

LAME SHEEP

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A SERMON

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*“Make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be dislocated, but rather be healed.”
Hebrews 12:13.*

THERE are some Believers with strong and vigorous faith. Soaring high, they can mount up with wings as eagles. Fleet of foot, they can run and not be weary, or, with steady progress, they can walk and not faint. But all are not so highly privileged. I suppose there is seldom a family which has no sickly member. However hale and hearty most of the sons and daughters may be, there is likely to be some weak one among them. So it certainly is in the spiritual household and it will be, therefore, my business, just now, to look after the weak ones. I trust that the word which I shall be enabled to speak may lead their companions to look after them and may God grant that by these means, many troubled ones may be conducted into peace and safety!

I. IN GOD’S FLOCK, THERE ARE ALWAYS SOME LAME SHEEP. Some of these people of God, who are compared to lame sheep, *seem to have been so from their birth*. Their lameness is in their constitution. Do you not know some friends of yours who naturally incline to despondency? They always look at the dark side of everything and if there is no dark side at all, they have a very fine imagination—so they very soon conjure up some difficulty or trouble. They appear to have been born with a propensity to read black-letter literature and nothing else. Illuminated writings are not for them—they cannot bear the fine colors which delight our eyes—they like the dark points. If they turn to the Bible, they seem naturally to fall upon the threats, or if they read the promises, they shake their heads and say, “Ah, these are not for us!” They make heavy troubles out of the common cares of life and it is only carrying out the same spirit which causes them to grieve and fret over the whole course of their Christian pilgrimage. For them, the road is always rugged, the pastures unsavory and the waters turbid. You will find such unhappy souls in all our Churches—people who seem from their very conformation to be lame as to their faith—timorous, trembling and full of doubts and fears.

Besides, have you never noticed *a constitutional tendency in some professors to stumble and get lame*? If there is a slough, they will fall into it. If there is a thicket, they will get entangled by it. If there is an error, they will run into it. We trust they are good people and they do believe in Jesus, but, somehow or other, they do not see things clearly. Men to them are like walking trees. Such persons go off at a tangent if anybody makes noise enough to attract their attention. “Lo, here!” and “lo, there!” are cries at the sound of which they go off directly. Let some Divine discover a novel doctrine and they are on the new track at once, never thinking where it will lead them. Let a would-be philosopher suggest some fresh theory which clashes with the Word of God and the things of the Spirit—and their eager appetite is whetted and they will leave the old fields of Truth to wander in the barren wastes of science falsely so-called!

When you go to market, if you are a sensible person, you do not turn aside from all the good wares and fair merchandise to waste your time and your money over the quack vendor of nostrums that he advertises with large pictures and loud talk. Your common sense directs you to seek wholesome food and useful articles, but there are credulous people ready to be caught with any bait. So, too, there are no lack of simpletons in all our congregations—good, thoughtless people, lame and limping in all their walk, troubled with skepticism and plagued with curiosity—unstable as water, they shall not excel.

Can you not detect, too, *some who are lame in point of character*? They seem to have been so from their very birth. There is a something about their gait that is unsteady. As you look at them, you are ready to say, “Yes, good people they

may be but they are of a strange sort.” We hope they are sincere, but they are like Mephibosheth, who was dropped by his nurse, and was lame in both his feet. If they walk at all, it is a dreadful hobble. They do their best and we cannot condemn them, but there is an awkwardness about their whole deportment. They are lame sheep at the best. With some, it is a cross temper. With others, it is a general moroseness which it does not seem as if the Grace of God itself would ever cure in them, or it may be a natural indolence oppresses them. Or it is quite possible that habitual impatience harasses them. Now, the Grace of God should eradicate these vices—it can and will if you yield to its influence, for the Grace of God, which brings salvation, teaches us to deny all ungodliness and worldly lusts. With some of us, the conquest over such evil propensities has been already gained. Still, there are among us those sheep that are lame in this particular respect—they are, if I may say so, constitutionally unsound from their very first entrance into the fold!

Moreover, *they betray their lameness when there is anything you give them to do*. If they are Sunday school teachers, they cannot walk regularly or keep step with their fellows, or they fail to help the young scholar on. Ask them to visit in any district—the steps they take are marked by indiscretion. Appoint them to preach at any of your stations—their speech is not straightforward—they go over the most plain ground of Gospel statement with a lack of consistency, like the walk of a man whose legs are not equal. Whatever they attempt, they do it just as a lame man would go on an errand. They are slow in their movements and slovenly in their performances. Aptly are they compared to lame sheep. Well, you know such people. I wonder whether you are one yourself? At least there are some such about, lame from their birth.

Other sheep of Christ’s flock are *halt and lame because they have been ill fed*. Bad food is the cause of a thousand disorders. Many a sickly man, instead of being dosed with drugs, needs to be nourished with wholesome meat. Had he something better to feed upon, he might conquer his diseases. Sheep cannot thrive well on bad food. It is true that many really good Christians have been badly fed. The preaching they have heard has, perhaps, been altogether false doctrine. The poor souls have sat and listened to moral essays, maudlin sentiments, or manifold subtleties that could not nourish their faith, or invigorate their spiritual constitution. If they sometimes suspected that it was not all right, they did not like to desert the place they had long been known to attend, or to forsake the minister they had long been known to hear. They are afraid of being thought too critical, so they have gone on with ill fare to the prejudice of their health and strength, their comfort and usefulness. It is more than probable that poisonous doctrine has got into their constitution and done them real mischief, hence they are lame.

In hundreds, not to say thousands, of cases that I know, Christians are lame through a kind of hazy teaching in which if there is not anything positively bad, there is nothing positively good. I have read the remark that if you were to hear 13 lectures on geology from any decent lecturer, you would probably get a pretty clear idea of his system, but that you might hear 1,300 sermons from many a minister without knowing what he believes! There is a systematic habit, nowadays, of keeping back the positive doctrines and the essential Truths of the Gospel—or of referring to them so vaguely that the sound of words gives no clue to the sense. The whole atmosphere is so full of fog that people cannot see where they are! The preacher may appear to be profoundly deep, but he is not clear. He stirs the mud and makes himself and his subject, alike, obscure. Or, perhaps, he is so superficial that he does not touch upon those Truths which lie at the foundation of the blessed hope of eternal life. Those that sit under such a ministry need not wonder how it is that they do not grow in Grace!

Yes, and how much ministry there is that has nothing but chaff in it! What else can we say of those exquisite preparations for the pulpit in which cuttings from the reviewers, tidbits from the poets and choice scraps from Scripture writers are woven together with a fine overture to begin and a flowing peroration to finish? What can we say of it but chaff, chaff, without a grain of pure wheat from first to last? I would like to chain eloquence down to a post—there let it be bound forever in the land of forgetfulness, never again let it lift its brazen face in this world! Aiming at oratory, cultivating rhetoric, the Gospel, which eschews the words of man’s wisdom and demands great plainness of speech, has been disparaged and displaced. We shall not get back a strong race of Christians till we get back such a sturdy band of outspoken men as dare their reputation, if not their lives, upon the unvarnished testimony they give to the Truth they know, the Truth as it is in Jesus, the Truth as it burns in their own hearts and fires their tongues, the Truth as it commends itself to every man’s conscience in the sight of God! But, undoubtedly, there are thousands of Christians at this good hour who are lame for life through unqualified, unhallowed teaching!

God save us from its hateful witcheries and its baneful influences! If we are called to preach, let us preach, but let us know what we have to say and let us say it as though we meant it—or forever hold our tongues! There are some preachers who seem to speak as if they meant to say nothing and they succeed to their heart's content, if that is their intention! Nothing comes of it. The children of God, trained under their auspices, do not know whether God has an elect people or not, whether the saints will persevere, or whether they will fall away and perish. They do not know whether Christ redeemed everybody, or somebody. They have no clear notion whatever of the things which make for their peace. May we be preserved from all willful ignorance and woeful infatuation! May God supply us constantly with strong meat and sound health to digest it!

Full many of the Lord's sheep are lame *because they have been worried*. Sheep often get worried by a dog and so they get lamed. It may be that I am addressing some poor child of God who has been beset and frightfully tormented by Satan, the accuser of the brethren. Oh, what trouble and what terror he can inflict upon us! He can suggest the most infernal insinuations. He can inject into our minds such blasphemous thoughts as make us stagger and reel. He can make us breathe, as it were, the very atmosphere of the infernal Lake of Fire! Those who have passed through this bitter experience will know how they carry the marks of a conflict with Satan upon them, after they have once been assailed by him—wounds and scars that they will bear upon them to their grave. He is such a cruel adversary that even when we overcome him, our strength is impaired by the battle. The fatigues and perils of our pilgrimage are light in comparison with our temptations. We had better go a thousand miles over hedge and ditch than have to stand foot to foot with that dread adversary of souls for an hour! Full many a child of God has been lamed in that fray.

Others, too, have been harassed by persecutors. Many a poor woman has lost her cheerful spirits through a harsh, ungodly husband who has excited her fears, or vexed her with sneers. And not a few dear young children have been broken down for life through the hard treatment they have had, for conscience' sake, to endure at home. True, there may be instances in which sufferers of this sort, out of weakness have been made strong, but, for the most part, when from day to day, from hour to hour, one is insulted and assaulted, the trial is heavier than any ordinary fortitude can bear, insomuch that those who have encountered it have gone halting like lame sheep all their days.

Some precious saints I have known have grown lame *through a rough and weary way*, just as sheep can be lamed if they are driven too fast, or too far, or over too stony a ground. To what an excess of trouble some children of God have been exposed! The Lord has graciously helped them through all their adversities. Still, the trouble they have had to endure has told upon their hearts. They seem as if they never could quite recover from the sudden shock, or the protracted anxiety that has once impaired their strength, wrinkled their face and dried up their moisture. If they had more Grace, no doubt they would recover their health and renew their youth, but there are some gentle spirits which, when once crushed, are unable to rally and, therefore, they remain lame.

Perhaps still more are lamed *through the rough road of controversy*. If you are a child of God and you know your bearings, always keep as much as you can out of the jingle-jangle of controversy. Little good ever comes of your subtle disputes, but they do gender much strife. Do you tell me that we are told to “prove all things”? Yes, so we are—and it is well to give heed to the admonition—but we are also told to “hold fast that which is good,” and we must not forget the latter half of the precept. Some people seem to think that in order to prove all things, they have to analyze and define every particular and every particle with scrupulous nicety. To prove the quality of the meat that is brought to your table, there is no occasion for you to eat the whole roast. A small sample will enable you to pronounce a sound opinion. Apply the same rule to books and it will save you a world of trouble. They may dish up old dogmas, or they may throw off new theories. They may contain the reveries of the thoughtful, or the ramblings of the idler. They may be conceived with a purpose, or composed for a price. In any case, you must have a voracious appetite if you would read them all through!

But it is quite unnecessary. Take the paper knife and just cut open a page in the center. One tasting will generally suffice for a fair testing. You can see, within a little, what tack their authors take. If they accord not with the Word of God, away with them! You have proved them quite enough. You will get little reward for your pains if you worry your poor mind to solve afresh the points which are settled among us. We have believed and rejoiced in the Truth of God these many years. Yes, believed on conclusive evidence where we once stood in doubt! Rejoiced with unspeakable joy where we once looked with dreary misgiving! What more can you require? But many have been lamed through choosing rough

places, adventuring among thorns and briars and leaving the beaten tracks without experience enough to avoid injury to themselves, or skill enough to clear a path in which others may safely follow.

Full many of the Lord's sheep have become lame *through negligence, faintness and the gradual declension of spiritual health*. They have backslidden. They have been remiss in prayer, omitted reading the Word and forsaken communion with God—so it is no marvel that their walk betrays their weakness. A bad cold is the parent of many ailments. Beware of catching a chill in religion! Lameness is not infrequently the result of a fall. A broken bone, or a compound fracture, or a serious dislocation of the joints is not easily healed. Those who have such injuries can tell you how helpless it makes them—how long it is before they can walk without crutches and how often a change of weather will remind them, by ache and twinge—that cures leave scars behind! Certainly it is so with any man who has fallen into gross sin after making a profession of faith in Christ. However fully he may be restored by Divine Grace, he will *feel its effects as long as he lives*.

II. There are, and I suppose we may expect there always will be, lame ones in God's flock, so I proceed to show that **THE REST OF THE FLOCK SHOULD SEEK THEIR HEALING**. "Make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be dislocated, but rather be healed."

Some Christian people seem to be so inconsiderate, and unsympathetic that they treat all the lame of the flock with harshness. You may be strong and vigorous in your physical constitution, strangers to nervousness and depression of spirits. Be thankful, then, but do not be presumptuous! Despise not those who suffer from infirmities that have never come upon you! Your turn may come before long. You are yet in the body and exempt from no ailment to which your fellow creatures are prone. I have known hectoring spirits whose contumely it was hard to quiet, so did they jeer at the weaklings and, presently, their own complaints have been hard to pacify, so they did moan over their own grievances. The more arrogant they have been when all was well with them, the more crestfallen and desponding have they been in their gloom when things have gone ill with them. Those often who crow most, croak worst! There is a passage in the 34th Chapter of Ezekiel which I should recommend every strong, rough man to read and diligently consider—"Thus said the Lord God unto them: Behold, I, even I, will judge between the fat cattle and between the lean cattle. Because you have thrust with side and with shoulder, and pushed all the diseased with your horns till you have scattered them abroad; therefore will I save My flock and they shall no more be a prey; and I will judge between cattle and cattle."

Jehovah is our Shepherd, and He is very tender of His little lambs and His weak sheep—and if we are not tender of them, too, we shall soon be made to smart for our hard-heartedness! It sometimes happens that those persons who have seldom or never had an illness in their lives, feel little sympathy for those who have to bear much pain and sickness. Others, who have never suffered from poverty, themselves, will sometimes shut up their heart of compassion against those who are in dire circumstances. Or if they dole out a charity, they will too often spoil a good deed with a harsh word. "You that are strong ought to bear the infirmities of the weak." And if that is too much to expect of you, the least that I can ask is that you will bear with them! I do beseech you, by the gentleness of Christ, that you tread lightly in the sick chamber and speak softly to such as are crushed by adversity. There are diseases that provoke irritability. Peevishness, or despondency may be a symptom of the particular ailment that prostrates one's energies and weakens one's entire being.

Do not be censorious—that would be cruel. Let those of you who are blessed with health and walk in the sunshine, be considerate of your Brothers and Sisters who are blighted with a malady they cannot shake off, or enveloped in a cloud that darkens all their prospects. Do learn to make another's case your own. Be kind. Let every tone of your voice, every gesture of your limbs, every look of your face show the kindness of your heart. God will surely requite it. He watches His children in the furnace. If you grieve them in their trouble, He will vex you in His sore displeasure. And there are spiritual ailments which, like bodily ones, require tender care and gentle treatment. Do not aggravate the sorrows of those who are harassed with doubts, tempted with evils and distracted with anxious cares. Their tale may appear simple enough to you, but it is very serious to them. What troubles them might not give you an instant's concern. Pass it not over, therefore, as nonsense. Your Lord and Master knew how to condescend to men of low estate and His condescension was always pure, never arrogant. He is far more gentle than the most tender among us. Oh, how desirable to learn His way!

Do you ask, then, what He says we are to do for these lame ones?

Evidently, *we ought to comfort them*. "Lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees." Cheer the heart when the limbs are weak. Tell the doubting that God is faithful. Tell those that feel the burden of sin that it was for sin-

ners Christ died. Tell the backsliders that God never does cast away His people. Tell the desponding that the Lord delights in mercy. Tell the distracted that the Lord does devise means to bring back His banished. Covet the character of Barnabas. He was a son of consolation. Study the sacred art of speaking a word in season. Apprentice yourself to the Comforter. Acquaint yourself with the sacred art of comforting the sad. Let your own troubles and trials qualify you to sympathize and succor. You will be of great value in the Church of God if you acquire the art of compassion and are able to help those that are bowed down.

But will you please give heed to the special instruction? *We are to make straight paths because of lame people.* You cannot heal the man's bad foot, but you can pick up all the stones from the path that he has to pass over! You cannot give him a new leg, but you can make the road as smooth as possible. Let there be no unnecessary stumbling-blocks to cause him pain. Do you ask me how you can observe this precept? If you have to preach the Gospel, preach it plainly. Poor sinners are dull enough of understanding—they can puzzle themselves without your puzzling them. Had you to feed a child, it would be folly to put a quarter-loaf down before it and account your duty done. Nor will it profit the mass of the people to preach the Gospel to them in the abstract, giving them a great lump of Truth to digest as best they can. No, but you should divide a child's bread into small pieces—crumble it up and then pour the milk on it, that he may be able to feed on it. So must we cater for God's tried and troubled people. We must speak simply, use homely illustrations and quote precious promises. What though somebody may be offended? Well, let him take offense! We need not be particular to pacify any of those critical people and God forbid that we should offend any of His little ones, for He is jealous of them! If one feeble soul gets a hold of the Truth through its being made plain to him, he will be grateful to you and nor is "God unrighteous to forget your work and labor of love."

Would you make straight paths? Then, *take care that your teaching is always according to the Bible.* Many lame people have been injured by a mixture of heathen philosophy and Christian doctrine. What is it that leads to the spread of Popery in this country? Where does this dogma of baptismal regeneration come from? Had every minister preached that Believers, only, ought to be baptized, there would have been no pretext for infant sprinkling and certainly no baptismal regeneration! If you go a little to the right, or a little to the left and so diverge from the high road, you do not know where it will take you. Have you ever tried that in a Surrey lane? Perhaps you have been beguiled by some pleasant-looking path to leave the main road, fully expecting to come back into it again a little further on, not for a moment supposing that you had changed your course altogether till you have found yourself two or three miles off the place that you wanted to get to! It is better for you always to keep to the Scriptures, Friends, for if you go a little away from them, you do not know where you may wander and, in teaching others, you may lead them astray! Errors that seem slight and frivolous at first, become sad and serious in a little while. A little deviation from the Word of God will presently lead to a total dissent from its teaching! Heaven only knows how far you may go astray when you once begin to turn your feet aside. Make straight paths for your feet, then, because there are lame ones that otherwise may not be healed.

And in all our walk and conversation, let us make straight paths for our feet as those who aim at holiness of life. Unholy Christians are the plague of the Church. They are spots in our feasts of charity. Like hidden rocks, they are the terror of navigators. It is hard to steer clear of them and there is no telling what wrecks they may cause. The inconsistencies of professors spread dismay among weak, desponding Believers. It is not merely the mischief you will do to yourself, Church member, if you grow wanton and worldly, or the grief you will bring to the stronger Brothers and Sisters, but it is the pain and peril to which you will expose the young, the weak—the tender ones of the flock! That poor little girl in yonder cottage will have your character thrown in her teeth! That poor struggling woman, whose godless husband she has sought to reclaim, will be sure to hear his cruel taunt, "Ah, there is one of your crew! That is how they live!"

The unclean life of anyone who happens to stand in an eminent place does damage which is impossible for us to estimate. The jeer does not alight only upon the transgressor, but upon the whole company of God's people with whom he was associated! They all have to bear the taunt and feel the smart. Many a lame one is thus staggered. Were he a strong Christian, of course he would say to himself, "Well, there was a Judas among the Apostles and there will be false professors among ourselves, so we must not pin our creed to any creature in the world." The less confidence he could repose in the disciples, the more closely he would cleave to the Lord. But timid, trembling Christians are put out of countenance, and out of heart, too, by the delinquencies of those they were known to look up to! They say, "If a Christian acts like *this*, can there be anything in Christianity worth seeking for and living for, after all?" So that what is lame is dislocated.

Oh, do walk carefully! When you try to teach others, do make your walk an example to those you wish to teach. I would say especially this to myself. Let your life be so pure that it excites no suspicion! Let your conduct be so upright that it needs no explanation or apology! Let your character speak for itself, a light that shines, an example that you need not be ashamed of, yourself, and such as others may wish to emulate! And beware, I pray you, of any secret sin, of any evil habits such as you would only tolerate when screened from observation, for, as sure as you live, if you are a child of God, it will come out, one of these days, to your shame.

The openly profane may enjoy a measure of impunity, but the professed follower of Christ can never play the hypocrite without provoking speedy retribution. Ah, David thought he had hidden his sin with Bathsheba, did he not? When he had arranged Uriah's death, he seemed to have imagined that nobody would ever know anything about it. But how soon it was discovered and that, too, without its being divulged by anyone who connived at his guilt! The Lord saw it, and He would not hide it. Never let a child of God think that his Heavenly Father will overlook his willful misdeeds. There is no special Providence to shield you from eating the fruit of your own ways. "Be sure your sin will find you out." "Make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be dislocated."

Once more let me admonish you. Do not be negligent when your Lord is so vigilant. Do not even be careless when you see Him so cautious. The Lord Jesus Christ, the Great Shepherd of the sheep, evidently cares for the lame ones. The charge He gives is a proof of the concern He feels. He bids us to be considerate of them, because He, Himself, takes a warm interest in their welfare.

III. WHAT SHALL I NOW SAY TO YOU WHO FEEL YOUR OWN WEAKNESS AND INFIRMITY?

You lame ones who cannot walk without limping, I know how you complain. "Ah," you say, "I am no credit to Christianity. Though, in all sincerity, I do believe in Jesus, yet, alas, I can scarcely think I am one of His true disciples, called, and chosen, and faithful! I fear that, after all, He will disown me." Ah, Beloved, He never will! If you really are trusting to Him and hanging upon Him, or even touching the hem of His garment, He *cannot* and He *will not* leave or forsake you! True, it would be likely enough if His ways were like our ways, and it will cause Him no little care to get you safely home. When Mr. Great-Heart went with Miss Much-Afraid and Mr. Feeble-Mind on the road to the Celestial City, he had his hands full. He says of poor Mr. Feeble-Mind, that when he came to the lions, he said, "Oh, the lions will have me!" And he was afraid of the giants and afraid of everything on the road. It caused Great-Heart much trouble to get him on the road. It is so with you. Well, you must know that you are very troublesome and hard to manage. But then, our Lord Jesus is very patient. He does not mind taking trouble. He has laid down His life for you and He is prepared to exercise all His Divine power and wisdom to bring you home to His Father's House. If He were to desert you, there would be no eye to pity, no hand to lead you—but there is no fear of His changing the purpose of His heart. Having loved His own, He loves them to the end. I have heard say—I do not know how true it is—that when one of her family is a little weak-headed, the mother is sure to love that one best and show it the most attention. Her most tender thoughts will always turn towards her helpless babe. And her keenest anxieties will hover over the child who is ill. She may forget, for a while, the strong and the hale, but those who need her succor most are quite certain to be never out of her mind. Be of good cheer, then—"As one whom his mother comforts," so will the Lord comfort you! "Like as a father pities his children, so the Lord pities them that fear Him."

You may say, "The Lord is my Shepherd, I shall not want." You may gratefully sing, "He shall gather the lambs with His arms and carry them in His bosom, and shall gently lead those that are with young." In the Divine economy, the more care you require, the more care you shall have. Besides, you know somewhat of our blessed Redeemer's Covenant engagements. Did our Lord Jesus Christ fail to bring His weak ones home, it would be much to His dishonor. "Those that You gave Me I have kept," He says, "and none of them is lost but the son of perdition, that the Scripture might be fulfilled." So Satan only had his own. How the wolf would howl over one sheep branded with the Savior's name were he to fall a prey to his teeth! What malignant hilarity and derision there would be among the infernal spirits if the Good Shepherd failed to bring home one lost sheep whom He had rescued! The joy among the angels of God, they would say, was premature. The Son of Man, they would say, had sought, found, but failed to save the lost. Then the weaker the victim, the keener would the satire be. Ribald lips might shout forth the taunt, "He saved the healthy—the lame He could not save."

It would thus be more discredit to Christ to lose a weak one than a strong one, or for one lame sheep to be lost than if some of the healthier of them should perish—but there is no danger of such a calamity! The oversight of the Shepherd secures the safety of all the flock. They are all numbered and each one in particular is known to Him. Our Lord is a Shepherd who loves His sheep so well that were one of them taken and held between the jaws of a lion, He would run to the rescue and kill the lion as David did of old. He would slay the lion and the bear to get His poor little one saved from the teeth of the devourer. You shall not die, but live! “Oh,” you say, “but I cannot preserve myself.” No, you cannot! And in your weakness lies your great strength! Jesus Christ will be sure to cover you with His power, so that when you are utterly defenseless, you shall be most efficiently defended. “Ah,” says another, “I have had a weary life of it to now.” Yes, but you have brighter days to come! Some of God’s children, after living in the joyous sunlight all their lives, as they draw near the closing scene, have felt much darkness and depression of spirits. This in no degree imperils their security—they will wake up all right in the morning. But, then, others of God’s children have passed most of their days under a cloud till the gloom seemed to settle on their visage and obscure even the radiance of their hope. And yet, when the hour of their departure was at hand, the mists and fogs have all dispersed, light has streamed into their souls and their sweet peace and sacred joy have been like an overflowing tide! The very ones that went limping and mourning, while they were on their pilgrimage, have played the man and displayed the faith of Christians most wondrously when the trial that they dreaded all their life overtook them! Just as Ready-to-Halt left his crutches behind, they have begun to sing and rejoice when they were departing! Like clear shining after rain, like a brilliant sunset after a stormy day, at eventide it was light with them and, I think, it will be so with many of you.

There are some flowers that must be grown in the shade. I believe God made and adapted them to flourish most in shady spots. Some ferns never thrive so well as in some little corner of the brook where the damp continually washes them. Perhaps you are one of those flowers or ferns, planted in a soil that suits your growth. Well, if it is so, murmur not at your lot! The gloom that hovers over you may help the peace of your heart. I have known women, pure and pious, for whom the sunny scenes of life have had no charms. But their bright faces, their beaming eyes and their benevolent hearts have shone with a beautiful brilliance as they have flitted about like angels in the chambers of the sick in the wards of the hospital, or among the couches of the wounded and the dying. Consider Him who was the Man of Sorrows, but whose spirit was not crushed. In the midst of dire distress, He said to His disciples, “Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid.” And, Beloved, do not be unmindful of the comfort you may derive under any affliction when you trace it to the will of God. If you suffer as an evil-doer—if it is your own fault—the scourge that chastens you will invite no pity and the conscience that reproaches you will aggravate your pain. If, on the other hand, you can trace the hand of the Lord in a cross or a calamity, your course is soon clear. It would be folly to repine—your wisdom is to resign yourself entirely to His will. Bear it patiently and God will reward you plenteously. When you would rather glorify the Lord than gratify yourself, your prayer shall come up before Him acceptably and the answer shall come down speedily.

It is not for me to say what particular purpose there may be in the personal afflictions that any of the sons and daughters of our Heavenly Father are called to bear, but I cannot help observing that the peaceable fruits of righteousness, which these tried ones put forth, are very sweet and luscious. Let me appeal to your own selves. Have you not often proved the Truth of those words of the Psalmist, “You have known my soul in adversities”? And is it not so that the notice which the Lord has taken of you, and the care He has exercised over you, have made you love Him more tenderly than you ever did before? You could say with David, “Your right hand has held me up and Your gentleness has made me great.” Oh, what prayer you have poured out when His chastening was upon you! Such prayer is sweet to the Lord Jesus Christ. I marvel not that He lets you suffer so much when your suffering yields such rich perfume! Well, dear Friends, when we get so choice a compensation, *now*—what shall we receive hereafter? Surely, in the ages to come, the lowliest of worshippers shall sing the loudest—

*“While Heaven’s resounding mansions ring
With shouts of Sovereign Grace.”*

Their soprano notes shall rise above the angels’ harps and the full tide of human voices with a distinctness like this, “MY soul does magnify the Lord, and MY spirit does rejoice in God my Savior!” The personal tribute of extraordinary love and gratitude shall thrill out its solo and then blend with the general chorus!

And now, to close, let us read our text again. “Therefore lift up the hands which hang down, and the feeble knees; *and make straight paths for your feet, so that what is lame may not be dislocated, but rather be healed.*” See to it that you are not negligent of this ministry of love! Remember how high a reputation Job got in his day for the care he bestowed on those who were frail and infirm? Eliphaz the Temanite said of him, “Behold, you have instructed many, and you have strengthened the weak hands. Your words have upheld him that was falling, and you have strengthened the feeble hands.” And do not forget the reproof which the Lord gave to the shepherds of Israel—“The diseased have you not strengthened, neither have you healed that which was sick, neither have you bound up that which was broken, neither have you brought again that which was driven away, neither have you sought that which was lost.” Above all, consider the example of our Lord Jesus. His eyes were always quick to spy out the lame, the blind, the crippled—and His hands were always stretched out immediately for their relief. “He went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with Him.” And if you and I, Beloved, walk with God, and God is with us, our godliness will show itself in the pity we feel and the kindness we show to the feeble and the faulty, the cross-grained and the crippled.

The Lord bless these counsels to the strong and these cordials to the weak—and may we all come to that blessed land where “the inhabitant shall not say, I am sick. The people that dwell therein shall be forgiven their iniquity”! Amen.

—Adapted from *The C. H. Spurgeon Collection*, Version 1.0, Ages Software, 1.800.297.4307

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