things bring fame in this world. One may be a hero in God's sight--and yet never hear a hurrah from any human lips.

When the country needed defenders, one boy entered the service, fought bravely, rose to honor, and returned, when the war was over, with high rank. He was greeted as a hero. His younger brother had stayed at home caring for his widowed mother and the little children--only a common farmer, without fame. But with God he was no less a hero than the other.

Then, it is not only what we DO--but even more what we ARE, that makes our lives count in their helpfulness and their capacity for giving pleasure to others. Some people are full of activity, even of eager helpfulness, and yet they are not always a comfort to their fellows. They have faults which mar the charm and the influence of their personality; they have 'dead flies in their ointment' which send forth a foul odor. They are not sweet, they lack humility, they are not really unselfish. People do not go to them with their perplexities and sorrows--there is in them something which hinders the outflow of confidence. One said, speaking of another, "He is one of the best men in the world, and is always offering his help--but somehow I could never go to him with my questions or with a sorrow." There is something in certain people's religion, which mars its beauty. If we would be a comfort to others, our lives must be rich in lovingness. A mother said of her daughter, "She makes a beautiful climate for me!" That is what we should make for the people who live near to us.

In one of his epistles, Paul speaks of certain of his friends as "men that have been a comfort unto me." He was in prison, and in his loneliness these men had cheered and strengthened him. They had been kind to him, and their kindness had comforted him.

He mentions by name three men who had specially helped him in this way. The first was Aristarchus, whom he calls "my fellow-prisoner." Perhaps he voluntarily stayed with the old minister in prison. No doubt he showed his love in many ways. Someone has defined a friend as "the person who comes in--when all the world has gone out." That is what Aristarchus had been to Paul.

Another who had been a comfort to him was Mark. We are glad to have Paul write this, for many years before Mark had failed him, and the apostle would not trust him again. It is pleasant to know that Mark lived long enough and well enough--to win again his old friend's confidence and affection.

There is another name in this list of honor, "Jesus who is called Justus." Not a hint is given of the way he had been a comfort to the apostle. Perhaps he had just been kind to him, doing nothing that could be written down--and yet no doubt his life was full of little gentle ministries that helped Paul more bravely and cheerfully to endure his chains. At least this man had been his friend, and just being a friend when one needs friends--is something gloriously worth while. Someone has said, "The greatest thing that a man can do for his Heavenly Father--is to be kind to some of the Father's other children."

The friends that Paul names were a comfort to him, because they sympathized with him with a sympathy that was not obtrusive, not officious, not always reminding him of his chain and prison--but that manifested

itself in quiet, unostentatious, inspiring ways. The word comfort is from a root-word which means to strengthen. It is like our noun cordial, in its old sense, something that invigorates, exhilarates; something that stimulates the circulation, making the pulses quicker, the life fuller. Paul's friends were a cordial to him, not lessening his sufferings nor lightening his burdens--but making him braver and stronger for endurance. They were a comfort to him.

Paul himself was a wonderful example of a man who was a comfort to others. What his life, with its rich fullness and its genius for friendship, must have been to those who came into personal companionship with him! What a privilege it was to his fellow-craftsmen to have him working with them at their tent-making! His presence must have made the work seem lighter and the atmosphere of the shop brighter. We do not begin to realize what it means to us--to live with certain people, to have them for friends, to drink from the fullness of their life.

One wrote of Phillips Brooks, after his death: "We did not know how much of God was walking with us!" Just so, men did not know how much of God was walking with them--when they had Paul for their companion, friend, teacher. The more closely we study his life and his words--the more do we find in him and in his teachings of love, of the delicate refinements of love, of all gentleness and kindness. The thirteenth chapter of First Corinthians is as matchless as a picture. It is like a dream in its beauty. But it was a dream which was realized in the writer's own life. "Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud or rude. Love does not demand its own way. Love is not irritable, and it keeps no record of when it has been wronged." Some people praise this wonderful picture of love--but do not think of living it. What a comfort we would be to each other--if we really lived in all our common days, the teaching of this great chapter!

Some people have love in their hearts, while in disposition, in speech, in expression, they lack lovingness. Paul teaches us not only to have a kindly heart--but a gracious manner. In his epistles he exhorts to the rarest delicacy of courtesy. Perhaps we do not give sufficient emphasis to this phase of Christian culture. We condemn lying, as well we may--but we forget that rudeness is a sin, too--as are also thoughtlessness, discourtesy, censoriousness, sharpness in speech or tone. Paul names "whatever things are lovely" among the ideal qualities of Christian character. Our religion should be beautiful, winning. We are to please others for their good, to edification.

Those who live thus gently, thoughtfully, beautifully--will always be a comfort to others with whom they live. A pastor was commending religion to a boy, expressing the hope that he would give his heart to God in his youth. "Religion is a continual joy," he said. "Look at your sister, Sarah. How much that dear girl enjoys her religion!" "Yes," drawled the boy, with frank candor, "She may enjoy her religion--but nobody else in the house enjoys it!" The boy's judgment may have been harsh and unjust--but there are professing Christians of whom it is true--that their families do not enjoy their religion! It is not sweet. It is not a comfort to people. It is critical, irritating, censorious, exacting. It was a serious condemnation of this girl's religion--that her family did not enjoy it.

A close observer has said that "Many a sister spoils her testimony in the church--by her tongue in the kitchen!" Another has said, "There are people who lead us heavenward--but stick pins in us all the way!" In a conversation overheard on a railway train, one reports catching this fragment of talk: "Yes, I suppose she's good--I know she is. But she isn't pleasant to live with." A goodness that isn't pleasant to live with--is not the kind that is most needed in this world. We may do all our duties faithfully, conscientiously, bearing our share of the burdens and cares--and yet if we are not pleasant to live with, we fail in the most essential

quality of love. An unlovely spirit, frowns and chilling looks, sharp, impatient words--outweigh the eager, painstaking service that does so much to help in practical ways. What the person IS--mars the value of what he DOES.

After all, "being pleasant to live with" is one of the final tests of Christlikeness in life. You are careful never to fail to do all the little things of duty. Your friends can never say that you are inattentive to them, that you leave undone the kindly deeds of neighborliness or even brotherliness. But if, meanwhile, you are not pleasant to live with--is there not something lacking? The ideal pious life--is one that is a comfort to others--as well as a help. It is gracious and winning in its spirit. It is a blessing to all it touches. It makes one a comfort, not only in his own home, where even his dog has a more pleasant life, because the master is a "Jesus Christian," but also in his church, among his neighbors, in the office or shop where he works. Then, withal, it makes him pleasant to live with.

This word of Paul's, really tests the Christian life of everyone of us. Are we a comfort to people? Are the boys and girls a comfort to their mothers and fathers? or do they vex them, fret them, keep them awake at night with anxiety? Are husbands and wives, a real comfort to each other? Are we a comfort to our neighbors, kindly, thoughtful, obliging, ready always to be helpful and gracious?

It has been named as the mark of a gentleman--that he never gives pain to another. An English poet called Jesus "the truest gentleman who ever breathed." He never gave pain to anyone. Love characterized him in all circumstances and experiences. Even when he was being betrayed, he was still the refined gentleman. When he was being nailed to the cross--he prayed for his executioners. Love never failed in him. He was always a comfort to others.

We as Christ's followers should be so full of his spirit, have our lives so permeated with his grace, love, and meekness, that we shall be a comfort to all men, and, above all, shall be a comfort to God!

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