

The Practice of Piety

A Puritan devotional manual,
directing a Christian how to live that he may please God

By [Lewis Bayly](#)

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Meditations for the Sick

While your sickness remains, use often, for your comfort, these few meditations, taken from the ends why God sends afflictions to his children. Those are ten.

1. That by afflictions God may not only correct our sins past, but also work in us a deeper loathing of our natural corruptions, and so prevent us from falling into many other sins, which otherwise we would commit; like a good father, who allows his tender babe to scorch his finger in a candle, that he may the rather learn to beware of falling into a greater fire: so the child of God may say with David, "It is good for me that I have been afflicted, that I may learn your statutes; for before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep your word." And indeed, says Paul (1 Cor 11:32), "We are chastened by the Lord, because we should not be condemned with the world."

With one cross God makes two cures—the chastisement of sins past, and the prevention of sin to come. For though the eternal punishment of sin, as it proceeds from justice, is fully pardoned in the sacrifice of Christ, yet we are not, without serious judging ourselves, exempted from the temporal chastisement of sin; for this proceeds only from the love of God, for our good. And this is the reason, that when Nathan told David, from the Lord, that his sins were forgiven, yet that the sword of chastisement should not depart from his house, and that his child would surely die. For God, like a skillful physician, seeing the soul to be poisoned with the settling of sin, and knowing that the reigning of the flesh will prove the ruin of the Spirit, ministers the bitter pill of affliction, whereby the remains of sin are purged, and the soul more soundly cured; the flesh is subdued, and the spirit is sanctified. O the odiousness of sin, which causes God to chasten so severely his children, whom otherwise he loves so dearly!

2. God sends affliction to seal unto us our adoption, for "the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes everyone he accepts as a son. Endure hardship as discipline; God is treating you as sons. For what son is not disciplined by his father? If you are not disciplined (and everyone undergoes discipline), then you

are illegitimate children and not true sons." (Heb 12:6-8.) Yes, it is a sure note, that where God sees sin and smites not, there he detests and loves not; therefore it is said, that he allowed the wicked sons of Eli to continue in their sins, without correction, "because the Lord would slay them." On the other side, there is no surer token of God's fatherly love and care, than to be corrected with some cross, as often as we commit any sinful crime. Affliction, therefore, is a seal of adoption, no sign of reprobation; for the purest corn is cleanest fanned, the finest gold is most often tried, the sweetest grape is hardest pressed, and the truest Christian heaviest crossed.

3. God sends affliction to wean our hearts from too much loving this world and worldly vanities; and to cause us the more earnestly to desire and long for eternal life. As the children of Israel, had they not been ill-entreated in Egypt, would never have been so willing to go towards Canaan; so, were it not for the crosses and afflictions of this life, God's children would not so heartily long for and willingly desire the kingdom of heaven. For we see many epicures that would be content to forego heaven, on condition that they might still enjoy their earthly pleasures; and, having never tasted the joys of a better, how loath are they to depart this life? whereas the Apostle who saw heaven's glory tells us, that there is no more comparison between the joys of eternal life, and the pleasures of this world, than there is between the filthiest dung and the pleasantest food; or between the most noisome ash-heap and the fairest bedchamber (2 Cor 12:4; Phil 3:8.)

God mixes sometimes affliction with the pleasures and prosperity of this life, lest, like the children of this generation, they should forget God, and fall into too much love of this present evil world; and so by riches grow proud; by fame, insolent; by liberty, wanton; and spurn with their heel against the Lord, when they wax fat (Deut 32:15.) For if God's children love the world so well, when it misuses and strikes us; how would we love this harlot, if she smiled upon us, and stroked us, as she does her own worldly brats? Thus does God, like a wise and a loving father, embitter with crosses the pleasures of this life to his children, that, finding in this earthly state no true and permanent joys, they might sigh and long for eternal life, where firm and everlasting joys are only to be found.

4. By affliction and sickness God exercises his children, and the graces which he bestows upon them. He refines and tries their faith, as the goldsmith does his gold in the furnace--to make it shine more glistening and brightly (1 Pet 1:7;) he stirs us up to pray more diligently, and zealously, and proves what patience we have learned all this while in his school of affliction. The like experience he makes of our hope, love, and all the rest of our Christian virtues; which, without this trial, would rust, like iron; or corrupt like standing waters, which either have no current, or else are not poured from vessel to vessel; whose taste remains, and whose scent is not changed (Jer 48:11.) And rather than a man should keep still the scent of his corrupt nature to damnation, who would not wish to be changed from state to state, by crosses and sickness, to salvation? For as the

camomile which is trodden grows best, and smells most fragrant; and as the fish is sweetest that lives in the saltiest waters: so those souls are most precious to Christ who are most exercised and afflicted with crosses.

5. God sends afflictions, to demonstrate to the world the trueness of his children's love and service. Every hypocrite will serve God while he prospers and blesses him, as the devil falsely accused Job to have done: but who (but his loving child) will love and serve him in adversity, when God seems to be angry and displeased with him? yes, and cleave unto him most inseparably, when he seems with the greatest frown and disgrace to reject a man, and to cast him out of his favor; yes, when he seems to wound and kill as an enemy: yet, then to say with Job, "Though you, Lord, kill me, yet will I put my trust in you." The loving and the serving of God, and trusting in his mercy in the time of our correction and misery, is the truest note of a sincere child and servant of the Lord.

6. Sanctified affliction is a singular help to further our true conversion, and to drive us home by repentance to our heavenly Father. "In their affliction," says the Lord, "they will seek me diligently." (Hos 5:15.) Egypt's burdens made Israel cry unto God (Exod 3:7.) David's troubles made him pray (Psalm 86:7.) Hezekiah's sickness made him weep (Isa 38:2-3;) and misery drove the prodigal child to return and plead for his father's grace and mercy. Yes, we read of many in the gospel, that by sicknesses and afflictions were driven to come unto Christ, who, if they had had health and prosperity as others, would have like others neglected or despised their Savior, and never have sought unto him for his saving health and grace. For as the ark of Noah, the higher it was tossed with the flood, the nearer it mounted towards heaven, so the sanctified soul, the more it is exercised with affliction, the nearer it is lifted towards God. O blessed is that cross which draws a sinner to come upon the knees of his heart unto Christ, to confess his own misery, and to implore his endless mercy! O blessed, ever blessed be that Christ, that never refuses the sinner that comes unto him, though weather-driven by affliction and misery!

7. Affliction works in us pity and compassion toward our fellow-brethren that are in distress and misery; whereby we learn to have a fellow-feeling of their calamities, and to condole their estate, as if we suffered with them (Heb 13:3.) And for this cause Christ himself would suffer, and be tempted in all things like unto us (sin only excepted) that he might be a merciful High Priest, touched with the feeling of our infirmities (Heb 4:15; Heb 2:18; Heb 5:8-9.) For none can so heartily bemoan the misery of another, as he who first himself suffered the same affliction. Hereupon a sinner in misery may boldly say to Christ.

8. God uses our sicknesses and afflictions as means and examples both to manifest to others the faith and virtues which he has bestowed upon us, as also to strengthen those who have not received so great a measure of faith as we; for there can be no greater encouragement to a weak Christian, than to behold a true Christian in the extreme sickness of his body, supported with greater

patience and consolation in his soul. And the comfortable and blessed departure of such a man will arm him against the fear of death, and assure him that the hope of the godly is a far more precious thing than that flesh and blood can understand, or mortal eyes behold, in this valley of misery. And were it not that we did see many of those whom we know to be the undoubted children of God, to have endured such afflictions and calamities before us, the greatness of the miseries and crosses which oftentimes we endure, would make us doubt whether we are the children of God or not. And to this purpose James says, "God made Job and the prophets an example of suffering adversity, and of long patience."

9. By afflictions God makes us conformable to the image of Christ his Son (Rom 8:18; 1 Pet 4:14), who being the captain of our salvation, was made perfect through sufferings (Heb 2:10.) And therefore he first bore the cross in shame, before he was crowned with glory (Heb 2:7;) did first take gall (Matt 27:34), before he did eat the honeycomb (Luke 24:42;) and was derided King of the Jews, by the soldiers in the High Priest's hall, before he was saluted King of glory, by the angels in his Father's court (Psalm 24:7.) And the more lively our heavenly Father shall perceive the image of his natural Son to appear in us, the better he will love us; and when we have for a time borne his likeness in his sufferings, and fought (2 Tim 4:7-8) and overcome (Rev 3:21), we shall be crowned by Christ; and with Christ, sit on his throne; and from Christ receive the precious white stone and morning-star (Rev 2:17), that shall make us shine like Christ forever in his glory (Phil 3:21.)

10. Lastly, that the godly may be humbled in respect of their own state and misery; and God glorified by delivering them out of their troubles and afflictions, when they call upon him for his help and support. For though there be no man so pure, but if the Lord will straitly mark iniquities he shall find in him just cause to punish him for his sin; yet the Lord in mercy does not always, in the affliction of his children, respect their sins, but sometimes lays afflictions and crosses upon them for his glory's sake. Thus our Savior Christ told his disciples, that the man was not born blind for his own or his parents' sin, but that the work of God should be showed on him. So he told them likewise that Lazarus's sickness was not unto the death, but for the glory of God. O the unspeakable goodness of God, which turns those afflictions, which are the shame and punishment due to our sins, to be the subject of his honor and glory!

These are the blessed and profitable ends for which God sends sickness and affliction upon his children; whereby it may plainly appear that afflictions are not signs either of God's hatred or our reprobation; but rather tokens and pledges of his fatherly love unto children whom he loves, and therefore chastens them in this life, where, upon repentance, there remains hope of pardon; rather than to refer the punishment to that life where there is no hope of pardon, nor end of punishment. For this cause, the Christians in the primitive church were accustomed to give God great thanks for afflicting them in this life. So the apostles rejoiced, that they were counted worthy to suffer for Christ's name (Acts

5:41.) And the Christian Hebrews suffered with joy the confiscation of their goods, knowing that they had in heaven a better, and an enduring substance (Heb 10:34.)

And in respect of those holy ends, the apostle says, "that though no affliction for the present seems joyous, but grievous; yet afterwards it brings the quiet fruit of righteousness to them who are exercised thereby." (Heb 12:11.) Pray, therefore, heartily, that as God has sent you this sickness, so it would please him to come himself unto you with your sickness, by teaching you to make those sanctified uses of it, for which he has inflicted the same upon you.

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