

The Tried Believer Comforted

by Octavius Winslow

The sermon explores how affliction is a vital part of the believer's journey, serving as God's loving discipline to foster spiritual growth and deeper faith.

Scripture: Job 23:10, Psalm 119:75, Isaiah 48:10, Isaiah 55:8-9, Matthew 10:24-25, Acts 14:22, Philippians 1:29, Hebrews 4:15, Hebrews 12:10, 1 Peter 2:21

Topics: "Affliction", "Sympathy of Christ"

Description

Octavius Winslow emphasizes the profound sympathy of Christ for believers, illustrating that their afflictions are part of God's sovereign plan to refine and discipline them. He explains that believers are often chosen in the furnace of affliction, which serves to deepen their faith and reliance on God. Winslow encourages believers to view their trials as opportunities for spiritual growth and to recognize that Christ, having shared in human suffering, intimately understands their pain. He reassures that through these experiences, believers can find comfort in the unwavering love and sympathy of Jesus, who bears their burdens alongside them. Ultimately, Winslow calls for a response of trust and submission to God's will in the midst of trials.

Transcript

"The Sympathy of the Atonement"

"For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are--yet was without sin." Hebrews 4:15

Could we draw aside, for a moment, the thin veil that separates us from the glorified saints, and inquire the path along which they were conducted by a covenant God to their present enjoyments, how few exceptions, if any, should we find to that declaration of Jehovah, "I have chosen you in the furnace of affliction!" Isa. xlvi. 10. All would tell of some peculiar cross; some domestic, relative, or personal trial which attended them every step of their journey; which made the valley they trod truly "a valley of tears;" and which they only threw off when the spirit, divested of its robe of flesh, fled where sorrow and sighing are forever done away.

God's people are a sorrowful people. The first step they take in the divine life is connected with tears of godly sorrow; and as they travel on, sorrow and tears do but track their steps. They sorrow over the body of sin which they are compelled to carry with them; they sorrow over their perpetual proneness to depart,

to backslide, to live below their high and holy calling. They mourn that they mourn so little, they weep that they weep so little; that over so much indwelling sin, over so many and so great departures, they yet are found so seldom mourning in the posture of one low in the dust before God.

In connection with this, there is the sorrow which results from the needed discipline which the correcting hand of the Father who loves them almost daily employs. For, in what light are all their afflictions to be viewed, but as so many correctives, so much discipline employed by their God in covenant, in order to make them "partakers of his holiness?" Viewed in any other light, God is dishonored, the Spirit is grieved, and the believer is robbed of the great spiritual blessing for which the trial was sent.

There is something so remarkable in the words of the Holy Spirit which we have quoted, that before we enter more fully into the discussion of our subject, we must again call them to the reader's mind. The passage is, "I have chosen you in the furnace of affliction." With what is the Divine will, as stated in these words, connected, respecting the afflictions of the believer? Is it with the circumstances of time? Is it since they were brought into existence that God determined upon the circumstances that should surround them, and the path they should tread?

O no! The trying circumstance, the heavy affliction, stands connected with the great and glorious doctrine of God's eternal, sovereign, and unconditional election of his people. They were "chosen in the furnace"- chosen in it before all time- chosen in it from all eternity- chosen in it, when he set his heart upon them, entered into an everlasting covenant with them, and took them to be his "chosen generation, his royal priesthood, his holy nation, his peculiar people." O, thus to trace up every affliction that comes from God to his eternal choice of his people; to see it in the covenant of grace; to see it connected with his eternal purpose of salvation; thus viewed, in connection with his eternal love, in what a soothing light does it place the darkest dispensation of his providence!

But, there is another thought in the passage equally blessed: "I have chosen you"- in what? in prosperity?- no: in the bright summer's day?- no: in the smooth and flowery paths of worldly comforts?- no: "I have chosen you in the furnace of affliction." "The furnace of affliction!"- is this according to our poor finite ideas of love and tenderness? O no! Had we been left to choose our own path, to mark out our own way, it had been a far different one from this. We should never have thought of affliction as a source of blessing.

But God's thoughts are higher than our thoughts, and his ways above our ways. Our great object in this work has been, to keep prominently and distinctly before the mind of the reader the absolute necessity of experimental religion. Without this, we have shown that all gifts and knowledge and profession were worse than worthless; that if the grace of God is not in the heart, the truth of God merely settled in the understanding, as to all holy, practical purposes, would avail a man nothing.

Having expatiated upon the necessity and nature of experimental religion, together with the great Author of the work, it seems appropriate that the reader now be led to a consideration of that method which a good and covenant God frequently employs, yet further to deepen his gracious work in the heart of his dear child, to try its character, test its genuineness, and bring the soul more fully into a personal experience of the truth. This method, it will be shown, is the sanctified discipline of the covenant.

The very WISDOM seen in this method of instruction proves its divine origin. Had the believer been left to form his own school, adopt his own plan of instruction, choose his own discipline, and even select his own teacher, how different would it have been from God's plan! We would never have conceived the idea of such a mode of instruction, so unlikely, according to our poor wisdom, to secure the end in view. We

would have thought that the smooth path, the sunny path, the joyous path, would the soonest conduct us into the glories of the kingdom of grace- would more fully develop the wisdom, the love, the tenderness, the sympathy of our blessed Lord, and tend more decidedly to our weanedness from the world, our crucifixion of sin, and our spiritual and unreserved devotedness to his service.

But "My thoughts are completely different from yours, says the Lord. And My ways are far beyond anything you could imagine. For just as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways and My thoughts higher than your thoughts." Isaiah 55:8-9 Nor is the believer fully convinced of the wisdom of God's method of procedure, until he has been brought, in a measure, through the discipline; until the rod has been removed, the angry waves have subsided, and the tempest cloud has passed away.

Then, reviewing the chastisement, minutely examining its nature and its causes- the steps that led to it- the chain of providence in which it formed a most important link- and, most of all, surveying the rich covenant blessings it brought with it- the weanedness from the world, the gentleness, the meekness, the patience, the spirituality, the prayerfulness, the love, the joy- he is led to exclaim, "I now see the infinite wisdom and tender mercy of my Father in this affliction.

While in the furnace I saw it not. The rising of inbred corruption, unbelief and hard thoughts of God darkened my view, veiled from the eye of my faith the reason of the discipline; but now I see why and wherefore my covenant God and Father has dealt with me thus; I see the wisdom, and adore the love of his merciful procedure." It is our purpose to show that, the path of affliction along which the believer walks, is the path of God's own appointment; and that, walking in this path, he comes into the possession of rich and varied blessings not found in any other.

This is a truth much forgotten, especially by the young Christian, who has just set out on his pilgrimage. To his eye, now opened to the new world into which grace has introduced him, all seems fair and lovely. "The love of his espousals," is the one theme of his heart. All above, beneath, and around him, seems but the image of his own joyous feelings- the sea unruffled, the skies unclouded, the vessel moving gently as over a summer sea, and the haven of rest full in view. "Tongue cannot express The sweet comfort and peace Of a soul in its earliest love."

He thinks not that all, now so fair, will soon change- that the summer sea will be lashed by angry billows- that the sky will look dark and threatening- that the fragile bark will be tossed from billow to billow- and that the port will be lost to sight. How needful then that this important truth, "through much tribulation we must enter the kingdom," should be ever kept in view! In looking into God's Word, we find it full and decisive on this point. We have already commented upon Isa. xlviii. 10: "Behold, I have refined you, but not with silver; I have chosen you in the furnace of affliction."

There is yet another remarkable declaration in Zech. xiii. 9: "And I will bring the third part through the fire, and will refine them as silver is refined, and will try them as gold is tried." Our Lord's own testimony harmonizes with this declaration: "In the world you shall have tribulation" -as though he had said, 'Expect nothing less: it is a world of sorrow! and while in it, you shall have tribulation. It is your lot. It is the way of my appointment it is the path I have ordained you to walk in- it is the path I have trod myself, and I leave you an example that you should follow my steps: "In the world you shall have tribulation, but in me you shall have peace."

And so taught his apostles. They went forth confirming the souls of the disciples, and exhorting them to continue in the faith, and that we must "through much tribulation enter into the kingdom of God." Acts xiv.

22. From the declarations of God's Word, let us pass to consider THE EXAMPLES. The entire histories of the Old and New Testament saints presents to us a people "chosen in the furnace of affliction." Paul inquires, "What son is there whom the Father chastens not?" He seems to throw out a challenge: 'Where is the exception to this principle of the Divine procedure?'

Where is the child taken unto God's family- where is the adopted son who has never felt the smartings of the rod, whom the Father chastens not?' More than this. Let it not be supposed that the feeblest of God's saints- those who have the least measure of grace and strength, who find the ascent difficult, and whose advance is slow and tardy- are those whom the Lord most frequently and sharply afflicts. O no! In looking into the Word of truth, in reading the memoirs of God's ancient saints, it will be found that those whom He blessed most, who were the most distinguished for some eminent grace of the Spirit, some mighty exploit of faith, some great act of devotedness, were those whom He "most deeply afflicted."

"The branch that bears fruit, he purges it, that it may bring forth more fruit." Let the histories of Abraham, Jacob, Moses, Job, and David testify. Let Paul's "thorn in the flesh" speak. And what is the testimony?- that the most eminent of God's saints are the most afflicted. Their eminence grew out of their afflictions. Like their blessed Lord, they were perfected through suffering. They became thus strong in faith, holy in life, close in their walk, devoted in the service of their Master, by the very discipline through which they passed.

They were eminently holy, because eminently tried. And what was the life of our adorable Lord? Anything but exemption from suffering. His life was one continuous trial. From the moment he entered our world he became leagued with suffering; he identified himself with it in its almost endless forms. He seemed to have been born with a tear in his eye, with a shade of sadness on his brow. He was prophesied as "a man of sorrows and acquainted with grief." And from the moment he touched the horizon of our earth, from that moment his sufferings commenced.

Not a smile lighted up his benign countenance from the time of his advent to his departure. He came not to indulge in a life of tranquillity and repose; he came not to quaff the cup of earthly or of Divine sweets, for even this last was denied him in the hour of his lingering agony on the cross. He came to suffer, he came to bear the curse- he came to drain the deep cup of wrath, to weep, to bleed, to die. Our Savior was a cross-bearing Savior; our Lord was a suffering Lord.

And was it to be expected that they who had linked their destinies with his, who had avowed themselves his disciples and followers, should walk in a dissimilar path from their Lord's? He himself speaks of the incongruity of such a division of interests: "The disciple is not above his master, nor the servant above his lord. It is enough for the disciple that he be as his master, and the servant as his lord." Matt. x. 24, 25. There can be no true following of Christ as our example, if we lose sight of him as a suffering Christ- an afflicted Savior.

There must be fellowship with him in his sufferings. In order to enter fully and sympathetically into the afflictions of his people, he stooped to a body of suffering; in like manner, in order to have sympathy with Christ in his sorrows, we must in some degree tread the path he trod. Here is one reason why he ordained that along this rugged path his saints should all journey. They must be like their Lord; they are one with him: and this oneness can only exist where there is mutual sympathy.

The church must be a cross-bearing church; it must be an afflicted church. Its great and glorious Head sought not, and found not, repose here: this was not his rest. He turned his back upon the pleasures, the

riches, the luxuries, and even the common comforts of this world, preferring a life of obscurity, penury, and suffering. His very submission seemed to impart dignity to suffering, elevation to poverty, and to invest with an air of holy sanctity a life of obscurity, need, and trial.

We are far from considering the present posture of the church that of a cross-bearing church. The church has thrown off the cross. Her path would be less smooth, the world less her friend, and she less the favorite of the world, were this not the case. How can we believe that she is bearing the cross, when we view her trimming policy, her compromising character, her worldly conformity, her efforts to catch the vain breath of human applause, her self-proclaimed importance, her heralded benevolence, her trumpeted fame, her sectarian badge, the waving of her treason-flag, and the shout of her shibboleth?

O no! She bears not the cross as in her primitive days. We speak not in a tone of unkind rebuke: we love the church universal; we love all and know no distinction of name or sect who love the Lord Jesus in sincerity and in truth; and it is this love we bear the whole elect of God which impels us to avow our solemn conviction, that the present is not the cross-bearing age of the church. True, she is extending her conquests far and wide; true, she is sending the preached and the oral Word into almost every accessible part of the globe; true, she is pouring in of her abundance into the treasury of the Lord: yet, with all this seeming prosperity, the true piety of the church may be exceedingly low, and there may exist in her bosom evils that call loudly for the correcting hand of God.

We have seen, then, that our blessed Lord sanctified, by his own admission, a life of suffering; and that all his followers, if they would resemble him, must have fellowship with him in his sufferings. The apostle Paul seems to regard this in the light of a privilege. "For unto you," he says, "it is given in the behalf of Christ, not only to believe on him, but also to suffer for his sake." Phil. i. 29. It seems, too, to be regarded as a part of their calling: "For even hereunto were you called: because Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example, that you should follow his steps." 1 Pet. ii. 21.

Happy will be that afflicted child of God, who is led to view his Father's discipline in the light of a privilege. To drink of the cup that Christ drank of- to bear any part of the cross that he bore- to tread in any measure the path that he trod, is a privilege indeed. This is a distinction which angels have never attained. They know not the honor of suffering with Christ, of being made conformable to his death. It is peculiar to the believer in Jesus; it is his privilege, his calling.

There is often a severity, a grievousness in the chastisements of our covenant God, which it is important and essential to the end for which it was sent not to overlook: "Now no chastisement for the present seems to be joyous, but grievous." Heb. xii. 11. He who sent the chastisement appointed its character: he intended that it should be felt. There is, we would solemnly remind the reader, as much danger in underrating as in overrating the chastisements of God. It is not uncommon to hear some of God's saints remark in the very midst of his dealings with them, "I feel it to be no cross at all; I do not feel it an affliction; I am not conscious of any peculiar burden."

Is it not painful to hear such expressions from the lips of a dear child of God? It betrays a need, so to speak, of spiritual sensitiveness- a deficiency of that tender, acute feeling, which ought ever to belong to him, who professes to have reposed on Jesus' bosom. Now, we solemnly believe that it is the Lord's holy will that his child should feel the chastisement to be grievous; that the smartings of the rod should be felt. Moses, Jacob, Job, David, Paul, all were made to exclaim, "The Lord has chastened me sorely."

There are many considerations which seem to add a grievousness to the chastisements of God. When it is remembered that our chastisements often grow out of our sin; that, to subdue some strong indwelling corruption, or to correct for some outward departure, the rod is sent; this should ever humble the soul- this should ever cause the rebuke to be rightly viewed- that, were it not for some strong indwelling corruption, or some step taken in departure from God, the affliction would have been withheld.

O how should every stroke of the rod lay the soul in the dust before God! "If God had not seen sin in my heart, and sin in my outward conduct, he would not have dealt thus heavily with me." And where the grievousness of the chastisement is not felt, is there not reason to suspect that the cause of the chastisement has not been discovered and mourned over? There is the consideration, too, that the stroke comes from the Father who loves us- loves us so well, that if the chastisement were not needed, there would not be a feather's weight laid on the heart of his child.

Dear to him as the apple of his eye, would he inflict those strokes, if there were not an absolute necessity for them? "What! is it the Father who loves me that now afflicts me? does this stroke come from his heart? What! does my Father see all this necessity for this grievous chastening? Does he discover in me so much evil, so much perverseness, so much that he hates and that grieves him, that this severe discipline is sent?" O how does this thought, that the chastisement proceeds from the Father who loves him, impart a keenness to the stroke!

And then there is often something in the very nature of the chastisement itself that causes its grievousness to be felt. The wound may be in the tenderest part; the rebuke may come through some idol of the heart; God may convert some of our choicest blessings into sources of the keenest sorrow. How often does he, in the wisdom and sovereignty of his dealings, adopt this method! Abraham's most valued blessing became the cause of his acutest sorrow. The chastisement may come through the beloved Isaac.

The very mercy we clasp to our warm hearts so fondly, may be God's voice to us, speaking in the tone of severe yet tender rebuke. Samuel, dear to the heart of Eli, was God's solemn voice to his erring yet beloved servant. Let no afflicted believer, then, think lightly of his chastisements: it is the Lord's will that he should feel them. They were sent for this purpose. If I did not feel the cross, if I was not conscious of the burden, if the wound were not painful, I should never take it to the mercy-seat, there to seek all needed grace, support, and strength.

The burden must first be felt before it is cast upon the Lord; the chastisement must be felt to be grievous before the tenderness and sympathy of Jesus will be sought. There is equal danger of overrating our afflictions. When they are allowed too deeply to absorb us in grief; when they unfit us for duty, keep us from walking in the path God has marked out for us, hold us back from prayer and from the means of grace; when they lead us to think hardly and speak harshly of God- then we overrate God's chastisements, and prevent the good they were so kindly sent to convey.

There are many and rich blessings found in this the Lord's appointed path of affliction, and in no other, which we would for a moment glance at. We speak now of those afflictions which have been sanctified to the soul by the Spirit of God. First- The view they give us of the faithfulness of God in sending the affliction, is no small mercy. This was the light in which David viewed his afflictions: "I know, O Lord, that your judgments are right, and that you in faithfulness have afflicted me."

Ps. cxix. 75. O what an act and triumph of faith is this, to count God faithful in sending the affliction; when messenger follows messenger- when wave follows wave- when our dearest comforts are taken- our

cisterns broken- our props removed from beneath us- children, friends, health, wealth, character, all touched by God- O then to feel and acknowledge, that God is faithful still- that "in faithfulness he has afflicted!" It is one thing to be convinced in the judgment of this truth, and it is another thing to acknowledge and approve of it in the heart.

But, when the Eternal Spirit works in the tried believer this still, composed, and satisfied frame, then the language of the bereaved and wounded, yet resigned heart, is, "True, Lord, I needed this rod, my heart was torpid, wavering, wandering, proud. This rouses, fixes, recalls, humbles me. I know you, love you better now. I see the emptiness of self and the world, and I die to both. You, Lord, will have my whole heart; Lord, it is yours. Your love is judicious, not falsely fond.

It is in faithfulness to my soul that you have afflicted. My good, not my ease, is what you, my God and Father, consult. It is good for me that I have been afflicted." It is no small attainment to be built up in the faithfulness of God. This forms a stable foundation of comfort for the believing soul. Mutability marks everything but of God. Look into the church, into the world, into our families, ourselves: what innumerable changes do we see on every hand! A week, one short day, what alterations does it produce!

Yet, in the midst of it all, to repose calmly on the unchangeableness, the faithfulness of God! to know that no alterations of time, no earthly changes, affect his faithfulness to his people! And more than this- no changes in them- no unfaithfulness of theirs, cause the slightest change in God! Once a Father, ever a Father; once a Friend, ever a Friend. His providences may change, his heart cannot. He is a God of unchangeable love. The promise he has given he will fulfil; the covenant he has made he will observe; the word that has gone out of his mouth he will not alter.

"He cannot deny himself." Peace then, tried believer! Are you passing now through the deep waters? Who kept you from sinking when wading through the last? Who brought you through the last fire? Who supported you under the last cross? Who delivered you out of the last temptation? Was it not God, your covenant God, your faithful, unchangeable God? This God, then, is your God now, and your God forever and ever, and he will be your guide even unto death. It is walking in the ordained path of trial, that the believer learns out the Divine faithfulness.

In this path, too, he learns his own nothingness. And what a lesson is this to acquire! For a child of God, not to confess merely- for nothing is easier than confession- but to feel his nothingness; to be conscious that he is the "least of all saints;" to be willing to be thought so; to feel no repining at being over-looked- cast in the shade yes, trampled under foot- O what an attainment is this! And yet, how few reach it! how few aspire after it! It is to be learned only in the path of sanctified affliction.

Other discipline may mortify, but not humble the pride of the heart- it may wound, but not crucify it. Affliction sanctified by the Spirit of God lays the soul in the dust; gives it low thoughts of itself. Gifts, attainments, successful labors, the applause of men, all conspire the ruin of a child of God; and, but for the prompt, and often severe, discipline of an ever-watchful, ever-faithful God, would accomplish their end. But the affliction comes- the needed cross- the required medicine- and in this way are brought out "the peaceable fruits of righteousness"- the most beautiful and precious of which is, a humble, lowly view of self.

And is not this, too, the method by which holiness is attained? So says God's own Word. Speaking of the needed chastisements of our heavenly Father, the apostle assures us, that they were "for our profit, that we might be partakers of his holiness. "Heb. 12:10. Job anticipated this as the result of God's afflictive

dealings with him: "When he has tried me, I shall come forth as gold." Job 23:10. It is the fire of affliction, the furnace of trial, that searches and purifies the heart; it is here the tin and tinsel are consumed; it is here the dross is separated from the pure ore, and the gold is brought forth reflecting back the image of him who, as the refiner, watches with tenderness, and faithfulness, the process of trial through which the precious metal is passing.

And is not this the method by which the righteousness of Christ is made to stand out in all its glory and fitness? Sanctified affliction teaches the soul its utter destitution. The believer often commences his spiritual journey with shallow and defective views of the perfect fitness and glory of the Redeemer's justifying righteousness. There is, we admit, a degree of self-renunciation, there is a reception of Christ, and there is some sweet and blessed enjoyment of his acceptance.

Yet, his views of himself, and of the entire, absolute, supreme necessity, importance, and glory of Christ's finished work, are as nothing compared with his after experience of both. God will have the righteousness of his Son to be acknowledged and felt to be everything. It is a great work, a glorious work, a finished work, and he will cause his saints to know it. It is his only method of saving sinners; and the sinner that is saved shall acknowledge this, not in his judgment merely; but from a deep heartfelt experience of the truth, 'to the praise of the glory of his grace.'

It is then, we say, in the successive stages of his experience, that the believer sees more distinctly, and adores more profoundly, and grasps more firmly, the finished righteousness of Christ. And what is the school in which he learns his nothingness, his poverty, his utter destitution? The school of deep and sanctified affliction. In no other school is it learned, and under no other teacher but God. Here his high thoughts are brought low, and the Lord alone is exalted. Here he forms a just estimate of his attainments, his gifts, his knowledge; and that which he thought to be so valuable, he now finds to be nothing worth.

Here his proud spirit is abased, his rebellious spirit tamed, his restless, feverish spirit soothed into passive quietude; and here, the deep, humbling acknowledgment is made, "I am vile!" Thus is he led back to first principles. Thus the first step is retaken, and the first lesson is relearned. The believer, emptied entirely of self; of self-complacency, self-trust, self-glorying, stands ready for the full Savior. The blessed and eternal Spirit opens to him, in this posture, the fitness, the fulness, the glory, the infinite grandeur of Christ's finished righteousness, leads him to it afresh, puts it upon him anew, causes him to enter into it more fully, to rest upon it more entirely; opens it up to the soul, and discloses its perfect fitness in his case.

And what a glory he sees in it! He saw it before, but not as he beholds it now. And what a resting place he finds beneath the cross! He rested there before, but not as he rests now. Such views has he now of Christ- such preciousness, such beauty, such tenderness he sees in Immanuel- that a new world of beauty and of glory seems to have floated before his view; a new Savior, a new righteousness appear to have been brought to his soul. All this has been produced by the discipline of the covenant- the afflictions sent and sanctified by a good and covenant God and Father.

O, you tried believers! murmur not at God's dispensations; repine not at his dealings. Has he seen fit to dash against you billow upon billow? Has he thought proper to place you in the furnace? Has he blasted the fair prospect- dried up the stream- called for the surrender of your Isaac? O, bless him for the way he takes to empty you of self, and fill you with his own love. This is his method of teaching you, schooling you, and fitting you for the inheritance of the saints in light.

Will you not allow him to select his own plan, to adopt his own mode of cure? You are in his hands; and could you be in better? Are you now learning your own poverty, destitution, and helplessness? and is the blood and righteousness of Jesus more precious and glorious to the eye of your faith? Then praise him for your afflictions; for all these disagreeable dispensations are now, yes, at this moment, working together for your spiritual good. It is no small mercy to have clear, close views of the glory and absolute fitness of Christ's righteousness.

"If, from this moment," is the beautiful sentiment of an old divine, "I had all the purity of angels, all the sanctity of seraphs, all the immaculate love of pure spirits made perfect, I would part with all to stand before God in the righteousness of Christ." Other and equally important blessings might be enumerated as resulting from the sanctified dealings of God with his people. Leaving the tried and experienced reader to supply them from a page of his own history, we pass to the consideration of the SYMPATHY OF CHRIST, as the point to which we had intended to have given more distinct prominence in this chapter.

The view which the Atonement presents of the sympathy of Christ is most glorious! The Divine compassion and sympathy could only be revealed by the incarnation of Deity. In order to the just exhibition of sympathy of one individual with another, there must be a similarity of circumstances. The like body must be inhabited, the same path must be trod, the same, or a similar, sorrow must be felt. There can be no true sympathy apart from this. A similarity of circumstances is indispensably necessary.

See then the fitness of Christ to this very purpose. God took upon him our nature, in order to bear our griefs, and carry our sorrows. Here we enter into the blessedness that flows from the human nature of Christ. As God merely, he could not endure suffering, nor weep, nor die: as man only, he could not have sustained the weight of our sin, grief, nor sorrow. There must be a union of the two natures to accomplish the two objects in one person. The Godhead must be united to the manhood; the one to obey, the other to die; the one to satisfy Divine justice, the other to sympathize with the people in whose behalf the satisfaction was made.

Let not the Christian reader shrink from a full and distinct recognition of the doctrine of our Lord's humanity; let it be an important article of his creed, as it is an essential pillar of his hope. If the Deity of Jesus is precious, so is his humanity: the one is of no avail in the work of redemption apart from the other. It is the blending of the two in mysterious union that constitutes the "great mystery of godliness." Approach then the humanity of your adorable Lord. Turn not from it.

It was pure humanity. It was not the form of an angel he assumed; nor did he pause in his descent to our world to attach himself to an order of intelligent beings, if such there be, existing between the angelic and the human. It was pure humanity, bone of our bone and flesh of our flesh, which he took up into intimate and indissoluble union with his Deity. It was humanity, too, in its suffering form. Our Lord attached himself to the woes of our nature, he identified himself with sorrow in its every aspect.

This was no small evidence of the love and condescension of Jesus. To have assumed our nature, this had been a mighty stoop: but, to have assumed its most humiliating, abject form, this surpasses all our thoughts of his love to man. The dark picture of fallen humanity was before him, drawn in its most gloomy and repulsive features; and, although he could not possibly have taken up into union with him our fallen humanity without the peculiar weakness inseparable from it, yet there were walks through life he might have chosen, and in which suffering and sorrow would have been greatly mitigated and softened, if not entirely unknown.

But, he chose the suffering state; he preferred to link himself with sorrow and tears, they being more in harmony with the mission on which he had come, and with his own pensive and sympathetic nature. It was necessary that our Lord, in order to sympathize fully with his people, should not only identify himself with their nature, but in some degree with their peculiar circumstances. This he did. It is the consolation of the believer to know, that the shepherd has gone before the flock.

He does not bid them to walk in a path which his own feet have not first trod, and left their impress. As the dear, tender, ever-watchful Shepherd of his sheep, "he goes before them," and it is the characteristic of his sheep, that they "follow him." Our Lord was eminently fitted to enter sympathetically into every circumstance of his dear family, so that no believer shall be able to say, "Mine is a solitary case; my path is a lonely path: I walk where there are no footprints; I bear a cross which none have borne before me; surely Jesus cannot enter sympathetically into my circumstances." -then there would have been a limit to the tender sympathy of Christ.

If there were a case among his dear family of trial, affliction, or temptation, into which Jesus could not enter, then he could not be "in all points" the merciful and sympathetic High Priest. View the subject in any aspect, and ascertain if Jesus is not fitted for the peculiarity of that case. Shall we commence with the finer feelings of our nature?- they belonged to him, and in him were of a far more exquisitely tender and chastened character than in us. His heart was delicately attuned to the gentlest harmony of ours.

Not a refined and tender emotion, but he possessed in a higher order; the tenderest affection, the most delicate and confiding friendship, were not strangers to his capacious heart. He knew, too, what it was to have those gentle ties rudely sundered by inconstancy, and painfully severed by death. Over the treachery of one, and the tomb of another, his sensitive spirit had poured out its grief. Beloved reader, the heart of Jesus is composed of the finest chords. You know not how accurately and delicately it is attuned to yours, whether the chord vibrates in a joyous or a sorrowful note.

You are perhaps walking in a solitary path; there is a peculiarity in your trial: it is of a nature so delicate, that you shrink from disclosing it even to your dearest earthly friend; and though surrounded by human sympathy, yet there is a friend you still need, to whom you can disclose the feelings of your bosom- that friend is Jesus. There is sympathy in Jesus to meet your case. Go to him- open all your heart do not be afraid, he invites, he bids you come. Christian reader, we suppose you to be no stranger to grief.

Your heart has known what sorrow is; you have borne, perhaps for years, some heavy, painful, yet concealed cross. Over it, in the solitude and silence of privacy, you have wept, agonized, and prayed. And still the cross, though mitigated, is not removed, Have you ever thought of the sympathy of Christ? Have you ever thought of him as bearing that cross with you? as entering into its peculiarity, its minutest circumstance? O, there is a fibre in his heart that sympathizes, there is a chord there that vibrates to that grief of yours; it is touched the moment sadness and sorrow find their lodgment in your bosom.

That cross he is bearing with you at this moment; and although you may feel it to be so heavy and painful, as to be lost to the sweet consciousness of this, still, it rests on him, as on you; and were he to remove his shoulder but for a moment, you would be crushed beneath its pressure. "Then why, if so tender and sympathizing, does he place upon me this cross?" Because of his tenderness and sympathy. He sees you need that cross. You have carried it, it may be, for years: who can tell where and what you would have been at this moment, but for this very cross?

What evil in you it may have checked; what corruption in you it may have subdued; what constitutional infirmities it may have weakened; from what lengths it has kept you, from what rocks and precipices it has guarded you; and what good it has been silently and secretly, yet effectually working in you all the long years of your life; who can tell but God himself? The removal of that cross might have been the removal of your greatest mercy. Hush, then, every murmur: be still, and know that he is God; and that all these trials, these cross dispensations, these untoward circumstances, are now working together for your good and his glory.

And what would you know- may we not ask?- of Jesus- his tenderness, and love, and sympathizing heart- but for the rough and thorny path along which you have been thus led? The glory and fulness, the preciousness and sympathy of Christ, are not learned in every circumstance of life. The hour of prosperity, when every thing passes smoothly on- providences smiling- the heart's surface unruffled- the bud of hope expanded into the full flower- the gladsome sunlight of creature happiness gilding every prospect with its brightness- this is not the hour, nor these the circumstances, most favorable to an experimental acquaintance with Christ.

It is in the dark hour- the hour of trial and of adversity- when the sea is rough and the sky is lowering, and providences are mysterious, and the heart is agitated, and hope is disappointed- its bud nipped, and its stem broken, and creature comfort and support fail; O, then it is the fulness, and preciousness, and tenderness of Jesus are learned! Then it is the heart loosens its hold on created objects, and entwines itself more fondly and more closely around the incarnate Son of God!

Blessed Jesus! Brother born for our every adversity! Did you take our nature up into union with your own? And can you, do you weep when we weep, and rejoice when we rejoice? O, adorable Son of God! we stand amazed, and are lost in this love, at your condescension and this sympathy. Draw our hearts to yourself- let our affections rise and meet in you, their center, and cling to you, their all. Shall we go on, as we proposed, to classify the peculiar trying circumstances of God's dear family?

They are so many and so diversified, we know not where to commence, nor where to terminate. "Many are the afflictions of the righteous." Each heart has its own sorrow- each soul bears its own cross; but Jesus is enough for all, he has sympathy for each and all his suffering people. Are you suffering from pining sickness? Are your days wearisome and your nights sleepless from the inroads of disease? Then there is sympathy in Christ for you; for it is written, "Himself took our infirmities, and bore our sicknesses."

He remembers that you are but dust; and, we doubt not, his blessed body knew what languid days and sleepless nights were. O, then, think of Jesus. That disease that wastes- that pain that racks- that debility that unnerves you, Jesus knows fully and sympathetically. True, he is now beyond all physical feelings; yet his tender heart sympathizes still. Are you suffering from temporal poverty? Are sources on which you depended broken up? Friends on whom you have leaned, removed?

Does need stare you in the face? And are you at a loss to know from where the next supply may come? Even here, my brother, even here, my sister, can Jesus sympathize with you. He, like you, and like the greater part of his people, was poor in this world's goods. No home sheltered, no daily-spread table provided for him; he was a poor, homeless, houseless, friendless wanderer! The foxes had holes, and the birds had nests, but Jesus had nowhere to lay his blessed head- that head that ached and bled for you.

Take your poverty to him; take your needs to him. Let the principle of faith now be exercised. Has he died for your soul- has he pardoned your sins- has he given you himself, then will he not with himself freely give

you all things necessary for your temporal comfort, while yet a pilgrim upon earth? Take your poverty and your need simply and directly to Jesus, think it not too trifling and too trivial to disclose to him; he has an ear to hear your cry, a heart to sympathize with your case, and a hand to supply all your need.

Then again we say- take your needs simply and directly to Christ. Has death entered your domestic circle, plucking from it some precious and valued member?- the affectionate parent the tender husband- the fond wife, or the endeared child? Has he "put lover and friend far from you," leaving the heart to weep in silence and sadness over the wreck of hopes that were so bright, and over the rupture of ties that were so tender? O, there is sympathy in Christ even for this! Jesus knew what it was to weep over the grave of buried love- of friendship interred; he knew what it was to have affection's ties broken, leaving the heart wounded and bleeding.

He can enter into your sorrow, bereaved reader- yes, even into yours. See him at the tomb of Lazarus- see him weep- "behold how he loved him." What! do you repair to the grave of the dear departed one to weep, and Jesus not sympathize with you? Let not unbelief close up this last remaining source of consolation- the tender sympathy of Christ. He can enter into those tears of yours: the heart's desolateness, loneliness, and disappointment, are not unknown and unnoticed by our blessed Immanuel.

And why has the Lord dealt with you thus? why has he torn the idol from its temple? why has he emptied the heart, and left it thus lonely and desolate? O why, but to prepare that temple for himself; why, but to pour into its emptiness the full stream of his own precious love and sympathy! For this, beloved, has he been, and, it may be, is now dealing with you. That heart of yours belongs to him- he bought it at a costly price; it belongs to him- he conquered and subdued it by the omnipotence of his Spirit; it belongs to him- he has sealed it with his precious blood.

And he would have you know this, too, by deep and sweet experience. He would have you know how he has loved you, and loves you still; he would have you know that you are his; his by eternal election; his by gift by purchase- by conquest- by a covenant that all your departures, all your unfaithfulness, all your unworthiness, all the changing scenes through which you pass, shall never, and can never alter. All this, it is his will you should experience. Then, bow with submission to the discipline; as a weaned child, sit at his feet, adopting his own blessed words, "Not my will, but yours be done."

Thus, dear reader, does the glorious Atonement of the Son of God open to us the ocean sympathy of his heart. But for that Atonement, nothing should we have known of his sympathy; but for his cross, nothing of his love; but for his death, nothing of joy on earth, and nothing of glory in heaven- all, all springs from the Atonement of Jesus. "Therefore, since we have a great high priest who has gone through the heavens, Jesus the Son of God, let us hold firmly to the faith we profess.

For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses, but we have one who has been tempted in every way, just as we are--yet was without sin. Let us then approach the throne of grace with confidence, so that we may receive mercy and find grace to help us in our time of need."
Hebrews 4:14-16

"Soon we go from grace to glory,

God's own hand shall lead us there;

Soon shall we rehearse the story

Of his gracious dealings here.

"Soon will end our earthly mission,

Soon will pass our pilgrim days,

Hope give place to full fruition,

Faith to sight, and prayer to praise."

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/octavius-winslow/the-tried-believer-comforted/>

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