

God's Slow Making of Us

by J.R. Miller

The sermon emphasizes that God is continually shaping us throughout our lives, encouraging patience and trust in His divine purpose.

Scripture: Job 23:10, Psalm 138:8, Proverbs 3:5-6, Isaiah 64:8, Jeremiah 29:11, Romans 8:28, 2 Corinthians 3:18, Ephesians 2:10, Philippians 1:6, 1 Peter 5:10

Topics: "Spiritual Growth", "Trusting God's Process"

Description

J.R. Miller emphasizes that God's work in our lives is a continuous process that begins at birth and lasts until death. He illustrates that every experience, whether joyful or painful, contributes to our development, and we should not judge our progress too harshly as we are all works in progress. Miller encourages patience with ourselves, reminding us that God has a purpose in every circumstance, even when we cannot see it. He uses the story of Joseph to illustrate that the final outcome of our lives may reveal God's goodness, even if the current chapter seems bleak. Ultimately, we are called to trust in God's love and wisdom as He shapes us into who we are meant to be.

Transcript

God does not make us all at once. The process is a long one, running through all the years of our life, however many these years may be. God begins making us when we are born into the world, and his work on us and in us goes on continuously unto the end of our days. There is never an hour when some new touch is not given to our life, some new line marked in our character. A thousand agencies and influences minister in the making of us--the mother, the father, the home, the school, the playground, the church, books, companions, friends and friendships, joys and sorrows, successes and failures, health and sickness, roses and briars--all life's circumstances and events. These things all work upon us--yet not blindly, not without guidance. Always God is on the field, and he works in and through all experiences, so that really it is he who makes us. But there is no period in all the years when we can say that God has finished making us. We are always still in process of being made.

In one of George Macdonald's books occurs this fragment of conversation. "I wonder why God made me," said Mrs. Faber, bitterly. "I'm sure I don't know where was the use of making me."

"Perhaps not much yet," replied Dorothy; "but then he isn't finished with you yet. He is making you now, and you don't like it." It would give us more patience with ourselves, if we always remembered this. We would not get so discouraged with our infirmities, imperfections, and failures--if we always kept in mind the

fact that we are not yet made, that we are only in process of being made, that God is not yet through making us. It would often help us to understand better the reasons for the hard or painful experiences that come to us. God is at work on us, making us. If we yield ourselves to his hand in quietness and confidence, letting him do what he will with us--all will be well.

At present we are not what we should be, neither are we what we shall be. The end is not yet manifest, "It does not yet appear what we shall be." It is a comfort to us, however, to know that God has a design in all his work upon us. There is nothing accidental in any of the providences that come into our life. There is a Hand that is guiding and controlling these providences, and there is a purpose running through all the events and circumstances. This purpose may not be evident to us--but there is an eye that always watches the pattern. God is always making us and fashioning us, and his thought for us is beautiful and good.

If we were never to lose this consciousness out of our mind, it would help us to trust God's heart--when we cannot see His hand. We do not need to know the reasons for the things in our life which seem strange. Faith is believing, when we cannot see, trusting that God is good and acting toward us in love--even when all things seem to prove just the reverse. If we believe that God is gracious and loves us, and that he understands what he is doing, and has a wise design in it all--that should satisfy us as well as if we could find a thousand reasons of our own for what he is doing. Job puts his faith in confident words in one of his answers, "I go east, but he is not there. I go west, but I cannot find him. I do not see him in the north, for he is hidden. I look to the south, but he is concealed. But he knows where I am going. And when he tests me, I will come out as pure as gold!" Job 23:8-10

Trial cannot harm anyone whose life is hid with Christ in God.

The great problem of living is not to escape hard and painful experiences--but in such experiences to keep the heart gentle, loving, and sweet. We can do this only by resting confidently in God's love, without doubt or fear, however terrible the trial or suffering may be.

We should never pass judgment upon unfinished work of any kind. An unripe apple is not fit to eat--but we should not therefore condemn it. It is not yet ready for eating, because God is not yet done making it. Its unripeness is the precise condition which belongs to it at its present stage. It is a phase of its career, and is fitting and good in its place. A child's piano playing may be execrable to the delicate ear of a trained musician, and yet there was a time in the history of his own musical development when he played no better, and when his friends and his teachers complimented him on his encouraging progress, seeing even in his faulty execution, the evidences of genius and the marks of improvement. We have no right to judge the work of a beginner in any art or kind of work; we should wait until he has finished what he is doing, before we pass an opinion on it. No artist will submit his picture for inspection, while in an incomplete state. Neither is it just or right for us to form opinions upon God's providences until they have been worked out to the end.

We should apply this rule to all that God is doing in us and with us. We should never mistake the processes, nor the incomplete condition for the final result. God is not yet finished with us--he still has the work in hand, unfinished. Not much that is good, worthy, or beautiful may yet have come to perfection in us. We continue to make innumerable mistakes and to stumble and fall continually. Somehow we seem never to get our lessons learned. We think we know them, that we have fully mastered them--but when we try to put them into word or act--we fail.

We think we have learned patience at last--but we have scarcely got into the thick of life's events and experiences, and begun to be tested--when our patience is gone and we speak unadvisedly or act foolishly! We think we have faith now, and that we shall not again lose confidence in any trial--but we have gone only a little way in the darkness of some new experience, when our faith fails as before. So it is with all our lessons--we seem never able to get them wrought fully into life.

But this should not discourage us. We are only learners, scholars at school, as yet. We are only children--not men. The fruit is not yet ripe. The picture is not yet painted. But if only we leave the fruit under the culture of the wise Gardener, it will in time, grow to ripeness. The picture which seems only an outline sketch at present, dimly revealing the features of the Artist's thought, at length, when finished--will win the praise of all who see it.

We should be patient with our own slow progress in the Christian life, and with the growth in us of the things that belong to Christlikeness. If only we are sincere, faithful, and diligent--we shall some day reach the mark. Others have gone on the same slow, painful way--and at length have realized all the beautiful visions of their hearts. So shall we, if we keep our faith and slack not our hand.

For the same reason, we should learn to wait for God until he makes known his purpose and will. Some of his ways seem strange to us. We cannot see love in their dark lines. Nor can we see how good can possibly come to us, out of the painful experiences through which we are passing. Again we should remember that we may not judge of any work in its processes--but should wait until we see it finished.

Take the story of Joseph, for illustration. If the narrative ended with the account of the boy carried off by the traders into Egypt, or with the account of the false accusation against him, under which he was cast into a dungeon and loaded with chains, we would see nothing beautiful in it, and could find no justification of the goodness of God in permitting such terrible wrongs to befall one of his children. But when we read the story through to the end, and find Joseph at last next to the king in power, using his power for the good of his own people and for the good of the world--then we find abundant justification of God's righteousness.

Life is full of similar experiences. We must wait for the last chapter of the book, to learn how the story ends, before we form a final opinion upon it. We must wait until the last chapter of a life is written--before we judge that God is not good and kind. Knowing God as we do, to be our Father--we may trust his love and wisdom, though we can see nothing of love or goodness in the way he deals with us!

It is a good thing to get into the heart, such a strong faith in God that we shall never for a moment doubt the outcome of any experience or combination of experiences, while we are doing his will and trusting him. This is not a world of 'chance'--there is no chance anywhere. This is not the devil's world. Our Adversary does not have his own way, without restraint, without limit. "The Lord reigns!" "My Father works hitherto--and I work." The divine Hand is active in all the affairs of the earth. God knows what he is doing with us. In all that he sends to us--joy and sorrow, success and failure, hope and fear, pleasure and pain, loss and gain--he is developing us. We have only to be loyal and faithful to him in every thought and feeling, and trustful in all experiences, and at length we shall find that in nothing has our divine Maker erred--but that he has done all things well.

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