

The Transforming Power of Prayer

by J.R. Miller

Through prayer, our lives are transformed into the image of Christ, and we are empowered to live a life of faith, hope, and love.

Scripture: Isaiah 48:10, Matthew 17:2, John 14:13-14, Romans 12:2, 2 Corinthians 5:17, Ephesians 3:20, Philippians 4:6-7, Colossians 4:2, 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18, James 5:16

Topics: "The Power of Faith", "Transformation through Prayer"

Description

J.R. Miller emphasizes the transformative power of prayer, illustrating how Jesus was transfigured while praying, and how this transfiguration can manifest in the lives of believers. He explains that prayer not only brings us closer to God but also changes our hearts, faces, and circumstances, allowing us to reflect Christ's glory. Miller highlights that through prayer, cares, sorrows, and duties are transfigured into blessings, teaching us valuable lessons and deepening our character. He encourages believers to embrace prayer as a means of surrendering to God's will, which ultimately leads to spiritual transformation. The sermon concludes with the assurance that prayer brings divine grace and blessings into our lives, changing our weaknesses into strengths.

Transcript

It is a very interesting fact, that it was as Jesus was praying, that He was transfigured. When He first knelt on the cold mountain, there was no brightness on His face; but as He continued in prayer, there began to be, at length, a strange glow on His features. Brighter and brighter it grew, until His face shone as the sun! Heaven came down to earth, and glory crowned the transfiguration mount.

What was true for Him in His human life--is true also for His people. Prayer transfigures. There may be no such bodily transfiguration as there was in the case of Jesus. Yet we have all seen human faces which had a strange glow in them, caused by the peace and joy within. The heart makes the face. The heart writes the lines of its features, on the countenance. An unhappy heart, soon makes an unhappy face. Discontent cannot be hidden long; it soon shows itself on the surface, working up from the soul's depths. Bad temper reveals itself, not only in unseemly outbreaks, but in the whole expression. Lust in the heart--before long stains and blotches the features.

On the other hand, good and beautiful things within, reveal themselves in the face. We have all seen sick people who in sorest pain--yet endured with a patience which made their features glow. We have seen people enduring sorrow, whose peace seemed to shine through their tears--as if a holy lamp were burning

within. We have seen old people who had learned life's lessons so well--that their faces, though wrinkled with age, appeared transfigured in sweet, quiet beauty.

Even the body is, indeed, oftentimes changed, transfigured by the grace that dwells within. Our bodies are temples of the Holy Spirit. We are assured, too, that in the resurrection, Christ shall change our mortal bodies into the likeness of His own glorified body. Moses and Elijah, who appeared in glory on the transfiguration mount, were saints in their common, every-day heavenly dress.

But whatever we may say about the body, the character of every true believer is being transformed. If Christ dwells in you, He will produce in you the same kind of life which He himself lived when He was on the earth. This change does not come in its completeness, or instantaneously the moment one believes in Christ. But it does begin then.

Life is large. Life's lessons are many and hard to learn! Paul was an old man when he said, "I have learned, in whatever state I am, therein to be content." It had taken him many years to learn this lesson of contentment.

Likewise, it takes us years to get life's lessons learned. But nothing is clearer, than that a believer's life's mission--is to be transformed into the likeness of Christ. There is to be a transfiguration of character. Holiness must become the every-day dress of the Christian. We are called to be saints, even in this sinful world. "If anyone is in Christ, he is a new creation; the old has gone, the new has come!" 2 Corinthians 5:17

There is yet another way in which Christian life is transfigured by faith in Christ. The very garments of Jesus were changed, sharing in His transfiguration. This suggests that for the Christian, all of life's conditions and circumstances are transformed.

Take the matter of CARE. Every life has cares. There are cares in business. There are cares in home-life. There are cares of poverty--but no less has the rich man his cares. Childhood has its anxieties; young faces sometimes appear careworn. No one can escape care.

To many people--life is very hard. But Christian faith transfigures care, for those who are Christ's and have learned how to live as He teaches us to live. He tells us not to worry about anything, because our Father is caring for us. He tells us that life is a school, and that all our cares are parts of lessons which He has set for us. That means that every care has hidden in it--a secret of blessing--a gift of love which our Father has sent to us. Every time you come to a hard point in your life--an obstacle, a difficulty, a perplexity--God is giving you a new opportunity to grow stronger, wiser, or richer-hearted. We try to make life easy for our children--but God is wiser than we are. He wants his children to have struggles, that they may grow strong, holy and noble!

Thus it is that common care is transfigured by the grace of Christ. It enfolds blessings for us. It carries in its 'dreary form' secrets of blessing for us. Our 'drudgeries' have blessings in their wearisome routine; we get many of our best lessons out of them. All we need to learn is how to meet our worries, and they are transfigured for us. The light of Christ shines through them.

Paul tells us in a wonderful passage how to get this transformation of care: "Do not worry about anything, but in everything, through prayer and petition with thanksgiving, let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses every thought, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ

Jesus. Philippians 4:6-7. God's peace will then shine through all life's frets. Thus care is transfigured, by the love of Christ in the heart.

Take SORROW. Everyone has sorrow. Being a Christian does not exempt any one from grief. But here, again, faith in Christ brings transfiguration. Not only are we taught to endure the sorrows that come to us patiently and submissively--but we are assured that there is a blessing in them for us, if we accept them with love and trust.

One of the deepest truths taught in the Bible--is that earthly sorrow has a mission in the sanctifying of life. One of the most sacred words of all Scripture, is that which tells us that Jesus Christ was made perfect through sufferings. This teaches that in the culture of even His sinless character, there was something which only suffering could do, which He could get in no other school. His life was not perfect in its development, until He had suffered.

We dread pain, and yet the person who has not experienced pain--has not yet touched the deepest and most precious meanings of life. There are things we never can learn--except in the school of pain. There are heights of life we never can attain--except in the bitterness of sorrow. There are joys we never can have--until we have walked in the dark ways of sorrow. A writer says: "Perhaps to suffer is nothing else than to live deeply. Love and sorrow are the two conditions of a profound life."

These are true words. Without loving, one can never know anything of life worth knowing; and without suffering, one can never get below the surface in human experience. Not to have sorrow, in some form, is to miss one of life's holiest opportunities. We get our best things out of affliction. "I have refined you in the furnace of suffering!" Isaiah 48:10. Those who wear the white robes in heaven are the saints who have come out of great tribulation.

Thus it is, that the Scriptures pour the light of Christ upon sorrow. Faith sees sorrow no longer dark and portentous--but struck through with the radiance of heaven, transfigured by the blessedness of Christ.

DUTY, also, is transfigured by faith in Christ. Duty is not easy. It exists every moment. Ofttimes it is hard, almost more than we can endure. Men find work oppressive in their places of business and toil. Women bend under their burden of household work, which is never finished. Much of all this duty is not only hard--but it is also dreary--the same things over and over, in endless routine. Ofttimes, too, nothing good seems to come out of it at all. It is like dipping up water into a bucket with holes--nothing is gained. The hands are empty at the close, after a whole lifetime of toil. Many people grow discouraged when they think of the hard, grinding routine to which they must put their hands anew every morning. The reward for doing their work well--is only more work, and harder!

But here, again, Christian faith transforms all. There is a blessing in duty, no matter how dull and wearisome it is. There is a blessing in the mere doing of it, though nothing seems to come of it. God loves faithfulness, and always rewards it. One may work hard for seventy years, and have nothing laid up in banks or in real estate; but if he has wrought truly--he has indeed much treasure laid up!

Work itself is a blessing, one of the best means of grace. It lays up strength in the body. It trains and develops both the physical and mental powers. It makes a man a man strong, capable, noble. We talk of the drudgery of our common task-work; it is in this very drudgery--that we get our best spiritual education. We form good habits, and thus build up life and character.

Think of a man supporting a home, bringing up a family, providing for his wife and children through all his years, and sending out his sons and daughters to take an honorable place in the world. Suppose that he is as poor at the end of his life--as he was at the beginning; if he has done all this, can he say that his commonplace duty all the years has left no blessing? He has not piled money into stocks and goods--but he has built blessing into immortal lives. He has gathered a wealth of noble character into his own soul. He has laid up treasures in heaven by his faithfulness!

These are hints of the way faith in Christ transfigures duty. There is a blessing in every fragment of it, when love fills it. An artist's picture shows a number of angels in a kitchen, doing the work of a weary housewife. One is putting the kettle on the fire. One is lifting a pail of water. One is getting down the dishes from the cupboard. Another is sweeping the floor. There really is no fiction in this bit of art work. It is beautiful as angels' work--the household duty of the mothers and daughters in the home. We know that there was One, higher than all angels, who actually wrought for years in a peasant carpenter-shop. That is not an artist's imagination, that is human story. Let not the men who work now in business and at trades, toiling oftentimes even to painful weariness, ever say that work is not holy. All duty is sacred, transfigured, if it is done with love for Christ in the heart.

Thus, turn wherever we may--we find the bright shining of the glory of the Redeemer, in these lives of ours. Our very bodies are made glorious, by being the temples of the Holy Spirit. Our characters are renewed and transformed into the beauty of the Lord, by the faith that lives within us. Then all life is transfigured; care, sorrow, duty.

The analogy holds also in the other fact that it is in prayer, communion with God, that this transforming takes place. All true prayer has a transfiguring influence. It brings us into the immediate presence of God. The Holy of holies in the ancient temple, where the Shechinah glory was, was no holier than where you bow every time you pray. You are looking up into the face of Christ Himself! John was not nearer to Him, lying upon His bosom--than you are in your praying. One cannot thus look up into the face of Christ--and not have some measure of transfiguration wrought in him.

Prayer is the reaching up of the soul toward God. It lifts the life for the time--into the highest, holiest frame. A prayerful spirit is full of aspirations for God. Its longings are pressing up Godward. No mood of spiritual life is more blessed, than longing. It is God in the soul--kindling its desires and yearnings for righteousness and holiness. It is the transfiguring of the Spirit, which purifies these dull, earthly lives of ours--and changes them, little by little, into the divine image!

All true prayer is characterized by submission to God's will. We come to God's feet--full of our own ways and wishes. But it may be that our ways are not God's ways. Perhaps we are willful, unsubmissive, rebellious. We desire things that are not best for us, and we are not willing to sink our will in God's. But while this is our spirit, we cannot even begin to pray. We must be brought to say, "Not my will--but may Your be done." Thus praying compels us into surrender and submission. It trains us to leave all our requests at God's feet in confidence. The highest possible Christian consecration, is found in the perfect yielding of our will to God's will. That itself is a transfiguration. Prayer that compels us to submit our way to God's way--transforms us into God's image!

Then prayer transfigures us, because it brings down divine grace and blessing into our life. Prayers are answered. The things we pray for we receive--if they are things that would truly bless our life. We are weak, and pray for strength--we rise from our knees with the power of Christ resting upon us. We pray for

holiness--and into our heart comes new impulses toward holy things. We are in temptation, with fierce struggles, and calling for help--and we receive blessing from Christ who gives us strength. We are in sorrow--and in praying, we get comfort from God. Thus it is that wherever and whenever we pray--that heaven is open above us, and divine blessings are sent down upon us. The touch of God is upon our soul in some way. Some new brightness begins to shine in our life. Thus prayer transforms our weakness into strength.

Prayer changes our defeats--into victories. It brings us peace--in turmoil. It changes fretting care--into quiet trust. It sets rainbows--on our storm-clouds. It makes our tears of sorrow lenses, through which we see deeper into heaven. It opens the treasures of God's love, and enriches us with the best things of grace. Praying, we are transfigured!

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