

The Office of Consoler

by J.R. Miller

The office of consoler is a sacred and blessed ministry of great usefulness and opportunity for rendering helpful service to humanity.

Scripture: Psalm 34:18, Isaiah 61:1, Matthew 5:4, John 14:27, Romans 12:15, 2 Corinthians 1:3-4, Philippians 4:13, 2 Timothy 1:7, 1 Peter 5:7, Revelation 21:4

Topics: "Following Christ's Example", "Ministry of Comfort"

Description

J.R. Miller emphasizes the sacred role of the consoler, highlighting that those gifted in comforting others attract the sorrowful like a magnet. He illustrates how Christ exemplified this ministry, healing the broken-hearted and providing hope and inspiration to those in distress. Miller encourages believers to follow Christ's example, recognizing that everyone experiences sorrow and that true comfort comes from genuine sympathy and understanding. He stresses the importance of being overcomers ourselves to effectively minister to others, and that comfort should empower and inspire rather than merely evoke pity. Ultimately, the goal of consolation is to help others find strength and blessings through their trials, guiding them towards a deeper relationship with God.

Transcript

There are some people who seem to be specially gifted for the office of comforter and consoler. The sorrowing and troubled are attracted to them--as steel filings to a magnet, or as thirsty ones to a spring of water. The paths to their doors are worn by the passing feet of many weary ones. No office among men is more sacred, or fuller of blessing; for in no other field can wider opportunity be found for rendering helpful service to sorrowing and troubled humanity.

It was to this service, in an eminent degree, that Christ was set apart. He said of himself, that the Spirit had sent him "to heal the broken-hearted." His whole ministry was one of consolation to the sorrowing. The weary and the heart-sore came to him with their burdens; the penitent crept to his feet with their confessions; mourners sought his sympathy; and, wherever he went, he carried cheer, hope and inspiration. No one who came to him with a trouble--went away uncomforted. His deep and ready sympathy, and his gentle, uplifting help--made him pre-eminently a consoler.

Those who would follow in Christ's footsteps, and repeat in their human measure his ministry of love and beneficence in this world--must strive to be sons of consolation. There is always need for this sacred ministry. Wherever one may live, there is no other human experience that one is so sure of meeting, as

sorrow. In other respects men differ--in race, in color, in social condition, in culture, in degrees of refinement, in customs and modes of life--but in one respect all are alike--all have sorrow. There are many languages spoken on the earth, and the traveler oftentimes finds himself unable to understand the word that falls upon his ear; but there is one language that he finds the same in all zones, in all conditions--the language of grief. Everywhere there are tears, telling of sadness. There is no circle in which there is not some heavy heart. We pass no day in which we do not meet with those who are oppressed with some open or secret grief.

An old clergyman once said to a company of students he was addressing, that they ought never to conduct a Christian service without some word of comfort for the troubled, for they would always have some troubled ones in their audience. Wherever we go, we come upon those who long for sympathy, and whose hearts are crying out for comfort. Therefore, those who have learned to comfort others have found a ministry of great usefulness.

It was the early prayer of Mrs. Prentiss, who has helped so many weary pilgrims heavenward:

"Oh that this heart, with grief so well acquainted,

Might be a fountain, rich and sweet and full,

For all the weary that have fallen and fainted

In life's parched desert--thirsty, sorrowful.

O Man of sorrows, teach my lips, that often

Have told the sacred story of my woe,

To speak of you until stony griefs I soften,

Until those that know you not, learn you to know."

Her prayer was answered; for of this gifted woman, after her death, it was said with great truthfulness, "Hers was in an eminent degree the blessing of those who were ready to perish. Weary, overtaxed mothers, misunderstood and unappreciated wives, servants, pale seamstresses, delicate women forced to live in an atmosphere of drunkenness and coarse brutality, widows and orphans in the bitterness of their bereavement, mothers with their tears dropping over empty cradles--to thousands of such she was a messenger from heaven."

To receive such eulogy when one's work is finished, is better than to have died amid the richest splendors of wealth, or to have had the paeans of fame sung over one's grave.

The anointing to the office of consoler, is usually an anointing of tears. Only those who have learned in God's school of experience, can be the best comforters of others. It was thus that Christ himself was prepared to be the great Comforter. It is because on earth he was tried in all points as we are, that now in heaven he is touched with the feeling of our infirmities. Even his divinity did not qualify him for sympathy; he must learn by actual human experience what sorrow is, that he might be the comforter of sorrow.

It is in the same school, that God ordinarily trains his children for this sacred office. He may not take them through bereavements (Christ did not suffer bereavements)--but there are many other kinds of suffering in

which hearts may be schooled. Some learn their lessons in early struggles with adversity, or with temptation, or with the weakness and sin of their own natures, or in disappointments, self-denials, and afflictions. Many who seem to common eyes to have escaped the sorrows of life, have yet in many ways been trained and disciplined, and their hearts chastened and softened, and cleansed of the hardness and selfishness of nature; so that they are well prepared to understand the experiences of others in struggle and sorrow, and give true and wise consolation. This is one of the rich compensations of affliction--if we endure it Christianly, we learn the preparation for one of life's most sacred ministries.

As to the manner in which this ministry of consolation may be performed--but few suggestions can be made. If the consoler's heart is prepared for it, no rules will be needed. Genuine sympathy is the basis of all true and wise comfort. We must enter into the experiences of those to whom we would minister comfort; we must understand their grief: this will make us truly sympathetic in the presence of their trouble. If we could read the secret history of those about us, who now oftentimes try our patience by their harshness of temper and disposition, we would probably find in their lives, sorrow and suffering enough to explain to us the infirmities which so mar their character.

True sympathy draws us very close to the sufferer. It also gives us that thoughtfulness, and that delicacy of feeling and touch, which make us gentle in all our treatment of grief; for no other ministry, is refinement of spirit so essential, as for that of dealing with pained or wounded hearts. A wrong touch, or a harsh word, or the quick flash of an eye, may do irreparable harm, only opening afresh, with new pain and torture, the wound it was meant to heal.

Hence, there is deep significance in the prophet's portraiture of Christ's gentleness in dealing with crushed hearts, "A bruised reed, He will not break." He never caused needless pain to the bruised heart which He meant to soothe. No touch of His was ever crude; no word of His was ever needlessly harsh. We need, in like manner, the most delicate gentleness for the offices of comfort.

We need also victorious faith, as well as gentleness, to fit us for the ministry of consolation. We cannot give what we have not ourselves to give. How can we communicate strong faith in God and in his Word--if our own hearts are full of doubts and misgivings? How can we kindle the lamps of hope and courage and joy in another's heart--where all is dark, if there be no lamps shining in our own breast?

A true comforter must know deep Christian joy, joy that springs up amid sorrows, like a sweet, fresh spring under the tides of the brackish sea. One woman wrote to another in deep grief, "The shadow of death will not always rest on your home; you will emerge from its obscurity into such a light as those who have never sorrowed, cannot know. We never know, or begin to know, the great Heart that loves us best, until we throw ourselves upon it in the hour of our despair!" This writer herself knew the joy which she foretold to her sister, now walking in the deep shadow.

One who had had sorrow--but had never gotten out into the sunshine--could not have given such comfort. Bright, radiant, victorious faith, is essential in one who would give real consolation. One who has not come as a conqueror through Christ out of affliction--but has been crushed, and still lies in the dust of defeat--cannot minister comfort to others. A vanquished soldier cannot inspire courage and hope in another who is going out to battle. We must be overcomers ourselves, if we would help others to overcome. We must be truly comforted by God--if we would comfort others.

As to the quality of the comfort itself that is ministered, it should be more than pity. Mere pity alone leaves the heart weaker than before. Wise and true comfort must give something that shall prove strength and

inspiration to the fainting spirit, and help it to rise again. It should be like the wine which angels of mercy pour into the lips of the wounded on the fields of battle to revive them. The design of comfort is not merely to help the sorrowing through their sorrow--but to help them to get from their sorrow the blessing it has for them, to take from God the message of love which the sorrow bears, and to come from the experience stronger, purer, more radiant, with more of Christ's image glowing in their face!

Wise and really helpful comfort, while it is touched by the friend's sorrow, and shares the pain--yet strives to put hope and strength into the sad heart, that recognizing God's hand, and submitting to it--it may yet take the blessing which the dark-robed messenger brings. In no experience of life, do most people need wise friendship and firm guidance, more than in their times of trouble. There are dangerous shoals skirting all the depths of affliction, and many frail barks are wrecked in the darkness. It is the office of the one who would give godly comfort, to pilot the sorrowing past the shoals--to the safe and radiant shore. For this, a firm hand is needed as well as a tender heart.

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