

# The Duty of Forgetting Sorrow

by J.R. Miller

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*We should remember our sorrows as a blessing if we sweeten them with faith, hope, and love, and move forward with reverent earnestness to new duties and joys.*

**Scripture:** Psalm 30:5, Matthew 11:28

**Topics:** "Moving Forward in Faith", "Healing from Grief"

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## Description

J.R. Miller emphasizes the importance of moving beyond sorrow, acknowledging that while grief leaves lasting marks on our hearts, it should not define our lives. He illustrates that there is a way to remember our sorrows that enriches our lives, contrasting it with a morbid fixation that leads to bitterness and despair. Miller encourages believers to focus on the blessings that remain and to fulfill their duties to the living, rather than dwelling in the shadows of past grief. He uses biblical examples, such as David's response to his child's death, to illustrate the necessity of turning grief into a catalyst for service and growth. Ultimately, he calls for a perspective that looks toward the light and embraces new joys and responsibilities, rather than being consumed by loss.

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## Transcript

Sorrow makes deep scars; indeed, it writes its record ineffaceably on the heart which suffers. We really never get over our deep griefs; we are really never altogether the same after we have passed through them--as we were before.

In one sense, sorrow can never be forgotten. The cares of a long busy life may supervene--but the memory of the first deep sorrows in early youth, lives on in perpetual freshness as the little flowers live on beneath the cold snowdrifts through all the long winter. The old woman of ninety, remembers her grief and sense of loss seventy years ago, when God took her first baby out of her bosom. We never can actually forget our sorrows, nor is it meant that we should do so.

There is a way of remembering grief--that is not wrong, that is not a mark of unsubmission, and that brings rich blessing to our hearts and lives. There is a humanizing and fertilizing influence in sorrow rightly accepted, and "the memory of things precious, keeps warm the heart that once enfolded them." Recollections of losses, if sweetened by faith, hope and love--are blessings to the lives they overshadow.

Indeed, they are poor who have never suffered and have none of sorrow's marks upon them; they are poorer far who, having suffered, have forgotten their sufferings and bear in their lives no beautifying traces

of the experiences of pain through which they have passed.

Yet there is a way of remembering sorrow, which brings no blessing, no enrichment--which does not soften the heart, nor add beauty to the life. There is an unsubmitive remembering which brings no joy, which keeps the heart bitter, which shuts out the sunshine, which broods over losses and trials. Only evil can result from such memory of grief. In this sense, we ought to forget our sorrow. We certainly ought not to stop in the midst of our duties and turn aside and sit down by the graves of our losses, staying there while the tides of busy life sweep on. We should leave our sorrows behind us--while we go on reverently, faithfully and quietly in our appointed way.

There are many people, however, who have not learned this lesson; they live perpetually in the shadows of the griefs and losses of their bygone days. Nothing could be more unwholesome or more untrue to the spirit of Christian faith, than such a course. What would be said or thought of the man who should build a house for himself out of black stones, paint all the walls black, hang black curtains over the dark-stained windows, put black carpets on every floor, have only sad pictures on the walls and sad books on the shelves, and should have no lovely plants growing and no sweet flowers blooming anywhere about his home? Would we not look upon such a man with pity--as one into whose soul the outer darkness had crept, eclipsing all the beauty of life?

Yet that is just the way some people do live. They build for their souls houses just like that; they have memories that let all the bright and joyous things flow away--while they retain all the sad and bitter things! They forget the pleasant incidents and experiences, the happy hours, the days that came laden with gladness as ships come from distant shores with cargoes of spices; but there has been no painful event in all their life whose memory is not kept ever vivid. They will talk for hours of their griefs and bereavements in the past, dwelling with a strange morbid pleasure on each sad incident. They keep the old wounds ever unhealed in their hearts; they keep continually in sight pictures and reminiscences of all their lost joys--but none of the joys that are not lost; they forget all their ten thousand blessings--in the abiding recollection of the two or three sorrows that have come amid the multitudinous and unremembered joys. These people live perpetually in the shadows and glooms of their own sorrows. The darkness creeps into their souls, and all the joyous brightness passes out of their lives, until their very vision becomes so stained that they can no more even discern the glad and lovely colors in God's universe!

Few perversions of life, could be sadder than this dwelling ever in the glooms and the shadows of past griefs. It is the will of God that we should turn our eyes away from our sorrows, that we should let the dead past bury its dead--while we go on with reverent earnestness to the new duties and the new joys that await us. By standing and weeping over the grave where it is buried--we cannot get back what we have lost. When David's child was dead, he dried his tears and went at once to God's house and worshiped, saying, "Now he is dead, why should I fast? Can I bring him back again?" Instead of weeping over the grave where his dead was not, he turned all the pressure of his grief into the channels of holy living. That is the way every believer in Christ should treat his sorrows. Weeping inconsolably beside a grave, can never give back love's vanished treasure. Nor can any blessing come out of such sadness. It does not make the heart any softer; it develops no feature of Christlikeness in the life. It only embitters our present joys--and stunts the growth of all beautiful things. The graces of the heart are like flowers; they grow well only in the sunshine.

There was a mother who lost a lovely Christian daughter by death. For a long time the mother had been a consistent Christian--but when her child died--she refused to be comforted. Her pastor and other Christian

friends sought by tender sympathy to draw her thoughts away from her grief--yet all their effort was vain. She would look at nothing but her sorrow; she spent a portion of nearly every day beside the grave where her dead daughter was buried; she would listen to no words of consolation; she would not lift an eye toward the heaven into which her child had gone; she went back no more to the church, where in the days of her joy she had loved to worship; she shut out of her heart every conception of God's love and kindness--and thought of him only as the powerful Being who had torn her sweet child away from her bosom. Thus dwelling in the darkness of inconsolable grief--the joy of her religion left her. Hope's bright visions no longer cheered her, and her heart grew cold and sick with despair. She refused to leave her sorrow--and to go on to new joys and toward the glory in which for Christian faith all earth's lost things wait.

There was another mother who also lost her godly child--one of the rarest and sweetest children that God ever sent to this earth. Never was a heart more completely crushed--than was the heart of this bereft mother. Yet she did not, like the other woman, sit down in the gloom and dwell there; she did not shut out the sunshine and thrust away the blessing of comfort. She recognized her Father's hand in the grief that had fallen so heavily upon her, and bowed in sweet acquiescence to his will. She opened her heart to the glorious truth of the immortal life, and was comforted by the simple faith that her child was with Christ. She remembered, too, that she had duties to the living, and turned away from the grave where her little one slept in such security, requiring no more, any service of earthly affection, to minister to those who still lived and needed her care and love. The result was, that her life grew richer and more beautiful beneath its baptism of sore grief. She came from the deep shadow--a lovelier Christian, and her home and a whole community shared the blessing which she had found in her sorrow.

It is easy to see which of these two ways of enduring sorrow is the true one. We should forget what we have suffered. The joy set before us should shine upon our souls as the sun shines through clouds, glorifying them. We should cherish sacredly and tenderly, the memory of our Christian dead--but should train ourselves to think of them as in the home of the blessed, with Christ, safely folded--waiting for us. Thus the bright and blessed hopes of immortality, should fill us with tranquility and healthy gladness--as we move over the waves of trial.

We should remember that the blessings which have gone away--are not all that God has for us. This summer's flowers will all fade by and by, when winter's cold breath smites them--we shall not be able to find one of them in the fields or gardens during the long, cold, dreary months to come--yet we shall know all the while that God has other flowers preparing, just as fragrant and as lovely as those which have perished. Spring will come again, and under its warm breath the earth will be covered once more with floral beauty as rich as that which faded in the autumn. So the joys that have gone from our homes and our hearts--are not the only joys; God has others in store just as rich as those we have lost, and in due time he will give us these to fill our emptied hands.

One of the worst dangers of inconsolable sorrow--is that it may lead us to neglect our duty to the living--in our mourning for the dead. This we should never do. God does not desire us to give up our work, because our hearts are broken. We may not even pause long with our sorrows; we may not sit down beside the graves of our dead and linger there, cherishing our grief. "Let the dead bury their dead," said the Master, to one who wished to bury his father and then follow him; "but you come and follow me." Not even the tender offices of love, might detain him who was called to the higher service. The lesson is for all--and for all time. Duty ever presses, and we have scarcely laid our dead away out of our sight--before its earnest calls that will not be denied, are sounding in our ears.

A distinguished general related this pathetic incident of his own experience in our civil war. The general's son was an army lieutenant. An assault was in progress. The father was leading his division in a charge; as he pressed on in the field, suddenly his eye was caught by the sight of a dead army-officer lying just before him. One glance showed him it was his own son. His fatherly impulse was to stop beside the dear form, and give vent to his grief--but the duty of the moment demanded that he should press on in the charge; so, quickly placing one hot kiss on the dead lips, he hastened away, leading his command in the assault.

Ordinarily the pressure is not so intense, and we can pause longer to weep and do honor to the memory of our dead. Yet in all sorrow, the principle is the same. God does not desire us--to waste our life in tears. We are to put our grief into new energy of service. Sorrow should make us more reverent, more earnest, more useful. God's work should never be allowed to suffer--while we stop to weep. The fires must still be kept burning on the altar, and the worship must go on. The work in the household, in the school, in the store, in the field, must be taken up again--the sooner, the better. Ofttimes, indeed, the death of one in the family circle--is a divine voice calling the living to new duty. Thus, when a father dies, the mother is ordained to double responsibility; if there is a son of thoughtful age, his duty is not bitter grieving--but prompt taking up of the work that has fallen from the father's dead hands. When our friends are taken from us, our bereavement is a call, not to bitter weeping--but to new duty.

Sometimes it is care alone--which is laid down when death comes, as when a mother puts her baby away into the grave; no work drops out of the little hands for the mother to take up. But may we not then say that, since God has emptied her hands of their own care and duty, he has some other work for them to do? He has set them free from their own tasks--that with their trained skill and their enriched sympathies, they may serve others.

In a sick-room there was a little rosebush in a pot in the window. There was only one rose on the bush, and its face was turned fully toward the light. This fact was noticed and spoken of, when one said that the rose would look no other way but toward the light. Experiments had been made with it; it had been turned away from the window, its face toward the gloom of the interior--but in a little time it would resume its old position. With wonderful persistence it refused to face the darkness, and insisted on ever looking toward the light.

The flower has its lesson for us. We should never allow ourselves to face toward life's glooms; we should never sit down in the shadows of any sorrow--and let the night darken over us into the gloom of despair; we should turn our-faces away toward the light and quicken every energy for braver duty and truer, holier service. Grief should always make us better and give us new skill and power; it should make our hearts softer, our spirits kindlier, our touch more gentle; it should teach us its holy lessons, and we should learn them, and then go on with sorrow's sacred ordination upon us--to new love and better service.

It is thus, too, that lonely hearts find their sweetest, richest comfort. Sitting down to brood over our sorrows--the darkness deepens about us--and our little strength changes to weakness; but if we turn away from the gloom, and take up the tasks of comforting and helping others, the light will come again and we shall grow strong!

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