

The School of Life

by J.R. Miller

J.R. Miller's sermon illustrates that life is a continuous learning process where every experience, including challenges and suffering, serves as a lesson from God.

Scripture: Philippians 4:11

Topics: "Learning in Christ", "Endurance through Trials"

Description

J.R. Miller emphasizes that life is a continuous learning experience, akin to a school where every situation teaches us valuable lessons. He reflects on how even the Apostle Paul and Jesus had to learn contentment and obedience through their experiences, illustrating that trials and temptations are opportunities for growth and strength. Miller encourages believers to view sorrow and suffering as lessons that enrich their lives, ultimately leading to deeper faith and resilience. He reminds us that patience, contentment, and the ability to endure hardships are essential lessons in Christ's school, which shape our character and prepare us to support others. The sermon concludes with a call to actively seek and learn from the lessons life presents us each day.

Transcript

The business of noble Christian living--is learning. We know nothing when we begin. On the tomb of an English historian is the inscription, "He died learning." Learning is not confined to what we get from reading books. All of life is a school--and 'books' are ever being put into our hands, and 'lessons' are set for us continually.

Paul tells us of one of the lessons he had learned in the 'school of experience'. "I have learned," he said, "the secret of being content in any and every situation." We are glad to know that Paul had to learn to be contented. We are apt to get the impression that such a man as he was--did not have to learn to live as common people do, that he always knew, for instance, how to be contented. Here, however, we have the confession that he had to 'learn the lesson' just as we do. He did not always know 'the secret of contentment'. He was well on in years when he said this, from which we conclude that it took him a long time to learn the lesson, and that it was not easy for him to do it.

There is a remarkable verse in the book of Hebrews, which tells us that even Jesus learned his lessons as we must do: "He learned obedience from what he suffered." Hebrews 5:8. It was not always easy for him to do the Father's will. Even in Gethsemane we see him learning. Each time he prayed that the cup might pass--the pleading was a little less intense and it was growing easier for him to submit. The fact of the

truth and reality of his humanity, shows us that even Christ, the Son of God, had to learn the lessons of life--just as his followers must do. He learned to be content in whatever state he was. He learned to be patient, to suffer injustice and wrong, to endure insults and not resent them. He learned to submit, to accept unkindness quietly--and return kindness instead.

We are all in Christ's school. Disciples are 'learners' and all true Christians are disciples. We enter the lowest grade when we begin to be Christians. We have everything to learn. Each new experience, is a new lesson set for us by the great Teacher. Tomorrow, a sharp temptation may come to you. You wonder why God permits it, if he loves you. Why does he let you be assailed and put to the test? He certainly does not want you to fail. Satan's purpose in bringing temptation upon us is to entice us to sin, to disobey Christ and prove disloyal to him; but that is not God's thought in permitting us to be tempted. He means for the temptation to prove us, and then to strengthen us and fit us for braver, better life.

It seems strange to us that Jesus had to be tempted; he of the pure soul and the sinless life. But we know that a large element in his helpfulness as our Savior and Friend, comes from his own experience of temptation. We know that he is able to help us, and deliver us in our temptations, because he was tempted himself--and was victorious. If he had been defeated--he could not have helped us. He is able also to sympathize with us in our struggles because he endured the same. In like manner temptation met and overcome, makes our lives mean more to others. One who by God's grace has kept himself unspotted from the world, becomes thus a comfort and a strength to many others.

One brave and valiant soul that is not besmirched by the world's evil, and does not fail in the testing, becomes indeed a strength to many others. He has not failed--and we need not fail. For others' sake, as well as for our own--we should stand firm and true in every experience of testing. If we falter and fail, others are made less strong to endure. One courageous man who never turns back to the foe, puts courage into others and they grow strong, too. But one faint heart, puts fear and dismay into many other hearts. Remembering that others will do what we do--that they will be brave and victorious; or cowardly and defeated--should be in us a mighty motive to stand firm.

Then, we need not fail. We may win in the battle. "No temptation has seized you except what is common to man. And God is faithful; he will not let you be tempted beyond what you can bear. But when you are tempted, he will also provide a way out so that you can stand up under it." Each temptation is a lesson set for us by the Master, and the lesson is never too hard to learn with his help.

Sorrow is also a lesson in Christ's school. Sorrow is not an accident breaking into our life, without meaning or purpose. God could prevent the coming of the sorrow--if he so desired. He has all power, and nothing can touch the life of any of his children--unless he is willing. Since we know that God loves us and yet permits us to suffer, we may be quite sure that there is a blessing, something good, in whatever it is that brings us pain or grief. We have this in the Master's Beatitude, "Blessed are those who mourn--for they shall be comforted."

The child of a patriotic soldier had been listening to his father as he told of a great battle in which he had been engaged. As the soldier spoke of the terrific struggle, the boy said, "I would have run away!" The father replied, "Ah, there are some things, my son, dearer than life." The cause of country was dearer to the soldier.

We shrink from pain. We would run away from afflictions. We would refuse to accept sorrow. But there are things worth suffering for, things dearer than ease and pleasure. We learn lessons in pain which repay a

thousand times, the cost of our tears. Suffering is hard, grief is bitter. To some people it seems almost cruel in Jesus Christ to say, "Blessed are those who mourn." How could he say it, they ask, if his heart is tender and loving as we claim it is? How can God permit such suffering and pain, so much grief and sorrow, as we see everywhere, if he is a God of love and of compassion as he says he is?

"If I were God," said one, "I would take away all pain, all grief, all suffering from the world." That is just what God is doing through the gospel of his grace and love. "He will wipe away every tear from their eyes." But we must not forget what it costs, to do this. Jesus wept--that our tears may be dried.

"It seems to me," said another, "that if God is the compassionate being that the Bible says he is--his heart would break as he looks down upon the world and beholds the pain and anguish, the injustice and wrong, which are everywhere." The answer is, "His heart did break!" That is the meaning of the cross! From God's own sorrow--comes blessing for the world and comfort for all sorrow!

Jesus does not say that mourning itself is blessed, is good or pleasant or beautiful. What he says is that the comfort of God is blessed, that those who mourn and receive comfort are so enriched, their lives so enlarged, so lifted up into the blessing of God's love--that they can rejoice even in their tears!

A young man who for fourteen years has had a great sorrow in his home--his wife being an incurable sufferer--speaks of the hard years bravely and joyfully, without a word or a tone of bitterness, testifying that he owes to the burden and sorrow of these years--all that is worthy and beautiful in his life. Whatever he is as a man, especially as a Christian man, is the fruit of what he has suffered. He can say that he has learned to rejoice in his pain and trial. He accepted the lesson which God set for him--and has learned it.

An ingenious photographer has been photographing the heart of a dried teardrop, under a microscope, revealing in it myriads of forms of beauty. The Bible tells us that God preserves the tears of his children, putting them in his tear-bottle. Tears are sacred to God, because of the blessings that come through them, to those who love God. In heaven, we will look back on our lives of pain and sorrow on the earth--and will find that our best lessons have come through our tears!

All the 'Christian graces' have to be learned in 'Christ's school'. There Paul had learned contentment. He never would have learned it, however, if he had had only pleasure and ease all his life. Contentment comes from learning to do without things, which we once supposed to be essential to our comfort. Paul had learned contentment through finding such fullness of blessing in Christ--that he did not need the 'secondary things' any more.

Perhaps we would succeed better in learning this same grace--if we had fewer of life's comforts, if sometimes we had experience of need. The continuity of blessings that flow like a river into our lives, gives us no opportunity to learn contentment. We think we are very happy and grateful for our favors; but how would we behave if instead of the unbroken supply of pleasant things--we were to suffer without them for a few days? If instead of our splendid health--we fell sick for a while? If instead of the happy circle of love and the sweetness of unending joy--sorrow came and we were bereft and lonely? Perhaps it is well that we have some 'dark days'--that we may learn to appreciate the 'blue sky'.

There are beautiful things in the 'darkness' which we never would see--if there were no break in the sunshine. When sufferings come into our life: disagreeable things--instead of pleasant things; hunger and poverty--instead of plenty; rough ways--instead of flower-strewn paths; God is teaching us the 'lesson of contentment', so that we can say at length, that we have learned the lesson!

Patience is another lesson set for us in life's school. Many of us are impatient with others. We are impatient with their slowness in learning. An English head-master used to tell how once he sharply reproved a pupil for dullness, when he failed to know his lesson. The boy looked up into the teacher's face and said, conscious of the injustice he was enduring: "Why do you speak so severely to me? Indeed, sir, I am doing the very best I can!" The teacher used to tell years afterward, how he always had regretted his loss of patience with that boy.

Great wrong is often done to a child--by impatience in reproving him. We should remember that it was an outbreak of impatience which kept Moses out of the promised land. We do not know how often impatience limits our usefulness. Impatience is often shown in hasty temper.

Ruskin, in a letter to his children, has this good advice: "Keep sweetly calm of temper under all circumstances, recognizing the thing that is provoking or disagreeable to you--as coming directly from Christ's hand. And the more it is likely to provoke you--thank him for it the more, as a young soldier would thank his general for trusting him with a hard place to hold on the rampart." We should always remember that, when we are disposed to become vexed, to fly into a passion, to speak harshly or pettishly--a lesson has been set for us--and we are to learn to keep sweet, to endure patiently. The fact that we are inclined to become impatient, shows that we have not yet fully learned our lesson, and therefore it is set for us again.

Lessons are also set for us when we are sick. The doctor sends you to your room and bids you to be quiet for a season. This means a good deal more than merely being sick. Your sickness has some mission for you. If your minister or your friends pray for you, there are two requests they should make. One is, that you may recover in God's good time--but the still more important prayer is that the mission of the sickness may not fail, that you may come from your sick-room in due time with a new blessing in your life.

When you are sick, you should ask God what the mission of your illness is to you and then ask him to teach you the lesson set for you. It is not accidental. Nor does it come purposeless. It would be a sad thing--if you should get over your fever--and miss the lesson which the fever was sent to teach you, or the good it came to work in you. It gives life a new sacredness, to think of it thus as a school, the 'school of Christ'. The Master is always saying to us, "Come unto me, and learn of me."

Are we learning? Some men set for themselves the rule to learn some new fact every day. Goethe says we ought every day to see at least one fine work of art, to hear one sweet strain of music, to read one beautiful poem. Are we learning something new in Christ's school each day? Are we adding a line of beauty every day to our character?

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