

THE WIDOW DIRECTED TO THE WIDOW'S GOD

by John Angell James, 1841

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PREFACE

One of the errands on which the Son of God came from heaven to earth, was to bind up the brokenhearted, and to comfort all who mourn. And during his sojourn upon earth, the tenderest sympathy was one of the virtues which adorned that holy nature, in which dwelt, as in its temple, "all the fullness of the Godhead bodily." Like their Divine Master, the ministers of the gospel ought to be 'sons of consolation', and to perform the functions of a comforter, as well as those of an instructor—for if pure and undefiled religion, as regards the professors of Christianity, consists, in part, of visiting the widow and fatherless in their affliction, how much more incumbent is it on its teachers, to cherish and to manifest the same tenderness of spirit towards this deeply suffering portion of the human family. A group of children gathered round a widowed mother, and sobbing out their sorrows, as she repeats to them, amid many tears, their father's beloved and honored name, is one of those pictures of woe, on which few can look with an unmoistened eye.

The Christian widow needs a special message of comfort from her Lord; a voice which speaks to her case alone; a strain of consolation which, in its descriptions and condolence, is appropriate, and exclusively so, to her. As it is the peculiarity of our sorrows which often gives them their depth and pungency, so it is the peculiarity of sympathy also which gives to this cordial for a fainting spirit, its balmy and reviving power. Affliction, like bodily disease, has numerous varieties; and, comfort, like medicine, derives its efficacy from its suitability to the case. May the present attempt, specially addressed to them, by one who knows by experience, the value of the considerations he submits to others; by one who has been called in time past to weep, and is now trembling and weeping again—be blessed by the God of all consolation, for their comfort.

The following work is written with great simplicity in sentiment and style—for it would be a mockery of woe to approach it with far-fetched subjects; difficult discussion; cold logic; or artificial rhetoric. The bruised heart loves the gentlest handling, and the troubled spirit is soothed with the simplest music. The soul has no inclination, at such times, and in such circumstances, for anything but the "sincere milk of the word," leaving the strong meat for other and healthier seasons.

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SYMPATHY

A Widow! What a desolate name! If there be one amid the crowd of mourners that tread the valley of tears, who above all others, claims our sympathy, and receives it, it is you who have laid down the endearing appellation of 'Wife'—to take up that of 'Widow'. It would be a mockery of your woe to say, "Woman, why do you weep?" You *may* weep, you must, you ought. You are placed by Providence in the region of sorrow, and tears befit your condition. Let them flow, and mine shall flow with them, for if it be ever our duty to weep with those who weep—it is when the Widow is before us.

The deathbed scene is still fresh in your recollection; the parting look, the last embrace are still present to your imagination. And oh! the sense of loss that presses like a dead weight upon your spirit, and converts this whole busy world around you, into one vast wilderness. You have my tenderest condolence. The closest tie which bound you to

earth has been severed. It seems to you as if there were nothing left for you to do upon earth but to weep. The husband's much loved picture, if it hangs not upon the wall, silent and motionless—is drawn upon the heart, for the imagination to gaze upon, and to remind you of your desolation. He whose absence but for a week or a day created an uneasiness which nothing could relieve but his return—is gone not for a day, or a week, or a year, but forever! He is never to come back, to gladden the heart of his wife, and to bless his household.

It has been finely observed "that the loss of a **friend**, (and much more the loss of a husband,) upon whom the heart was fixed, to whom every wish and endearment tended—is a state of dreary desolation, on which the mind looks abroad impatient of itself, and finds nothing but emptiness and horror. The blameless life, the artless tenderness, the pious simplicity, the modest resignation, the patient sickness, and the quiet death—are remembered only to add value to the loss, to aggravate regret for what cannot be amended, to deepen sorrow for what cannot be recalled. Other evils, fortitude may repel, or hope may mitigate—but irreparable privation leaves nothing to exercise resolution, or flatter expectation. The dead cannot return, and nothing is left us here but languishment and grief." (Thomson's Consolations for Mourners)

But it is not merely the loss of such a friend you have to mourn, but probably the means of your comfortable **sustenance**. Your husband was your provider, and the supporter of your babes. When he died all your prospects faded. The sun of your prosperity set upon his grave. Even when an ample fortune is left, it is a poor substitute for that friend whose decease covered the earth with sackcloth, and spread a pall over every terrestrial scene. But what an aggravation of woe, what a dreariness is added to desolation—when the spectres of poverty and destitution—or even the dark portents of care and privation—rise from a husband's grave. Perhaps even his labor, and skill, and patient perseverance, were but just sufficient to support the family—and what is the widow, unused, perhaps, to business, and untrained to hardship—to do alone? "It is," says Mr. Bruce, "the climax of human sorrow, when the wife of youth is left to mourn the loss of an affectionate husband at the time when his well-formed schemes were advancing to maturity; so that, in addition to the care of providing for her rising offspring, some of whom never learned to lisp the name of 'father', she has to struggle with difficulties, which his sagacity and perseverance might have overcome."

Nor is it only the lack of support, afflicted woman, you dread for yourself and your children—but the lack of **protection**. You have seen enough of the world to know, how selfishness prevails over benevolence, and how little benevolence is to be expected from that multitude, in which are to be found so many who oppress the weak, and so many more that neglect the friendless. A thousand fears of insult and injuries rise in your perturbed mind, and you feel as if the tear of the widow, and the cry of the fatherless, will have little power to interest the busy, and to melt the iron heart of the unjust.

Already, perhaps, you think you have received significant hints, not to be mistaken, even from the friends of your husband, that your expectations, even of counsel and advice, much more of other kinds of assistance, must be very limited. It is possible, however, that sorrow, solitude, and dependence, may have produced a sensitiveness on this subject, which makes you more suspicious and mistrustful, than you have need to be, and that after all, there is a larger portion of sympathy and generous intention, than you may be led to suppose.

To the widow of the departed Christian, there is another ingredient in the cup of her sorrow, another aggravation of the loss she has sustained, and that is—she is **deprived of her own spiritual comforter and companion**. And if she is a mother, she is deprived of the religious instructor and guide of her children. He who was at once the king, the prophet, and the priest of the little domestic community, is removed. How tenderly did he solve her doubts, relieve her perplexities, and comfort her in her sorrows. How sweet was it to take counsel with him on the things of the eternal world, and to walk to the house of God in company. What sabbaths they spent, and what sacramental seasons they enjoyed together. And then his nightly and morning sacrifice at the domestic altar; his fervent prayers, and his pious breathings for his family—but that tongue is now silent in the grave; those holy hands are now no more lifted up to bless the household; that mild scepter of paternal rule has dropped.

Even *he*, good man, felt a dread and a trembling that sometimes almost overcame his faith and trust, as he lay upon his death bed, and anticipated the hour when he should leave his children amid the snares and temptations of this dangerous world. I do not wonder that you, his sad survivor, should feel your great responsibility, as you look around on the bereaved circle, and remember that these young immortals are left to your sole guidance and guardianship. Often you say, as the tears roll down your cheeks, "It is not merely, nor chiefly, the care of their bodies, nor the culture of their minds, that makes me feel my sad

privation—but the interests of their souls! I could eat my bread, if it were *only* bread, and drink my cup of cold water, and deal out bread and water to *them* with tolerable composure—if I could well discharge the duty I owe to their souls, and see them following their sainted parent to the skies. But oh! the thought that my boys have lost a father to guide them along the slippery paths of youth, and form their character for time and eternity too; and that at a season when his instructive example and advice were most needed—this is the wormwood and gall of a widow's cup!"

Afflicted woman, if sympathy be a balm for the wounds of your lacerated heart, you have it. Bad as human nature is, it is not so entirely bereft of the whatever things are lovely, as not to condole with *you*. It is not yours to reproach, in the language of holy writ, the insensibility of a whole generation, and say, "Is it nothing to you, all you that pass by—come see if there be any sorrow like unto my sorrow, with which the Lord has afflicted me." This little volume, at any rate, comes to you as a comforter and a counselor. One individual has thought upon you; and as a minister of him who wept at the grave of Lazarus, and who restored to the widow of Nain, her son, when she was following him with a heart half broken, to the grave—he comes with more than human sympathy, and earthly consolation. It is balm from heaven he brings, and a divine medicine for your sick and sorrowful heart. It is Christianity, in the person of one of its ministers that presents the cup of peace. O turn not away from it, nor refuse to be comforted. Hush then, the clamor of tumultuous thoughts; calm the perturbations of your troubled spirit—for the voice of the Comforter can be heard only in the silence of submission.

Yes, even *your* grief is susceptible of alleviation. I cannot break open the tomb to undo the work of death, and reanimate and restore the dust which lies sleeping there—I cannot replace by your side the dear companion that has been torn from it—but I can suggest topics, which, if you can sufficiently control your feelings to ponder them, are of such a nature—so soothing and sustaining—that they will pluck the sting from your affliction, and enable you by God's grace, to bear up with fortitude under a load, which would otherwise crush you to the earth. I am anxious at once to possess you with the idea, that you ought not to be, and need not be, inconsolable. Tenderly as I feel for you, and anxious as I am not to handle roughly the wounds which have been inflicted upon your peace, still I must remind you, that you are not authorized to indulge yourself in an unlimited liberty of grief; nor to justify such an excess, by affirming that you do well to be sorrowful even unto death.

I beseech you then to obtain permission from your agitated heart, to listen to the gracious words of Him of whom it is so beautifully said, "He comforts those that are cast down." In his name I speak to you; and I speak of that which I have tasted, and felt of the Word of God. I too have been afflicted like yourself, and have known, not by observation merely, but by experience—what a desolation and blank one single death can make in the garden of earthly joys—and where in that hour of dreariness and woe, the lonely spirit may find a refuge and a home!

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SUBMISSION

"They all know that the the hand of the Lord has done this. In His hand is the life of every creature and the breath of all mankind." Job 12:9-10

"Be still, and know that I am God." Such is the admonition which comes to you—and which comes from heaven. **It is God himself who has bereaved you**, through whatever second causes he has inflicted the blow. Not even a sparrow falls to the ground without his knowledge—much less a rational and immortal creature. He has the keys of death, and never for a moment entrusts them out of his hand—the door of the sepulcher is never unlocked but by himself. Though men die and drop as unheeded by many, as the fall of the autumnal leaf in the pathless desert—they die not by chance. Every instance of mortality, that for example, which has reduced you to your present sorrowful condition, is an individual decision of infinite wisdom. Whether therefore the death of your husband was slow or sudden; at home or abroad; by accident or disease—it was appointed, and all its circumstances arranged by God. "Be still, therefore, and know that he is God, who does his will among the armies of heaven, and the inhabitants of earth, nor allows any one to say unto him, What are you doing?" **Bow down before him with unqualified submission—and find relief in acquiescence to His wise and sovereign will.**

But what is submission to God? It is *not* a stoical apathy; a state of mind that scorns to feel any emotion; a proud refusal to pay the tribute of a tear to nature's God, when he demands it. No! Chastened grief is allowed—is called for! Sorrow is one of the natural affections of

the soul—not to be uprooted, but cultivated. If we did not feel our losses, we would not be the better for them. Gentle and well-directed grief, softens our hard hearts, and prepares them for the impression of divine truth—just as showers in spring soften the ground, and fit it for the reception of the seed, and the process of germination.

But then you must repress inordinate grief. Submission to the will of God, while it allows reasonable sorrow, forbids that which is excessive. Do not give yourselves *up* to sorrow. All passionate distress—which shuts out consolation and refuses to be comforted—is high rebellion against the will of heaven. It is at once impious and unreasonable. It is more, it is destructive, for it is the "sorrow of the world that works death."

Your health is now doubly precious, and your life doubly desirable—for the sake of your children. You alone have now to care for them, perhaps, to provide for them; and it is immensely important not to waste that strength and energy, which is necessary for their welfare, in consuming sorrow. Excessive grief will not only unfit you for exertion, but it will incapacitate you from deriving any improvement from the sad stroke. The voice and lessons of God's providence will be unheeded, yes unheard, amid the noise of your tumultuous sorrows. Restrain your feelings. Call in reason, and especially true religion, to your assistance.

Submission forbids all passionate invective; all rebellious language; all bitter reflections on second causes; and all questionings about the wisdom, goodness, or equity of the God of Providence. "I was silent," said the Psalmist, "I opened not my mouth;" there is submission, "because **you** did it!" there is the ground of submission. It is said of Aaron, when both his sons were struck dead before the Lord, he "held his peace." It was not the silence of stupor, or of stubbornness—but of submission. How striking is the commendation passed upon Job, when it is said, in reference to his behavior under his complicated losses, "In all this Job sinned not, nor charged God foolishly." He said nothing irreverent, or rebellious against God. But it is equally incumbent upon you, in order to the performance of this duty, that you should not only suppress all murmuring, and complaining **language**—but all **thoughts** and **feelings** of this kind.

If while the tongue is silent, the heart is full of rebellion—there is no acquiescence. Many who would be afraid, or ashamed to give *utterance* to their feelings of insubordination, still continue to indulge them. The abstinence from murmuring and repining *words*, then, is

not submission—unless the heart is still. We must not contend with God, nor fight against his Providence within our heart, for "he searches the heart and tries the thoughts of the children of men."

Submission is that state of the soul under afflictive dispensations of Providence, which produces an acquiescence in the will of God—as just, and wise, and good. It expresses itself in some such manner as the following; "I feel and deeply feel the heavy loss I have sustained, and my nature mourns and weeps; but as I am persuaded it is the Lord's doing, who has a right to do as he pleases, and who is at the same time too wise to mistake, and too benevolent to put me to unnecessary pain—I endeavor to bow down to his will."

Such is submission; but how difficult! How hard the duty to acquiesce in an event, which has reduced you to such a state of desolation, that earth seems to have lost its principal charms. Difficult, my afflicted friend, it is—but not impossible. All things are possible with God, and what you cannot do in your own strength, you can in His strength. Multitudes *have* submitted, whose loss was as great, whose prospects were as gloomy as yours. I have heard the language; I have seen the conduct of submission in widows' houses—and have admired the grace of God, as manifested in such persons, and in such circumstances. That grace is sufficient for *you*. Do not make up your mind, that submission is impossible for you; on the contrary, be persuaded that it may, by God's help, become your privilege, as it unquestionably is your duty, to exercise it. Pray for it. Let this be the burden of your supplication to God, but let it be presented in faith—

O Lord my best desires fulfill,
And help me to resign,
Life, health, and husband, to Your will,
And make Your pleasure mine.

In bringing you and others to this state of mind, God employs motives. He places certain truths and sentiments before the mind of the afflicted, and enables them to contemplate these principles with such fixed attention, as to admit their reasonableness and force, and under their soothing and powerful influence, to suppress the murmur, and hush every complaint to silence. Some of these principles I now present to your notice.

1. Consider God's indubitable and SOVEREIGN RIGHT to take from you the dear companion of your life.

Are we not all his creatures, over whom he has an absolute, and sovereign control? Has he acted the part of a ruthless invader of your domicile, and committed an aggression, which he can as little justify, as you could resist? Is it an unauthorized theft? No! Painful as it is to you—it was not an unrighteous act in him. Shall he not do as he will with his own? You received your husband, if you received him with right views, rather as a 'loan', than an eternal gift; as a favor lent to be recalled at any time, when the donor thought proper to do so. And now he has demanded it back again. Harken to his admonition; "Woman, I do you no wrong, in asking for what belongs to me. Have I deceived you? Did I ever renounce my right, or promise to forego my claim; or even intimate that I would not urge it, until you had arrived at extreme old age? Be still, and know that I am God." Do not then contend with God. Yield to his sovereign will. Submit to his disposal.

But this perhaps will be thought by some like vinegar to a festering wound; and it will be felt as a harsh and feeble motive to submission—to tell a mourning widow that God had a right to take from her the desire of her eyes. "Oh?" she is ready to exclaim, "Is this all you can say to me?" No—but it is the basis of everything else—and even this is said rather to awe the rebellious thoughts, to keep in check the turbulent feelings—in order that silence and calmness being obtained, softer and sweeter accents may be listened to.

2. Think also, of God's unerring WISDOM. He cannot mistake. He does nothing at random, nothing in haste, nothing in ignorance. He is wise in heart—and his understanding is infinite. He works all things after the *counsel* of his will. He fills everything with the product of his all-wise mind; yes, even your bitter cup of sorrow. "Truly he is a God who hides himself," but it is in the secret place of his infallible wisdom. "His judgments are a great deep," but it is a depth of unfathomable knowledge. There is some wise end to be answered; some object worthy of himself to be accomplished—in your bereavement. He may not, and will not, perhaps, reveal it to you now, for reasons which he can justify. But if it were proper or possible for you to know it, you would exclaim, "Oh the depth of the riches both of his wisdom and knowledge! How unsearchable are his judgments, and his ways past finding out!"

If you could see the wisdom of his plans, and it were then left to your choice to take back your husband again from the grave, you would not dare to do it, on account of the disarrangement and disorder which you would see must ensue. Have you not sometimes required something from your children, without assigning any reason, or

explaining to them what it would be improper for them to know, or impossible for them to comprehend—and required them to confide in your known prudence? Is it too much for God to expect this confidence from you? He is wise—trust in his wisdom. The moment your thoughts are rising into rebellion, or sinking into despondency, repeat the short, the simple, but the potent sentiment, "God has done it—and God is all-wise!"

3. Think also, of God's GOODNESS. His name is Love. His wisdom is employed to fulfill the 'purposes of benevolence'. He is concerned for the happiness of his creatures. "He does not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men." He takes no pleasure in the tears and groans of his offspring—any more than earthly parents do—but like them, he often sees it necessary to bring about their tears. Did you never exercise your kindness in taking from the hand of a child, that which the babe would not surrender without weeping? Divine goodness, when it is clearly understood in all its schemes and motives—will be as clearly demonstrated in what it takes, as in what it gives.

Add these two ideas together, infinite **goodness**—and infinite **wisdom**. Apply them both to God—believe that they really belong to him, and that they were both concerned in your affliction—and then murmur if you can. Did we *really* believe in the doctrine of Providence, and that he who superintends its administration, unites to an arm **of omnipotence**—a **mind of infinite knowledge**, and a **heart of boundless love**—submission would be easy. Is the sepulcher of a husband the only place where his wisdom and love may be doubted? Are these glorious attributes dead and buried in the grave of that beloved man whom you have lost? It is nothing that you cannot understand how your present melancholy circumstances can correspond with love?

Your children often found it as difficult to harmonize your conduct with love; but now they are arrived at adulthood, they clearly comprehend it, and admire the rich displays of judicious kindness with which your treatment of them was replete. The time of weeping and suffering, and with it the time of ignorance, has passed away, and now your paternal character stands justified before them. So shall it be with you, when you have reached your maturity in heaven. You will see the goodness of God which was contained even in these painful dispensations of providence, under which you now so bitterly suffer. Yes, God is good; do not doubt it. Every attribute of God's nature is a motive to submission. Every view we can take of his nature, and our relations to him—is a reason why we should acquiesce to what he does. It is only

when we are out of sight of him—that we can indulge in a rebellious murmuring, and a refractory resistance of his will. The moment we come back into his tremendous presence, and realize him as near—we feel subdued.

4. But the foundation of this state of mind is laid, not only in considering what God is, but what *WE* are. Murmuring and complaining have their origin in ignorance or forgetfulness of our own sinful condition. None can truly submit to affliction, which they do not feel they have deserved. The heroine, a widow, of what has been called one of the purest of our tragedies, is made to say, in the bitterness and pressure of her griefs, "Gracious heaven, what have I done, to merit such afflictions?" As long as you have such an opinion of yourself, there is, there can be—no submission. The very idea that 'we do not deserve it'—is rebellion against the will of heaven, and will inevitably lead to the most unholy and unchastened sorrow. It is only when we enter into the words of the Psalmist that we shall give up our murmurings and repinings, "He has not dealt with us after our sins, nor rewarded us according to our iniquities." How meekly does the prophet submit to the chastening hand of God, under the subduing power of this one thought, "I will bear the indignation of the Lord, because I have sinned against him." "Why should a living man complain—for the punishment of his sins."

Oh sufferer, take this view of your case, and consider yourself a sinner. Call to recollection what sin is—an infinite evil, and deserving of an infinite punishment—an evil that might have long since consigned you to the abodes of interminable misery! Dwell upon the number, the aggravations, and the repetitions of your sins! Among other sins, perhaps, you may mention your ingratitude for, and misimprovement of, the mercy you have lost. You made your husband your God, inasmuch as you loved him more than God—and can you wonder that he is removed? "It is of the Lord's mercies that you are not consumed, because his compassions fail not." Dare you murmur, since you have only the 'God's rod'—when you might have had 'God's curse'? Does the language of complaint befit those lips, which might have been pouring forth the petition for a drop of water to cool your parched tongue?

I deny not the reality or the weight of your affliction—I do not insult your griefs by affirming that there is no cause for them. I admit you may justly go mourning all your days; but then I contend it is a powerful motive to submit, to consider that you might have been tormented through all eternity—and that nothing has a more powerful

tendency to check the excess of sorrow, than the consideration, that your sins have justly merited all you **have** suffered, ever **will** suffer, or ever **can** suffer on earth!

5. But I may also mention that **one of the great ends of Providence in sending the affliction, is to bring you into a state of submission.** Perhaps you have never yielded your heart to God. God spoke to you in your prosperity—and you would not hear. You have tried to be independent of God. You have lived for yourself—and not for God. You have never yet taken his yoke upon you. In the days of your 'fullness' you yielded not your heart to him—and now he is calling you to yield to him in the time of your straits. As you would not submit to him amid the joys of the married state—he has placed you in widowhood, and calls for submission there. "Surely she will resign herself to me now," is perhaps his declaration and expectation. How much is he set on producing this state of mind in you, when he takes such drastic methods to accomplish it. Shall his end be defeated? Will you resist now? Will you carry on the conflict in your widow's garments? What, not yield now—broken, disappointed, forlorn—as you are? Will you be rebellious, not only in sight of the flowing fountain, but amid the wreck and fragments of the broken cisterns; and contend against God, like Jonah, not only beneath the shade of the green and flourishing gourd, but before the naked stem of the blighted and withered one? Oh woman, submit to God! It is for this he has driven you into the wilderness, like Hagar of old, and may you, like her, cease the conflict there, and say "You are the God who sees me—I have now seen the One who sees me!" Genesis 16:13

6. Among the motives to submission, should be placed, **a due regard to your own comfort.** It has been beautifully said, that the wild bird, yet untamed and unaccustomed to confinement, beats itself almost to death against the wires of its cage—while the tame prisoner, quietly acquiesces, and relieves its solitude by a song. An apt illustration of the soothing influence of submission. No possible relief, but a certain and immense addition to the calamity, is gained by **excessive mourning and repining.** It is a vain and useless thing—as well as a sinful one. It is of itself a deep affliction, a sad discomposure of spirit, a fever of the heart, a delirium of the soul—and is so much added to the weight of the original trouble.

But resignation to the dispensations of God's Providence—what a blessed remedy is this to the soul! What a rest from all those sinful disturbances which discompose our spirits—it is a lower heaven—a green and sunny spot in a region of gloom, and desolation! For as in

the state of glory there is an unchangeable agreement between the will of the Creator and of the creature—so according to the same measure wherein we conform our wills to God's now, we proportionately enjoy the holiness and blessedness of that state.

Daughter of sorrow, since you can no longer enjoy the 'pleasure of possession'—seek the 'comfort of submission'! Extract by resignation, the few drops of divine cordial, which even your wormwood and gall contain. Forbidden any longer to enjoy the sweetness of gratitude for the retention of your temporary blessing—open your heart to the tranquilizing comfort of surrendering it to God. Soothe the wounds of your lacerated heart with the balm of acquiescence—and do not inflame them with the uncontrolled grief of a rebellious spirit. Try the effect of those few sweet words, "Father! not my will—but your be done!" They will be like the voice of Christ, to the winds and waves of the stormy lake, "Peace! Be still!" Or like heavenly music to the troubled mind. There is no relief but in unqualified submission, and there is relief only in that.

7. If you are a professor of true religion, you ought to find in that another and a powerful motive to this frame of mind. Christian mourner, consider God as the author of all your trials--as well as of all your comforts! View him as your Father! Be assured that He loves you too well to do you any harm! Be confident that He is making all things work together for your good! Now then let us see the blessed influence of your faith. Let us behold in you the tranquilizing power of your principles. Should *you* sorrow as do others? Should *you* appear as uncontrollable in your grief as those who know not God?

A couple of days ago, I visited a widow, whose husband had just been suddenly killed by the overthrow of a carriage. I found her as might be expected, deeply afflicted. But it was grief kept within due bounds by the controlling power of eminent piety, as dignified as it was deep; and there were circumstances too, eminently calculated to produce a complicated sorrow. Her calm, though affecting distress attracted the attention of a lady whose brother had died very suddenly. "Ah," she exclaimed, to my bereaved friend, "how differently did my sister-in-law act, to what you have done. But *your* composure is the effect of true religion. I see now the power of true religion." Be it your study to exhibit the same power, and to draw forth the same testimony.

Glorify God in the fires! Let it be your prayer that your true religion may shine forth in all its luster, and manifest itself in all its glory. Let it be one of your consolations to be enabled to do honor to the truth and

grace of God, as manifested in supporting you during this sorrowful time. Think what an effect an unsubmitive spirit will have upon those who observe it. How many widows making a profession of religion, have by the vehemence of their grief, astonished the observer of their conduct. It was not a scene or a season in which to utter the language of reproach, but who could help saying to themselves, though delicacy kept them from saying to the sufferer, "Where in all this tumult of soul, and excessive grief—is their piety? Is there no help for them in God? We expected a calmer sorrow, from a Christian. She does not much commend true religion to us."

8. Some of you may contrast your circumstances with those of others around you. Do not wrap your widow's garments upon you, and say, "Is there any sorrow like unto my sorrow?" Is there? Yes—and far greater! You have lost a good husband—yet perhaps you still have a comfortable support for yourself and your children. But there are other poor widows who have lost their support—as well as their husband! You are left with fatherless children—yet they are kind and dutiful towards you. But there is a widow whose heart bruised by her loss—is well near broken by the unkindness of an undutiful son. Your children are all in health. But there is a widow who pours her daily tears over a crippled son—or a dying daughter. You are surrounded by a wide circle of sympathizing friends. But there is a widow, forlorn, alone, and a stranger in this busy world. Oh, it is well sometimes to compare our sorrows with those of others. What widow that shall read these pages can speak of grief like the following?

"A poor woman, from the north of England, went with her family to seek employment in London. The husband, through fatigue, was attacked with a raging fever; the disorder soon assumed a very malignant, putrid character, of which he died. Two of the children caught the infection, and died also. The widow was reduced, with her surviving children, to the most deplorable poverty, and seemed on the point of starving. In this situation she was visited by a Christian, who observed an old Bible, with a large print, lying on her table. He said, 'I perceive you can read, and have got the best of books by you.' She replied, 'Oh, sir, what would I have done without it? It is not my own. My eyes are, with illness, anxiety, and tears, too weak for a small print—I borrowed this Bible of a neighbor. It has been food to my body as well as to my soul. I have often passed many hours without any nourishment, but I have read this blessed book, until I have forgotten my hunger.' Sometime after this the poor woman died, literally worn down and exhausted with poverty and anxiety. But the night before she expired, the consolations of the holy Scriptures shone in her

countenance. She spoke of her death with a smile of sacred triumph; enumerated her pious ancestors and friends, with whom she trusted shortly to unite in joy and felicity; and seemed, as it were, to feel the saying brought to pass, which is written, Death is swallowed up in victory!"

Read this, and be still. Read this, and learn that there is no weight of sorrow under which genuine faith in God's word, cannot sustain you!

9. Make another comparison, I mean between your losses and trials, as a woman—and your mercies and gains as a Christian.

Here, say you, is the grave of my dear husband—there, I say, is the cross, the grave, the throne of your Redeemer! Here, say you, is his vacant seat at my table, his vacant place at my side, his vacant chair at my hearth—there is God, with his smiling countenance, his heart of love, his covenant of grace, his all-sufficient resources, to fill the vacuum! Here, say you, is the weight of woe and care pressing upon my heart, like a huge unsupportable load—but there is not the burden of unpardoned sin, sinking down your soul to the bottomless pit! Here, say you, is my now gloomy house—there is the house of your God, always inhabited by his gracious presence! Here, say you, I am a forlorn creature upon earth, having lost all that rendered the world delightful—there is heaven glowing like a brilliant sky over your head, into which your departed Christian husband has entered, and where you will soon join him in glory everlasting!

Think how many widows there are, who have no covenant God to go to; no consolations of the Spirit to sustain them; no pleasure in the bible or in prayer to soothe them. You, even you, ought to rejoice in a present Savior—and a future heaven! All the attributes of God, all the offices of Christ, all the consolations of the Spirit, all the promises of scripture, all the blessings of grace, all the prospects of glory remain to be set over against your loss—and is not this enough?

The Widow Directed to the Widow's God

by John Angell James, 1841

INSTRUCTION

God is the best and only infallible teacher! "None teaches like him." He delivers his lessons in various ways, and through different mediums. The **Scriptures**, of course, contain the fullest and clearest revelation

of his will; but these are corroborated and illustrated by the works of nature, and the dispensations of **Providence**. All events are pregnant with instruction. "Hence," says the prophet, "the Lord's voice comes unto the city—hear the rod, and who has appointed it." Yes, every 'rod', as well as every 'word', has a voice—and it behooves us to listen to it. Afflicted woman, read the lessons which Providence has inscribed in dark characters on the tomb of your husband. It may be that God is saying to you, "I spoke unto you in your prosperity—but you would not hear; this has been your manner from youth, that you obeyed not my voice." Taken up with the enjoyment of the dear objects to be found in a quiet and comfortable home, you withheld your heart from God. You neither loved, served, enjoyed, nor glorified God as the end of your existence. Your husband was your idol—your support and prop—and now God, who is a jealous God, and will not endure a rival, has removed the object of that supreme attachment, which ought to have been placed on *him*; and in language which derives additional weight and solemnity from being uttered over the sepulcher, says "I am God, and there is none else. You shall have no other God besides me; and you shall love the Lord your God with all your mind, and heart, and soul, and strength." This is his demand now, and it always was. It is not only what he says, now in the wilderness into which he has driven you—but what he said when you walked in the Eden of your earthly delight, and felt that your husband was to you as the tree of life in the midst of the garden.

Now then, open your ear, and hear the voice of his Providence. Open your eye and read the lessons which, as I have said, are inscribed on that tomb, which contains all that was dearest to you on earth. Desire to learn; be willing to learn; and much is needed to be learned from the sorrowful scenes through which you have been, and still are called to pass. When God takes such methods to teach, surely you should be willing to learn; and it may be that it is his intention to make up to you by spiritual instruction and consolation, if you will receive it, the loss he has called you to sustain of temporal comfort.

1. Are you not most impressively reminded of the evil of sin?

What *could* more affectingly illustrate this, than the deep sorrow which has fallen upon you? If the magnitude of an evil may be ascertained by the magnitude of its effects. What must sin be, which has produced such consequences, as those you have witnessed. What agonies has sin inflicted, what ties it has rent asunder, what desolation it has made, what scenes it has produced—that widowed mother, those helpless, perhaps portionless babes, that gloomy house, those flowing tears too well proclaim! And what is the cause? Sin! "**Sin** entered into

the world, and **death** by sin—so death has passed upon all men, for that all have sinned." Yes! death with all its consequences, are the bitter fruits of sin. Had the man not sinned, he would have been immortal. Every instance of death is the infliction of a penalty; for "the wages of sin is death."

Think of what sin has robbed you! Calculate the mischief which it has wrought in your desolate abode. What has made you a widow? Sin! What has made your children fatherless? Sin! And think of the millions who are at this moment, in similar sad and melancholy circumstances. God is benevolent, and does not afflict willingly, nor grieve the children of men; and yet he is perpetually multiplying widows and orphans by the ravages of death. How evil must sin be in his sight, when he takes this method of showing his abhorrence of it; when he has fixed this penalty to it. And then this is only the *first* death, a mere type and symbol of that more painful "*second* death," which falls upon the wicked in another world.

Consider then the evil of sin. Take deep, large, views of it. Recollect *you* are a sinner—not vicious indeed, but virtuous; not profligate, but moral; but still a sinner in the sight of God. "For all have sinned and come short of the glory of God." Oh have you thought of this? Have you been convinced of sin by the Spirit of God? Have you seen your sinfulness, as well as heard of it? Felt it, as well as known it? Many have thought of their sins, for the first time in their life, with any seriousness, in their afflictions; and have said with the poet—

Father! I bless your gentle hand;
How kind was your chastising rod,
That brought my conscience to a stand,
And brought my wandering soul to God.

Foolish and vain I went astray,
E're I had felt your scourges, Lord;
I lost my guide and lost my way
But now I love and keep your word.

'Tis good to me to wear the yoke,
For pride is apt to rise and swell;
'Tis good to bear my Father's stroke,
That I might learn his statutes well.

If *you* have thought but little of sin until now, may you begin to think upon it in your affliction. You have lost your husband—but how much

greater a calamity would be the loss of your soul! And lost it must be, if you have no just sense of sin. There can be no salvation without pardon; and no pardon without repentance towards God, and faith in our Lord Jesus Christ; and no repentance and faith, without the knowledge of sin. Oh! what an unutterable blessing will it prove; what a cause for adoring wonder and gratitude through all time and eternity too—if such affliction should prove to be the means of your eternal salvation; and if the death of the dear companion of your life should be overruled for the salvation of your immortal soul. Happy will it be, if led by this event to think of the sinfulness of your heart and conduct in the sight of God, you should be brought—in the character of a true penitent, and real believer—to the foot of the cross! How will a sense of divine pardon sooth your sorrows! How will God's forgiving love comfort your soul! How sweetly will you sing even while the tear of widowhood is glittering in your eye, and its sable garment is spread over you, "It was **good** for me that I was afflicted!"

2. Another lesson to be learned by widowhood is [the vanity of the world, and its insufficiency to make us happy.](#)

"Vanity of vanity, said the preacher; all is vanity, and vexation of spirit." And you have found it to be so. You have proved that the world, if not an unsatisfying portion, is at any rate, an uncertain portion. How joyous, until lately, were your circumstances. The purest happiness of an earthly nature, is that which springs up in a comfortable home, where there is a loving union of hearts between man and wife. The tender sympathy, the delicate affection, the minute attentions, the watchful solicitude, the ceaseless offices of marital love—are the sweetest ingredient in the cup of life, and contribute a thousand times more to earthly enjoyment, than all the possessions of wealth, and all the blandishments of rank, station, and fashion.

"With the affection, and health, and company of my husband," exclaims the fond and devoted wife, "I feel nothing lacking to my comfort, and can easily dispense with many things that others consider essential to their enjoyment." Such, perhaps, my mourning reader, was once your happy lot, for you had such a sharer of your home. Little cause had you to envy the gay or the great; as little to sigh for their access to the festive party. To welcome at eventide, when the heat and burden of the day were over, the good man of the house, to his own fireside, and to your companionship; and to feel the honest satisfaction of a wife, that *he* needed no other friendship to make him happy—this was your nightly joy, for years that flew too fast. Perhaps you thought too much had been said about the vanity of the world, for it was a pleasant world to *you*, and you were ready to

blame the preacher, and call him ascetic and harsh, and reproach him for disturbing the happiness of others by the wailings of his own disappointed heart. But, ah! you too, have at length returned an echo of that sad cry, and said in the bitterness of your spirit, "All is vanity!"

Yes, the lovely vision of your domestic bliss has vanished! Death has intruded, and changed the scene! No more returns at the accustomed hour, of the joy of your heart and the light of your eyes. His chair is vacant. His place at the fireside, which knew him once, knows him no more. He is not on a journey. No—he is in the grave, and with him died the world to you. Everything is now changed; and you too exclaim, "Oh, vain world, you have deceived me. Are all your flattering smiles, and ample promises, come to this? In one hour I have fallen from the heights of happiness, into all the depths of woe. And am I a widow? Yes, and a widow indeed!"

Such then is the world—such all it can do to make you happy. Harken to the language of God, by the prophet, "My people have committed two evils, they have forsaken me, the fountain of living waters, and hewed out cisterns, broken cisterns, which can hold no water." There are the fragments of the broken cisterns; there the spilled water; there the memorials of fragile comfort, and disappointed hope! And there, near by, let me add, the blessed contrast, the full and flowing fountain, sending out its never failing streams of pure and living waters. The world has deceived and forsaken you. Now turn to God. You cannot restore the broken *cistern*, nor gather up the spilled contents—now turn to the *fountain*! You have settled your heart upon the creature, and it has proved a quicksand; now settle it on God, "the rock of ages." You have leaned upon an arm of flesh, and it has failed you; now trust to the arms of the Omnipotent Spirit. How many, when the first shock of their disappointment was over, and their faculties have recovered from the stunning effects of their loss, have seen the folly, as well as the sin—of trusting for happiness to mortal man—and have turned their weeping, longing, and imploring eye to the eternal God!

And even those who have been convinced before, of the vanity of the world, at least by profession, and have been taught to set their hearts on God, have perhaps forgotten too much their principles and their profession—and trusted for a larger share of their happiness than they ought to have done, to the things that are seen and temporal. Yes, you who are called the people of God, and are such, we hope, even you have trusted far more to the world, to the life of your husband, and to your other possessions for your soul's portion—than was your

duty. An earthly-mindedness has crept over you and damped the ardor of your pious affections. You have sought the daylight of your soul from the smile of a creature—instead of the light of God's countenance. And now the lesser luminary is extinguished, and you are in darkness. Still, however, the greater light remains; the Sun of Righteousness is shining in all his splendor and noontide glory! Go forth from your gloomy and disconsolate situation into the brightness and warmth of his heart-cheering radiance—and bask in the ardor of his beams!

3. What a lesson does widowhood teach of the power and value of true religion—and that in two ways.

First by the influence of it, where it is possessed, in supporting the mind and consoling it, amid sorrows which from any other source, knows not consolation's name. I appeal to devout and holy women, who have been enabled in the hour of their extremity to cast themselves by faith, and prayer, and submission upon God, and to still the tumult of their thoughts, and keep down the rising tide of their grief, by the potency of his grace—whether the value of piety ever rose so high in their esteem, as in that moment when they first answered to the name of widow, and they felt that they could do it without fainting at the sound. Friends gathered round them in all the tenderness of sympathy, and there was a balm in their words, and looks, and actions; but at the same time, each new visitor seemed in other respects to open their wounds afresh, and to be a new remembrancer of the loss sustained.

It was only when the mourner could get to her Bible, and to her God, in all the power of faith and prayer, that she felt she could be sustained—and then she *did* feel it! Astonished at her own calmness; at her tranquility amid such a wreck of earthly hopes—she at first questioned whether it was indifference, stupefaction, or true religion. It could not be the first, for she was as sure of her love to her husband, as she was sure of her existence; nor the second, for she reasoned, reflected, and anticipated. It must therefore, she said, be the last—it must be faith laying hold of the promise, and staying itself in this dark dispensation, upon the name of God. It must be the power of God perfecting its might in her weakness—the flowing in of grace into a soul, which grace has first made willing and able to receive it.

How wondrous must the faith of Abraham have appeared to himself, when he came to reflect on what he had done, or rather what the grace of God had wrought in him—in his willingness to offer up Isaac. Inferior to this, of course—but analogous to it—has been the surprise

of many an afflicted widow at the submission and confidence with which she laid the ashes of her husband in the sepulcher. What else could have so sustained her, bereft as she was of what gave to earth its chief interest? Let that true religion still support you. What it *has* done—it can *still* do. It has proved to you its reality and its power—still trust it as the anchor of your soul, sure and steadfast. If it prevented you from sinking, when the shock came first upon you, it can do the same through every future stage of your solitary journeying, and every future scene of your now unshared sorrow.

But perhaps your present situation demonstrates the excellency of true religion, by another medium of proof—I mean by the **lack** of it. You have *not* true religion to support you—and you have therefore literally nothing. The storm has come, and you are without a shelter. The cup of wormwood and gall is put into your hand, and you have nothing with which to sweeten it. Well then now, when everything else fails, turn to this one and only refuge which remains. It opens to you now. You feel that nothing else is of any avail. It is not too late. God waits to be gracious. Oh let me now sound in your ears the music of our Lord's comfortable words, "Come unto me, all you who labor and are *heavy-laden*, and I will give you rest." Oh mark that—*the heavy-laden*. No matter what may be the burden, whether of sin, or of care, or of sorrow—there is rest from it in Christ. If you look to him by faith to take away the burden of your sin, he will lighten every other load that presses upon your spirit.

Jesus Christ, the *Savior* of the lost—is the *Comforter* of the distressed. He meets the natural cry of misery, and goes out to wipe away the tears of sorrow, by the hand of his redeeming mercy. He came to bind up the broken-hearted, and to comfort those who mourn—but it is in his own way. Many have come to him, led as it seemed by the mere instinctive longing after happiness, and have tried faith in the gospel as a last and almost hopeless experiment, after the failure of every other attempt to obtain consolation. And oh! what an unlooked-for discovery have they made! They who had found no resting place in the world, and who had wandered through it in quest of some object however insignificant, that might divert them from their sorrows, and for a moment at least remove the sense of that hopeless grief which lay dead upon the heart—found now an object which the widest desires of their soul could not grasp, and of such irresistible power as to turn the current of their feelings—I mean the salvation which is in Christ Jesus, with eternal glory. They who had been ready to abandon life, as having no charm, and to embrace death as having no greater terror than their present affliction, now see that even in the absence of

that which once threw over their existence its deepest interest, they can find something worth living for—in the pursuit of an eternal joy.

While in sorrow and in desolation they went to Jesus for comfort; the Spirit, whose secret, but unknown influence guided their steps, opened the eyes of their understanding to discern the path of life, and by the aid of a hope full of immortality—to rise above the ravages of death, and the spoliations of the grave. Thus while like Mary Magdalene—as they were lingering round the sepulcher, the Savior revealed himself to them, and they dried up their tears in the presence of their Lord. May it be so with those who read these pages. May you in your affliction turn to Jesus—who is the universal remedy, and panacea, for the sorrows of life. You do not know, even yet, how much you will need him, in the future stages of your sad and solitary journey.

The friends whom the freshness of your grief has gathered around you, will forget your loss much sooner than you will; and the force of their sympathy will have spent itself, long before the tide of your grief has ceased to flow. Few, very few, are the faithful friends whose tender interest is as long-lived and as deep, as our tribulation. Sympathy wears out long before that which calls it into existence—and then, what can comfort you but true religion? Venture not forward, without decided and fervent piety. Let your next step be from the tomb of a husband—to the cross of a Savior! Take the following instance as at once a direction and an encouragement—

In the course of my pastoral visits among my flock, I one day called upon a young widow, who had become a member of the church under my care since the death of her husband. I found her at her hard work, by which she earns a scanty and precarious support for herself and child. I found her somewhat indisposed, exhausted by labor, and depressed, though not desponding. I entered into conversation with her on her necessitous and afflictive circumstances, when she expressed her strong confidence in God, and her expectation she should be provided for. She soon reverted to her husband, who had been a consistent member of my flock. Her eulogy upon his memory was in strong and tender language. She described him as having been one of the kindest and most loving of husbands, and implied that she had of course been a happy wife. "But," said she, "I can thank the Lord for his death, for in consequence of that sad event, I now hope to be associated with him, in the presence of Christ in heaven!"

The fact is, the death of her husband was the painful means, in the hands of the Spirit, of her saving conversion to God. In this you see

one instance among many in which widowhood has been the furnace of affliction, where God has chosen some of his people, and called them to pass through the fiery trial—to bring them to himself! The female whose case I am now narrating, by the piety she then obtained, and by the sweet hope of meeting her deceased husband in the land where there shall be no more death, endures with a sorrowful cheerfulness, the desolation of widowhood and the rigors of poverty.

What lessons does this little incident teach! What a potency and a heavenly balm are there in true religion! What present and what future advantages does it yield, when it can enable a poor widow, to bow with her fatherless child at the grave of her departed husband, or in the dreary abode once made happy by his presence and his love—and give God thanks for his removal, because of the eternal felicity that would result to both in heaven—from their early separation upon earth! What an admonition to those who like this poor woman have lost pious husbands, while they themselves are not yet partakers of true experimental piety!

Let them consider the reasoning which is implied in her gratitude—"Had my husband lived, I would have been content with my happiness as a wife, and have sought no happiness from a higher source—and perhaps have lived and died a stranger to true religion. Thus after enjoying his society a few years upon earth, I would have been banished not only from his company—but from the presence of the Lord forever! But now since his death was sanctified for my conversion to God, I have lost him for a season—to be with him forever in glory!"

O widow, whose husband has left you as did hers—in an unconverted state—let it be your desire, your prayer, your resolution to turn this deep affliction to your soul's advantage. You have lost his life; lose not also his death. He, as it were, bends to you from the skies, and with accents of faithful love, says to you, "Follow me to heaven! Let us not be separated forever. Let faith, prayer, and submission, heal the wound of separation. O let us meet in the blessed world of life and joy!" Comply with the admonition, and then you too will be able to comprehend the thanksgiving of this poor woman, for the decease of a loving husband.

And now take the testimony of another widow who related in the following language her sad—yet in another view of it, her happy experience—to a minister who visited her—

"My husband died, and then disease seized on my children, and they were taken one by one. In the course of a few years, I had lain those in whom my heart was bound up, in the grave. Oh! they were many, many bitter tears that I shed. The world was dark. The very voice of consolation from others, was a anguish. I could sit by the side of my friend—but could not hear him speak of my departed ones. My affliction was too deep to be shared. It seemed as if God himself had deserted me. I was alone. The places at the table and the fireside remained—but they who filled them were gone. Oh the loneliness—as it had been a tomb—of my chamber! How blessed were the dreams of sleep! For then the dead lived again. They were all around me. My youngest child and last, sat on my knee—she leaped up in my arms, she uttered my name with infant joyousness; and that sweet tone was as if an angel had spoken to my sad soul. But the dream vanished, and the dreary morning broke—and I waked, and prayed, and I sought forgiveness, even while I uttered it for my unholy prayer—that God would let me lie down in the grave, side by side with my children and husband.

"But better thoughts came. In my grief I remembered that though my loved ones were separated from me, the same Father—the same Infinite Love, watched over them as when they were by my fireside. We were divided—but only for a season. And by degrees, my grief grew calmer. Since then, my thoughts have been more in that eternal world, where they have gone, than in this earthly world. I do not remember less—but I look forward and upward more. I learned the worth of prayer and trust. Would that I could express to every mourner how the sting is taken away from the grief of one, who, with a true and full heart, puts her trust in God. I can never again go into the gay world. The pleasures of this world, are no longer pleasures to me. But I have trust, and hope, and confidence. I know that my Redeemer lives. I know that God ever watches over his children. And in my desolation, this faith in my heart has long enabled me to feel a different kind of pleasure indeed—but a far deeper, though more sober joy—than the pleasures of this world ever gave me even when youth, and health, and friends all conspired to give them their keenest relish. I have learned in my own heart—that all trials are not evils.

"It was with eyes upturned to heaven, and gushing over with tears—not tears of sorrow, but gratitude—and with a radiant countenance, that she said, in a tone so mild, so rapt, as if her heart were speaking to her God—'It has been good for me that I have been afflicted!'"

4. What an impressive view does your affliction give you of the solemnity of death, and the necessity of being prepared for it!

You have now, not only heard of the dreadful visitor, or read of him—but you have seen him. And though his icy hand has not been laid on *you*, it has taken from your side the companion of your life. It is not a book, a sermon, or a preacher—but death itself which has spoken to you—who as he bore away the dear object of your affection, looked back unpitifully, and sternly said, "And I will come for **you** soon!" He will! Listen also to the voice of one who with milder accents than those of the last enemy, says to you, "You also be ready—for at such an hour as you do not think, the Son of Man comes." Can you ever forget the scene? The dread reality? The harbingers, the attendants, the consequences of death? The pain, the sickness, the restlessness, the delirium, the torpor—and then the mortal stillness which ten thousand thunders could not disturb? Oh what a change is death!

Is that the proper time, that the proper scene, those the proper circumstances—to which it is wise and safe to defer the business of true religion, the concerns of your soul, the pursuit of your own salvation? You saw how all but insupportable were the last woes of expiring nature; or how sudden was the stroke; or how shattered was the reason; and how impossible it was *then* to meditate on matters which require the concentrated attention, the calm undisturbed possession of all the faculties of the soul. Learn then a lesson from that scene never to be forgotten, and instantly to be practiced—of yourself being prepared at once, and completely, for the great change!

You saw how valueless in death is everything but salvation, and how all but impossible it is to commence the momentous concern then. Be wise then, and consider your own latter end. Preparation for death is living work. A life of faith, holiness, and devotion is the only preparation for a deathbed. May this be one of the beneficial results of losing an object so dear. On his tomb, devote yourself to the pursuit of salvation—as the business of life, and the only suitable fitness for death.

It is said with equal power and beauty by a well-known and deservedly admired living writer, "I consider the scene of death, as being to the interested parties, who witness it, a kind of *sacrament*, inconceivably solemn, at which they are summoned by the voice of heaven to pledge themselves in vows of irreversible decision. Here then, as at the high altar of eternity, you have been called to pronounce, if I may so express it, the inviolable oath—to keep forever in view, the momentous value of life, and to aim at its worthiest use, its sublime

end—to spurn, with lasting disdain, those foolish trifles, those frivolous vanities, which so generally wither in our sight, and consume life as the locusts did Egypt; and to devote yourself with the ardor of passion, to attain the most divine improvement of the human soul; and in short, to hold yourself in preparation to make that transition to your eternal existence."

The Widow Directed to the Widow's God

by John Angell James, 1841

CONSOLATION

Yes! consolation! Yours, even yours, is not a case that excludes all comfort. **There is balm for the wounds of a widow's heart!**

1. It may seem a strange and unlikely method of comforting you, to **remind you of happiness forever fled, and scenes of enjoyment that have vanished like some bright vision.** But is it not a comfort to retrace the history of your union, and to remember that you loved and were beloved; that you lived in harmony and peace with your departed husband; that you had his confidence and his heart, and he yours; that you traveled pleasantly together in this desert world, and made the journey a delightful one while it lasted? You have nothing but holy and happy reminiscences. Is not this better than the retrospect of an ill-formed marriage—and the scenes of discord and strife which such unions bring with them? His picture, his chair, his dear name—if they form the most sorrowful memories—yet, at the same time, they awaken the most sacred memories. His image, as it rises in the region of imagination, is no sullen specter—cold, frowning, and perturbed—and which looks upon you as if to upbraid you for the past. But it is a blessed image—smiling, complacent, and calm, that still beams with the same affection with which it was accustomed to do—and you feel as if you had nothing to offer in the way of apology or penitence—for the purpose of satisfying and soothing. You still feel in mysterious and happy fellowship, though separated by the wide deep gulf of the grave.

Extract comfort, then, from your very tears, for love has left a drop even in *them*. You were happy, and that should prevent you being wretched now—you were his comfort on earth, and assisted him on his pilgrimage to heaven; where, perhaps, he is now thinking of you

before the throne, and finding a place for your name in the song of his gratitude before the fountain of mercy.

2. Perhaps you were permitted to be with him in his dying sickness, and to minister to his comfort, as long as he needed it and was capable of understanding your soothing touch. "I am glad I am not a king," said a dying husband to an affectionate and devoted wife, who never left him night or day, until his spirit forsook its clay—"for then," continued he, "I would not be waited upon by *you*." How tender and how soothing are the attentions of a wife at all times. But oh, how much greater are her comforts, in the chamber of sickness and death. Men who set little value on the kind offices of their wives in the time of health and activity, have been glad to have them at their bedside, in the season of disease, and at the last hour. How doubly precious are such offices in death, to those who loved their wives, and prized their attentions in life.

Such, afflicted woman, was, perhaps, your case. You were his constant attendant. You waited, watched and labored, to the uttermost of your strength—to smooth the pillow of sickness, and the bed of death. The food, and the medicine were always most welcome from your gentle hand; he forgot his pains in your presence. And it was some mitigation of your sorrows, while as his ministering angel you occupied the post of observation, darker every hour—that you saw how much you contributed to his comfort. You heard the words of love and gratitude that fell from the sufferer's lips; you saw the looks and tears which spoke what words were too weak to utter—and taxed your energies almost beyond what nature could supply—to meet the necessities of one whose flickering lamp seemed to be kept from extinction, by your vigilance and tenderness.

Well, it is all over now! Affection has done its **last**—as well as its **best**—and its **uttermost!** Is it not consoling to you to think of all this? Especially if you were enabled to minister to the comfort of the soul, as well as to the body, and by words of scripture promise, to drive away the gloomy thoughts and disturbing fears which came upon his spirit as he approached the dark valley of the shadow of death. Perhaps it was reserved for that solemn hour, for your dying husband to disclose to you the state of his soul, and to express to your more entire satisfaction, than you had felt before, his sense of sin, his faith in Christ, and his hope of glory.

3. And this is intimately connected with another source of consolation, I mean **the consideration of the happiness of your departed**

sainted husband, where indeed there is satisfactory ground to believe that he died as a true Christian. "How does the reflection," said Mrs. Huntingdon, after she became a widow, "that our departed friends have reached the point which we must reach before we can be happy—sweeten and soothe the anguish of separation! Let us contemplate them in every supposable view, and the prospect is full of consolation. We cannot think of them as what they were, or what they are, without pleasure. They are the highly favored of the Lord, who, having finished all that they had to do in this valley of tears, are admitted to the higher services of the upper temple. True, when we look at our loss, nature will feel sorrowful." Be it so, that you are sorrowful. Yet it is not, as regards your husband, a sorrow without hope. You have no grief on his account. Time was when you wept for *him*—you saw him burdened with care; exhausted by labor; perplexed with difficulties; sometimes humbled by a sense of his imperfections; and in his closing scenes, pale with sickness, racked with pain, until the tears glistened in his eye, and the groan escaped his bosom. But he will suffer no more; the days of his mourning are ended; and he is basking in the fullness of joy in God's presence, and surrounded with pleasures forevermore at his right hand. Strive then so far to rise above your grief, as to rejoice with him, though he cannot weep with you. You loved, and tried to make him happy upon earth—and he smiled when you in any measure succeeded; take some comfort in the thought that God has made him happy in heaven. Think of him not as in the **grave**—but as in **glory!** Say in the language of that beautiful epitaph—

Forgive, blessed one! the tributary tear,
That mourns your exit from a world like this,
Forgive the wish, that would have kept you here,
And ceased your progress to the seats of bliss.

No more confined to groveling scenes of night,
No more a tenant pent in mortal clay,
Now should we rather hail your glorious flight,
And trace your journey to the realms of day!

But perhaps, in all this, I do but lacerate some widows' heart already wounded, by the fear, their husbands' souls are not in heaven. Then turn from the subject in deep and silent submission. Confide in the justice of God. Rely upon his unerring wisdom. If you cannot reflect with comfort, and hope—then endeavor not to reflect at all. Say, "shall not the judge of all the earth do right?" If this source of consolation be closed, turn to the others, and they are many.

4. Recollect that God lives. "He lives," said the Psalmist, "and blessed be my rock, and let the God of my salvation be exalted." God lives! What a compass of thought and of consolation is there in that one expression; and akin to it is the language of Christ, to the beloved apostle in the isle of Patmos, "Behold, I am alive forevermore!" All will die—yet Christ lives! How often is he called in scripture, "the *living* God"—it is one of his most frequently repeated titles. And dwelling as we do, amid the tombs, it is one of his most comforting titles—as well as one of his most sublime and impressive ones, especially to those who have been called to sustain the loss of friends by death.

Thus we find there is a title, and attribute, and view, and operation of God—suited to all the varieties of our circumstances, our needs, our woes, and our fears. There is bounty for our needs; mercy for our sins and miseries; patience for our provocations; power for our weakness; certainty for our fears; wisdom for our ignorance; immutability for our vicissitudes! And because our friends are dying, and we also are following them to the grave—he is presented to us as the *living* God. And as he lives, all who belong to him, live with him. His attributes neither change nor die.

Just look at one view of his nature and conduct as given by the apostle—"*The God of all comfort.*" Beautiful representation! And akin to it is that other, "God, who comforts those who are cast down." What ideas are contained in these two aspects of God. They seem to tell us that not only is all comfort in him, and from him, and for all people who are willing to be comforted; not only that his consolations are such as by way of eminence and excellence, deserve to be called comfort, almost exclusively. But also that he is in his nature *all* comfort to his people, and in his dealings *always* comforting them. His nature is one vast fountain of consolation, and his operations, so many streams flowing from it. Now this God lives—and he lives to comfort *you*.

Your earthly comforter is gone. But your heavenly comforter remains. Is there not enough in his **power** to protect and support you? Is there not enough in his **wisdom** to guide you? Is there not enough in his **all-sufficiency** to provide for you? Is there not enough in his **goodness** to pity you? Is there not enough in his **love** to supply you? Is there not enough in his **presence** to cheer you? In your troubled and broken condition of mind, you need consolations which are not only sufficient in themselves—but which can be simply expressed and easily apprehended, without any long train of thought, or elaboration of argument. Here then is one, containing all comforts *in one*, "*My God*

lives!" Seize the simple yet wondrous conception; take it home to your afflicted bosom; apply it to your forlorn and desolate spirit; repeat it to yourself—and by the power of it, drive away unbelief, distrust, and all the crowd of dark, desponding thoughts—which hover like evil birds of prey over the desolate heart, there to nestle, and utter their moaning voices. Learn from a little child who seeing her widowed mother in utter sorrow and tears, asked the question, "*Is God Almighty dead, Mamma?*"

5. The Lord Jesus Christ in all his mediatorial offices, all his redeeming grace, all his tender sympathy, and all the blessings of his salvation—still remains! "Don't be afraid! I am the First and the Last. I am the living one who died. Look, I am alive forever and ever! And I hold the keys of death and the grave!" Rev. 1:17-18. Oh there is enough in these sublime words to support and comfort all the widows that are alive at this moment—or ever will be upon earth. Here they are not only told, that the Redeemer has exclusive dominion over death and the invisible world, so that none ever turns, or holds the key but himself—but also that he lives in all the plenitude of his power and grace to comfort those who survive! All that there is in the incarnation and death of Christ as the Savior of a lost and ruined world; in his resurrection from the grave; in his ascension into heaven, and intercession at the right hand of the Father; in his universal government of the world; in the promise, the purpose, and the hope of his second coming; in the assurance that he is now in the midst of his church, and will never leave it; in the distant prospect of the millennial days when his glory shall cover all lands—all this remains to console the hearts of his mourning people in their sorrows upon earth! And connected with all this, are the blessings that result from his mediatorial work—the pardon of all our sins, our full justification, the sanctification of our nature, adoption, final perseverance and preservation—in short, a perfect salvation!

And is there one who can think so little of these things as to find in them no adequate consolation in the hour and scene of her woe! Oh believer, is there not enough in *all this*, to save you from fainting? Bereaved woman, shall your sorrows at the grave of the most affectionate husband that a wife ever had—or ever lost—weigh down the cross, the atonement, the righteousness, the sympathy, the grace of Christ? He is still the same as to compassion, as he was when upon earth. Those eyes that wept at the grave of Lazarus, look on you! That bosom that groaned over the sorrows of Martha and Mary, cherishes you! He who pitied the widow of Nain, pities you! "In all their suffering he also suffered, and he personally rescued them. In his love and

mercy he redeemed them. He lifted them up and carried them through all the years." Isaiah 63:9.

In all his unsearchable riches of grace, in his promises of truth, and in his invitations—he is with you, and has said, "I will never leave you, nor forsake you! Not a promise died—when your husband died; not a fruit of grace, or a pledge of glory withered—when he departed. Not a single gospel consolation lies entombed in his sepulcher. The cup of your earthly prosperity may be emptied—but not a drop is lost from the cup of salvation. Death has deprived you of your temporal enjoyment—but your eternal salvation in Christ still remains! You are called to bear your cross—but Christ has borne his also. In one sense your husband sleeps in the tomb of Jesus—for we "are dead and buried with him." Therefore comfort yourself with these thoughts.

6. God has in a most especial manner interested himself on behalf of widows, and their fatherless children.

Just see how he has literally crowded the page of inspiration, with declarations concerning widows, and their fatherless children. He has revealed himself in a very especial manner as "the widow's God".

Observe how he has fenced in their interests and protected them from injury. "You shall not afflict any widow or fatherless child." Exod. 22:22. "You shall not take the widow's garment in pledge." Deut. 24:17. "Cursed be he who perverts the judgment of the fatherless and the widow." Deut. 29:19. "Judge the fatherless, plead for the widow." Isaiah 1:17. "If you oppress not the fatherless and the widow, . . . then will I cause you to dwell in this place." Jer. 7:6-7. "Oppress not the widow, nor the fatherless." Zech. 7:10. "In this have they vexed the widow." Ezek. 22:7.

Observe next the injunctions delivered not even to neglect the widow. "At the end of every third year bring the tithe of all your crops and store it in the nearest town. Give it to . . . the orphans, and the widows in your towns, so they can eat and be satisfied. Then the Lord your God will bless you in all your work." Deut. 14:28-29. "Every third year you must offer a special tithe of your crops. You must give these tithes to the . . . orphans, and widows so that they will have enough to eat in your towns. Then you must declare in the presence of the Lord your God, 'I have taken the sacred gift from my house and have given it to the . . . orphans and widows, just as you commanded me. I have not violated or forgotten any of your commands.'" Deut. 26:12-13.

Then dwell upon those passages in which kindness to widows is spoken of by men, or by God himself. "I caused the widow's heart to sing for joy." Job 26:13. In opposition to which he gives it as the mark of the wicked— "They drive away the donkey of the fatherless, and take the widow's ox for a pledge." Job 24:3. "The Lord will establish the border of the widow." Prov. 15:25. "A judge of the fatherless and widows is God in his holy habitation." Psalm 69:5. "Leave your fatherless children, I will preserve them alive, and let your widows trust in me." Jer. 49:11. "Pure and undefiled religion before God and the Father is this, to visit the fatherless and widows in their affliction." James 1:27.

What widow is there who in casting her eye over such passages as these—but must be comforted in thus witnessing the deep interest and concern, which God takes in her forlorn condition, when he has not only promised her what he will do himself—but commanded in every variety of form and expression—all others to sympathize with her, and actually to befriend her. She may surely say—
Poor though I am, despised, forgot,
Yet God, my God! forsakes me not.

Whoever is passed over by Jehovah, the Christian widow receives his special notice!

7. Perhaps you have still many FRIENDS left—for it is rarely the case that a widow has none, either on her own side, or on that of her late husband. There is something in your case that calls forth sympathy. Your very widow's dress, with silent but expressive signs, seems to say, "My husband is in his grave, pity me!" Hearts not easily moved have relented, and eyes unaccustomed to weep have shed tears—at the recital of your loss. Low as human nature has sunk by our apostasy from God, it has not lost all that is kind and amiable towards our fellow creatures—and in the exercise of this kindness, many are predisposed to be the friends of the widow. Do not refuse their friendship. Open your hearts and let them pour in the balm of sympathy. Do not discourage them in their efforts to interest or please—nor undervalue them. The 'sun' of your bright day has set, and it is night—but do not despise the 'lunar' beams—nor even the twinkling of a few scattered stars—even this is better than rayless gloom! Some, I admit there are, who in losing their husband, lose almost every friend they have on earth. Let them think of the friend, who is all friends in one—I mean, "the widow's God".

8. Is there not upon record such an assurance as this, "All things work together for good to those who love God, to those

who are the called according to his promise." Romans 8:28. The consolation I know is limited to a particular class of people, "to those who love God and are called according to his purpose," and none have a right to appropriate the comfort—but those who answer to the character. To no others can good come out of evil—for no others is God preparing a happy result of all their troubles—for no others are his mighty and glorious attributes of wisdom and power weaving the 'dark threads' of their history into a texture of felicity, and a garment of praise. But then, all are invited, and may instantly accept the invitation—to come within the comprehension of this circle of good, by coming through faith into the love of God.

To those who are already there, how inexpressibly consoling, if they have faith to receive it—is the assurance that there is good to be extracted for the widow, from her tears. Observe it is *good*—not ease; *concealed*—not apparent good; *future*—not present good. What an illustration of this passage of scripture is the history of the patriarch Joseph. Sorrow upon sorrow settled on the heart of his venerable father, as one bad report of his children after another fell upon his ear—until in the agony of his spirit he exclaimed, "All these things are against me!" And judging by appearances, he was right. Appearances, however were fallacious. Jacob could not see to the end—and he who cannot see the end, should not pronounce what the end will be. **All things were at the time working together for good**—though it was impossible for him to imagine in what way.

Equally impossible is it for you to see, or even to imagine, nor do I pretend to foretell—in what way good can come to you, from a husband's grave. All your brightest hopes have vanished; all your springs of earthly consolation are dried up; your support, and that of your children, is cut off. In such an event, 'human reason' can see nothing but unmixed evil for the present—and prognostications of woe for the future! And it really seems like a mockery of your woe to tell you, that it will work for your good. But is not good promised? If so, it must be fulfilled, though in a way unknown to us.

Suppose any one had gone to the venerable patriarch Jacob, when he was weeping, first for Joseph, and then for Benjamin, and uttered this astonishing language in his hearing, "All is working for your good!" Would he not have looked up, and with a reproving voice, said, "Do you come to mock me?" Yet he lived to see that it was so! If God says it is good—it must be so—for he can *make* it good! It may not be good for your temporal comfort—but it may be good for your eternal welfare! And if not for yours, it may be good for your children's eternal

welfare! And if not for theirs, it was good for your Christian husband's eternal happiness!

In this present world, you may never see how the death of your husband is for good. Many go all their lives without having the 'mystifying characters' of the sad event deciphered—and the secret workings of God's love laid open. They die in ignorance of his plans—though not of his purposes. So it may be with you. The 'finished side' of the embroidery may never be turned to you here; and looking only at the tangled threads and dark colors of the back part—all now appears to be in confusion! But when the front view shall be seen, and the design of the divine artist, and all the connections of the finely embroidered piece shall be pointed out, and the coloring shall be shown in the light of eternity—with what adoring wonder, delight, and gratitude will you exclaim, as the 'whole picture' bursts upon your sight, "O the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable are His methods! How unfathomable are His ways! All things have worked together for my good!"

9. Realize that TIME is short. "What I mean, brothers, is that the **time is short**. From now on those who have wives should live as if they had none; those who mourn, as if they did not; those who are happy, as if they were not; those who buy something, as if it were not theirs to keep; those who use the things of the world, as if not engrossed in them. For this world in its present form is passing away. 1 Cor. 7:29-31.

"Time is short!" Solemn expression! It is the death of the worldling's joy! But it is the solace of the Christian's sorrows! Widow, you cannot weep long, even though you go weeping all the way to your grave! The days of your mourning are numbered—and must end soon. The 'valley of tears' is not interminable. You are passing through it— and will soon pass out of it! Be patient, the coming of the Lord draws near! Eternity is at hand, through the everlasting ages of which, you will weep no more—for God himself shall wipe away all tears from the eyes of his people! In hell sinners weep forever! In heaven saints never weep!

10. Realize what felicity awaits you on that blessed shore, on which your departed husband stands looking back wonderingly on the dark waters of the river he has passed, and beckoning you, as it were—to come away to the realms of immortality! You will soon follow to the regions of which it is said, "there will be no more death."

Heaven is *a world of life*—eternal life—never to be interrupted by the *entrance* of death—or even the *fear* of death! And this is reserved for you, Christian! Those who are united by the bonds of Christian love, as well as marital love—do not lose one another in the dark valley, never to meet in the world of immortals. They drop the 'fleshy union' in the grave, and all that appertained to it—but not the 'spiritual union' that makes them one in Christ.

United in the honors and felicities of that blessed world, where *all* are blessed perfectly and forever—you shall receive together the answer of those prayers you presented upon earth. You shall realize the 'anticipations of heaven' which you indulged, while traveling across the 'desert of mortality'. You shall trace together the providential events of your earthly history. You shall learn why you were united—and why separated. You shall see the wisdom and goodness of those events, which once appeared so dark, and drew so many tears from your eyes. You shall indulge in reminiscences, all of which will furnish new occasions of wonder—new motives to praise—and new sources of delight. You shall point one another to the vista of everlasting ages opening before you, through which an endless succession of joys are advancing to meet you! And then, filled with a pure, unearthly love for each other, you shall fall down before the throne of the Lamb, and feel every other affection absorbed in supreme, adoring love to him! Such a scene is before you! And since it is—then bear your sorrows, afflicted widow, for in what felicities are they to result—and how soon!

But, perhaps, I should help to comfort the mourner, if, in addition to those gracious promises and directions which are specially appropriate to the case of widows, and which have been already presented to your notice, I lay before you **a selection of passages of Scripture**, which are applicable to all people in trouble. What words may be expected to have such power over the sorrowful heart, as those of God. Many of these have been already quoted—but there may be an advantage in bringing them all together in one view before the mind.

GOD'S PURPOSE IN AFFLICTING

"For you, O God, tested us; you refined us like silver." Psalm 66:10
"Moreover, we have all had human fathers who disciplined us and we respected them for it. How much more should we submit to the Father of our spirits and live! Our fathers disciplined us for a little while as they thought best; but God disciplines us for our good, that we may share in his holiness." Hebrews 12:9-10

GOD'S JUSTICE AND FAITHFULNESS IN OUR TRIALS

"He has not punished us for all our sins, nor does he deal with us as we deserve." Psalm 103:10

"I know, O Lord, that your decisions are righteous; you disciplined me because I needed it." Psalm 119:75

"The unfailing love of the Lord never ends! By his mercies we have been kept from complete destruction." Lament. 3:22

"Why should we, mere humans, complain when we are punished for our sins?" Lament. 3:39

"I will be patient as the Lord punishes me, for I have sinned against him. The Lord will bring me out of my darkness into the light, and I will see his righteousness." Micah 7:9

GOD'S LOVE IN AFFLICTING US

"My child, don't ignore it when the Lord disciplines you, and don't be discouraged when he corrects you. For the Lord corrects those he loves, just as a father corrects a child in whom he delights." Proverbs 3:11-12

"For the Lord disciplines those he loves, and he punishes those he accepts as his children." Hebrews 12:6

"I am the one who corrects and disciplines everyone I love." Rev. 3:19

GOD A COMFORTER

"The Father of compassion and the God of all comfort." 2 Cor. 1:3

"God, who comforts the downcast." 2 Cor. 7:6

GOD A REFUGE

"God is our refuge and strength, always ready to help in times of trouble. So we will not fear, even if earthquakes come and the mountains crumble into the sea. Let the oceans roar and foam. Let the mountains tremble as the waters surge! The Lord Almighty is here among us; the God of Israel is our fortress!" Psalm 46

GOD'S PRESENCE WITH US IN THE DEEPEST TRIBULATION

"Do not be afraid, for I have ransomed you. I have called you by name; you are mine. When you go through deep waters and great trouble, **I will be with you!** When you go through rivers of difficulty, you will not drown! When you walk through the fire of oppression, you will not be burned up; the flames will not consume you. For I am the Lord, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior." Isaiah 43:1-3

GOD'S EYE UPON HIS PEOPLE IN SORROW

"He *knows* the way that I take; when he has tested me I shall come forth as gold." Job 23:10

GOD CANNOT FORGET HIS PEOPLE

"Can a mother forget the baby at her breast, and have no compassion on the child she has borne? Though she may forget, I will not forget you!" Isaiah 49:15

TRUST IN GOD ENJOINED, ENCOURAGED, AND EXEMPLIFIED

"Those who know your name trust in you, for you, O Lord, have never abandoned anyone who searches for you." Psalm 9:10

"And so, Lord, where do I put my hope? My only hope is in you."
Psalm 39:7

"You will keep in perfect peace all who trust in you, whose thoughts are fixed on you! Trust in the Lord always, for the Lord God is the eternal Rock." Isaiah 26:3-4

"Though he slays me, yet will I trust in him." Job 13:15.

CONSOLATORY ASSURANCES

"Affliction does not spring from the soil, and trouble does not sprout from the earth." Job 5:6

"Even strong young lions sometimes go hungry—but those who trust in the Lord will never lack any good thing." Psalm 34:10

"Trust in the Lord and do good. Then you will live safely in the land and prosper." Psalm 37:3

"Once I was young, and now I am old. Yet I have never seen the godly forsaken, nor seen their children begging for bread." Psalm 37:25

"In all their suffering he also suffered, and he personally rescued them. In his love and mercy he redeemed them. He lifted them up and carried them through all the years." Isaiah 63:9

"So don't worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring its own worries. Today's trouble is enough for today." Matthew 6:34

"Since he himself has gone through suffering and temptation, he is able to help us when we are being tempted." Hebrews 2:18

"I will never fail you. I will never forsake you." Hebrews 13:5

THE SHORT DURATION OF OUR TRIALS

"His anger lasts for a moment—but his favor lasts a lifetime! Weeping may go on all night—but joy comes with the morning." Psalm 30:5

"Those who plant in tears—will harvest with shouts of joy." Psalm 126:5

"Yet what we suffer now is nothing compared to the glory he will give us later." Romans 8:18

"For our present troubles are quite small and won't last very long. Yet they produce for us an immeasurably great glory that will last forever!" 2 Cor. 4:17

"So be truly glad! There is wonderful joy ahead, even though it is necessary for you to endure many trials for a while." 1 Peter 1:6

ENCOURAGEMENTS TO CAST OURSELVES AND OUR **BURDENS** UPON THE LORD

"Trust me in your times of trouble, and I will rescue you, and you will give me glory." Psalm 50:15

"Give your burdens to the Lord, and he will take care of you. He will not permit the godly to slip and fall." Psalm 55:22

DIRECTIONS AND EXAMPLES HOW TO BEHAVE IN TROUBLE

"And Aaron remained silent." Leviticus 10:3

"It is the Lord's will. Let him do what he thinks best." 1 Samuel 3:18

"In all of this, Job did not sin by blaming God." Job 1:22

"Should we accept only good things from the hand of God and never anything bad?" Job 2:10

"I am silent before you; I won't say a word. For my punishment is from you." Psalm 39:9

"Father, if you are willing, please take this cup of suffering away from me. Yet I want your will, not mine." Luke 22:42

BENEFICIAL RESULTS OF AFFLICTIONS

"I used to wander off until you disciplined me; but now I closely follow your word." Psalm 119:67

"The suffering you sent was good for me, for it taught me to pay attention to your principles." Psalm 119:71

"I will bring that group through the fire and make them pure, just as gold and silver are refined and purified by fire." Zech. 13:9

"We can rejoice, too, when we run into problems and trials, for we know that they are good for us—they help us learn to endure. And endurance develops strength of character in us, and character strengthens our confident expectation of salvation. And this expectation will not disappoint us. For we know how dearly God loves us, because he has given us the Holy Spirit to fill our hearts with his love." Romans 5:3-5

"You know that the testing of your faith develops perseverance. Perseverance must finish its work so that you may be mature and complete, not lacking anything." James 1:3-4

THE **END** OF ALL OUR AFFLICTIONS

"You will show me the way of life, granting me the joy of your presence and the pleasures of living with you forever." Psalm 16:11

"These are the ones coming out of the great tribulation. They washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb and made them white. That is

why they are standing in front of the throne of God, serving him day and night in his Temple. And he who sits on the throne will live among them and shelter them. They will never again be hungry or thirsty, and they will be fully protected from the scorching noontime heat. For the Lamb who stands in front of the throne will be their Shepherd. He will lead them to the springs of life-giving water. And God will wipe away all their tears!" Rev. 7:14-17

Daughter of sorrow! These are the words of God! And they are tested words. Millions now in glory, and myriads more on the way to glory—have tried them in the dark hour of their affliction—and have found them a cordial to their fainting spirits! "Unless your word had supported me," they have each said, "I would have perished in my affliction." That word *did* support them, and though the torrent was roaring and rushing furiously, that word kept them buoyant upon its surface, when they otherwise must have sunk. A single text has in some instances saved the despairing soul from destruction. Read the previously selected list—what variety of representation; what kindness and compassion of sentiment; what tenderness of language; what beauty in the figures; what force in the allusions; what appropriateness in the epithets; what universal comprehension in the descriptions! Whose case is omitted? Whose circumstances are untouched? Whose sorrows are unnoticed? Remember, I say again, this is the consolation of your heavenly Father! It is Jehovah coming to you, and saying to you, "Woman, why are you weeping? Is not all this enough to comfort you? Do not close your heart against such consolations as these! Be still, and know that I am God!"

The Widow Directed to the Widow's God

by John Angell James, 1841

CONFIDENCE IN GOD

Perhaps, as I have already supposed, in addition to the deep affliction of your being left a widow, you are left also in circumstances every way calculated to aggravate this already heavy woe. To lose your husband is of itself a cup of sorrow requiring nothing to fill it to overflowing, and embitter it with wormwood, except to have a young dependent family—and no provision for their support, or their settlement in the world. O! for that woman to be plunged into all the anxieties of business, all the fear of destitution, who never knew a care, or tasted of solicitude! For such a one, unskilled in trade, unused

to labor—to have her own maintenance and that of her children to earn! To sit day after day, amid her little fatherless circle, and witness their consciousness of their loss; to hear them ask why she weeps; to have her heart lacerated by questions about their father; to sit in silent solitary grief when their voices are all hushed at night, except that cry which issues from the cradle; to be followed to a sleepless pillow, and be kept awake through the whole night, by recollections of departed joys—and *fears of future destitution!!* Ah my afflicted friend, I pity you. May God support and comfort you.

Permit me to whisper in your ear, and direct to your troubled spirit, the passage I have already quoted, "*Let your widows trust in me. A father to the fatherless, a defender of widows, is God in his holy dwelling.*" Do consider *who* it is that says this. It is the omnipotent, all-sufficient God! It is he who has afflicted you—who says this. He authorizes, he invites, he enjoins your confidence. But what do I mean by confidence? An expectation that he will provide for you—an expectation, which if it does not bring you to strong consolation, is sufficient, at any rate, to control the intensity of your grief, to check the hopelessness of your sorrows, and save you from despair—an expectation which shall prevent all your energies from being paralyzed, and keep you from sitting down amid your little helpless family, and abandoning all for lost—an expectation which leads you to say, "I do not see *how* or *where* help is to come—but I believe it *will* come. I am utterly at a loss to conceive how I shall be able to work my way, or provide for these fatherless children—but God has encouraged me to confide in him—and he is omnipotent. I know not whence to look for friends—but the hearts of all men are in his hands, and he can turn some helper towards me in acts of kindness." *This* is confidence; this is trust in God. Is it necessary for me here to mention **the grounds of trust**? They are at hand in great number and force.

1. Dwell upon the innumerable exhortations to trust, as appertaining to all states of sorrow and difficulty, which are to be found in the Word of God. Scarcely one word occurs more frequently in the Old Testament than the word, "TRUST," nor one in the New, more frequently than "FAITH." They stand intimately related; for indeed, if not identical in meaning, they are nearly so. Trust in the God of providence means faith in him; and faith in Christ, means trust in him. How sweetly does one sacred writer after another catch up the word "TRUST," and roll it in innumerable echoes along the whole line of revelation. How repeatedly does the sound come from the lips of God himself, "Trust in me." How often do we hear the troubled and destitute saint reply, "In you do I put my trust." How often do the

inspired penmen, after disclosing the glories of the divine character, and the infinite attributes of Jehovah, finish their description by such an admonition as this, "Put your trust in the Lord."

Dwell on the **power** of God! Can he not sustain you and your children? In casting yourselves on his boundless sufficiency, his infinite and inexhaustible resources—you do not intrude or presume upon him. He invites, yes, commands your confidence. You do not lay down your burden on his arm unauthorized; he stretches out his arm and says, "Here—put your burden here, and I will sustain it." He asks to take care of you. He promises to take care of you. Trust him then. But you have nothing, you think—but his bare promise. You man not have a friend to whom you can look; not an hint even to point out in what way *his* assistance is to come. Then you have the more need, and I was almost going to add, more warrant, to trust him. Then is the time for faith in God's word, when you have nothing to look for from man—then is the time to trust in the promise, when you have nothing else *but the promise* to trust to.

It is not possible to conceive of one act of the human mind that more honors God, or more pleases him—than that simple trust in the promises of his word, which is exercised in the absence of everything else. A widow, with a little circle of dependent children, with no present provision, and no assured prospect of provision, who yet exercises confidence in God, and believes she shall in some way or other be taken care of, is in a state of mind, certainly, as acceptable to God, as any in which a human being can be found—and perhaps even more so.

2. Meditate much upon the special promises and gracious intimations which are made to your own particular and afflictive case. Go over the passages which I have already quoted—read them repeatedly, until you are enabled to feel their full force. *They are God's own words to widows*—the language of the divine and infinite Comforter, to the most afflicted class in all the school of sorrow! And ought they not to be received as such, with all the faith and trust that are due to an infallible being? Can *he* have invited the widow's saddened heart to words of consolation, only to mock its sadness? Can *he* have attracted her confidence by language specially addressed to her, only to leave her forsaken and abandoned? This would not be *human* mercy, much less *divine* mercy.

Difficult, then, as it may be, and must be—amid broken cisterns, failing springs, exhausted resources, and with no prospect, or even the

slightest indication of the coming blessing on the distant horizon, to trust in God—endeavor, dejected woman, to do so. Like Hagar in the wilderness, you may be near the deliverer—when you know it not. An invisible comforter is near, and the provider may be coming, though unseen. Trust, O trust—and be not afraid! Endeavor to hush your fears to rest, under the music and the charm of that one promise, "Do not be afraid, for I have ransomed you. I have called you by name; you are mine! When you go through deep waters and great trouble, **I will be with you!** When you go through rivers of difficulty, you will not drown! When you walk through the fire of oppression, you will not be burned up; the flames will not consume you. For I am the Lord, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior." Isaiah 43:1-3

3. Another encouragement to trust, is the testimony of those who have observed the ways of Providence, and the care which it has exercised over widows.

It has grown into a kind of current adage, "That whomever may seem to be overlooked by Providence, God takes especial care of widows and orphans." Who has not heard this expression, and who has not seen its verification in instances that have come under his own observation? Who could not mention the names of some whom he has seen extraordinarily provided for in their necessitous and seemingly helpless, hopeless widowhood? It has so often been my lot to see this gracious interposition of Providence, that I scarcely ever despond over the case of a widow. And the more necessitous and hopeless—so far as human support is concerned—the more confident do I feel of divine intervention. Thus true it is, that he who removes the arm of flesh which sustained the wife, lends his own arm of power to sustain the widow. "Your maker is your husband," says the prophet.

4. Perhaps your own experience may come in advantageously to encourage your confidence.

You have been supported hitherto. You sustained the shock of separation, which, at one time, when anticipated, you thought must crush your heart. You have perhaps got through the first difficulties of your afflicted condition—you have not been allowed to sink thus far. Remember—God is the same yesterday, today, and forever. He neither grows tired of helping—nor unwilling to help. He who has carried you through the first season of your widowhood, can with equal ease, sustain you through any succeeding one.

5. Direct your attention to the language of Christ. "Look at the birds. They don't need to plant or harvest or put food in barns because your heavenly Father feeds them. And you are far more valuable to

him than they are." Matthew 6:26. And this is but a repetition of a similar sentiment in Psalm 147, "He feeds the wild animals, and the young ravens cry to him for food." Does he take care of ravens, and sparrows—and will he not take care of *you*? Will he feed his birds—and starve his babes? Think of the millions of millions in the animal world, which rise every morning dependent for their sustenance upon the omnipresent and all-sufficient Feeder of his creatures! This consideration may not, perhaps, have struck you before—but it is one which our Lord suggested for the comfort of his disciples, and one, therefore, which with great propriety and force, may be considered by you.

6. Consider how all creatures, rational and irrational, are under the direction and control of God. "He has prepared his throne in the heavens, and his kingdom rules over all." All orders of beings, from the highest seraph in glory, down to the lowest reptile which crawls in the dust—are his servants, and can be made to do his will, execute his plans, and fulfill the purposes of his benevolence towards his people. All hearts are at his disposal, and he can make even the covetous liberal, the hardhearted sympathetic, and the hostile friendly. In a thousand instances he has made men act contrary to their nature, and brought as it were, the 'waters of mercy' out of the 'rocky heart', to refresh the weary and faint. Help has often come from quarters, whence it was to be least expected—and instruments have been employed which, to the eye of reason, were of all the most unlikely.

The following fact, extracted from an American religious newspaper, is an illustration of this.

"It was a cold and bleak evening, in a most severe winter. The snow, driven by the furious north wind, was piled into broad and deep banks along our streets. Few dared or were willing to venture abroad.

"In a most miserable and shattered tenement, somewhat remote from any other habitation, there then resided an aged widow, all alone—and *yet not alone*. During the weary day, in her excessive weakness, she had been unable to step beyond her door stone, or to communicate her needs to any friend. Her last morsel of bread had been long since consumed, and none heeded her destitution. She sat at evening by her small fire, half famished with hunger—from exhaustion unable to sleep—preparing to meet the dreadful fate from which she knew not how she should be spared. She had prayed that morning, in full faith, 'Give me this day my daily bread,' but the shadows of evening had descended upon her, and her faithful prayer had not been answered.

While such thoughts were passing through her weary mind, she heard the door suddenly open, and as suddenly shut again, and found deposited in her entry, by an unknown hand, a basket crowded with food, which had all the sweetness of manna to her. What were her feelings on that night, God only knows! but they were such as arise up to Him—the great deliverer and provider—from ten thousand hearts every day. Many days elapsed before the widow learned through what messenger God had sent to her that timely aid. It was at the impulse of a little child, who on that dismal night, seated at the cheerful fireside of her home, was led to express the generous wish, that that poor widow, whom she had sometimes visited, could have some of her numerous comforts and good cheer. The parents followed out the benevolent suggestion—and a servant was soon dispatched to her humble abode with a plentiful supply. "What a beautiful glimpse of the chain of causes, all fastened at the throne of God! An angel, with noiseless wing, came down and stirred the peaceful bosom of a pure-hearted child, and with no pomp or circumstance of the outward miracle, the widow's prayer was answered."

Of course when I recommend confidence in God, it is implied that all suitable exertions be made to obtain the means of support. If you allow grief, despondency, and indolence to paralyze your efforts, you have no encouragement to trust in God. His grace is to be exercised in connection with the employment of all those energies which yet remain—and every widow, instead of sitting down to indulge in hopeless sorrow, should, in humble dependence on divine grace, immediately apply herself in such way as her talents and her circumstances allow, to some occupation—for the support of herself and her children.

The Widow Directed to the Widow's God

by John Angell James, 1841

BENEFITS OF AFFLICTION

It may not be amiss to introduce here a few of the benefits, which afflictions in general are intended and calculated to produce. God does not afflict willingly—nor grieve the children of men. He takes no delight in seeing our tears—or hearing our groans. But he does take delight in doing us good, making us holy, conforming us to his own image, and fitting us to dwell in his own presence. He treats us as the sculptor does the marble under his hand, which from a rough unsightly mass,

he intends to carve into a splendid statue, a glorious work of art. Every application of the chisel, every blow of the mallet, is to strike off some bit of the stone, which must be removed to bring out the figure in perfection, which he designs to form.

In our case how much is necessary to be struck off from our corrupt nature, and from what appertains to us, before we can be brought into that form and beauty which it is the intention of the divine Craftsman we should bear, especially as it is his plan to mold us into his own image. How much of pride and vanity; of carnality and worldly-mindedness; of self-sufficiency and independence; of creature-love and earthly dependence; must be removed by each blow of the mallet, and each cut of the chisel, before the beauties of holiness, humility, meekness, and heavenly mindedness; and all the graceful proportions and features of the divine nature can be exhibited.

1. Affliction quickens DEVOTION.

Our prayers are too often only *said* in prosperity—now they are *prayed!* In prosperity, they do but *drop*—now they are *poured* out, and flow like a stream; or rise like a cloud of incense, in almost uninterrupted exercise, until the thoughts and feelings seem to follow without intermission in one continued prayer. Ah! how many can look back to the place of affliction, and say, "There it was, that my soul poured out many prayers to the Lord. I had grown negligent of prayer, and careless in its performance. But when I was afflicted, I prayed indeed—then I had communion with God; then I sought the Lord, and he heard me and delivered me from all my fears."

Nearness to God is the happiness of the renewed soul. **Affliction is but one of God's servants to bring us into his presence**, and the enjoyment of this privilege. God delights to hear from us often, as the kind parent loves to hear from his child when at a distance from home. Affliction comes and knocks at the door, enters into our habitation, asks us if we have not forgotten our father, and expresses a willingness to conduct us to him. Many have found, in trial, the lost spirit of prayer, and have experienced in that one benefit, more than a compensation for all they have suffered. Many a woman has been recalled, as a widow, to the closet of devotion, which as a wife, she had forsaken.

2. Affliction discloses, mortifies, and prevents SIN.

Affliction is a season of REMEMBRANCE of sin. The sin of Joseph's brethren was forgotten until they were in prison; then it came to their recollection, and they exclaimed, "Surely we are being punished

because of our brother." Genesis 42:21. The poor widow of Zarephath, when her child lay dead in the house, thus addressed the prophet, "What do you have against me, man of God? Did you come to remind me of my sin and kill my son?" 1 Kings 17:18. Perhaps at that moment, the guilt of all her past life, for which she had not sufficiently humbled herself before God, came before her perturbed mind.

Sin appears but small, and presses but lightly on the conscience in the days of prosperity—but its dreadful form seems alarming in the night season of trial. Our sorrows look then as the shadows of sins, and address us as with a kind of spectral voice. We go back through our lives; we follow ourselves through every scene; we look at our conduct with an inquisitive and jealous eye; we examine our motives, and weigh our spirits—and oh what humbling disclosures are the result! Many have gained more self-knowledge by a month's learning in the school of sorrow, than by all their previous life.

As affliction *discloses* sin—so it DESTROYS THE STRENGTH OF SIN. As wise and salutary **discipline** weakens evil habits and strengthens the moral virtues; as the **frosts** of winter kill the noxious insects, and the poisonous weeds; as the **knife** prunes the tree of its dead and superfluous branches; and as the **fire** purifies the precious metals, so that they lose nothing by its burning, but their dross—so **trials purge the soul of its corruptions**—by weakening the love of sin; giving an experimental proof of its malignity; awakening strenuous efforts to resist its influence; and teaching the necessity of renewed acts of faith on the atoning blood of the Savior, and dependence on the power and grace of the Holy Spirit. "Every branch that bears fruit, he prunes, that it may bear more fruit." John 15:2. "By this, therefore, shall the iniquity of Jacob be purged; and this is all the fruit to take away his sin."

When Mr. Cecil was walking in the Botanical Gardens of Oxford, his attention was arrested by a fine pomegranate tree, cut almost through the stem near the root. On asking the gardener the reason of this, "Sir," said he, "this tree used to shoot so strong, that it bore nothing but leaves. I was therefore obliged to cut it in this manner; and when it was almost cut through, then it began to bear plenty of fruit." The reply afforded this inquisitive student a general practical lesson, which was of considerable use to him in after life, when severely exercised by personal and domestic afflictions. Alas! in many cases, it is not enough that the useless branches of the tree be lopped off—but the stock itself must be cut—and cut nearly through—before it can become

extensively fruitful. And sometimes the finer the tree, and the more luxuriant its growth, the deeper must be the incision."

Nor is affliction without its benefit in PREVENTING sin. We never know how near we are to danger. We are like blind men wandering near the edge of a precipice, the mouth of a well, or the margin of a deep pit; and then God by a severe wrench, it may be, and a violent jerk that puts us to some pain, and gives us a severe jolt—plucks us from the ruin that we did not see. Oh what hairbreadth escapes from destruction, effected perhaps by some distressing visitation, shall we in eternity be made to understand, we experienced on earth. We now often stand amazed at some severe trial; we cannot conjecture why it was sent; we see no purpose it was to serve, no end it was to accomplish—but there was an omniscient eye that saw what we did not, and could not see—and he sent forth this severe trial to pluck our feet from the net which had been spread for them! How we shall adore God in heaven for these 'preventing mercies', which came in the form of some dark and inexplicable event, which filled us at the time with lamentation and woe! Oh woman, even your husband's grave, was to prevent perhaps a calamity still deeper and heavier than his death!

3. Affliction tends to exercise, improve and quicken our GRACES.

In the present state our graces are all imperfect, and our conformity to the divine purity is only like the resemblance of the sun in a watery cloud—our imperfections envelope and obscure our excellencies. Therefore God sends the stormy wind of his providential and painful visitations, to sweep away the clouds and cause the hidden luminary to shine forth.

How is **faith** tested, revealed and strengthened by tribulation! Abraham had not known the strength of *his* faith, had he not been called to sacrifice Isaac; nor Peter his, had he not been called by Christ to tread the waves. How many have gone with a weak and faltering belief to the riverside, and yet when there, have had their confidence in God so strengthened, that they plunged into the flood, and have emerged, wondering at the grace which carried them safety through.

Resignation has also been revealed and strengthened by tribulation! There are some graces, which, like the stars, can be seen only in the dark, and this is one of them. As they came to the trial, these afflicted ones saw that their only hope was in submission, and they sent one piercing cry to heaven, "Lord, save me—or I perish. Help me to bow down with unresisting acquiescence." Resignation was given to them;

and they kissed the rod, exclaiming, "Even so, Father, for so it seems good in your sight."

Their **trust** and **confidence** have equaled their faith and submission. At one time they trembled at the shaking of a leaf; to their surprise they now find they can brave storms, or face lions! Then, it did not seem as if they could trust God for anything—now, they can confide everything to him. They have been taught lessons of reliance, which in seasons of unmolested ease, seemed as much beyond their comprehension as their attainment. "Tribulation works perseverance," and if it does not accomplish this in perfection, it produces it in large measures. Oh what a blessing is perseverance! It is beautifully said by Bishop Hopkins, "If God confirms and augments your perseverance under sufferings, sufferings are mercies; afflictions are favors. He blesses you by chastisements, and crowns you with glory—even while he seems to crown you with thorns. Perseverance stoops to the heaviest burdens, and carries them as long as God shall please, without murmuring and repining; and if that be to the grave, it knows that what is now a load, shall then be found to be a treasure. A Christian does but carry his own wealth, his crown, and his scepter; which though here they be burdensome, shall hereafter be eternally glorious."

The following is an extract from a letter of Oberlin to a lady who had suffered many bereavements—"I have before me two stones, which are in imitation of precious stones. They are both perfectly alike in color, they are both of the same quality—clear, pure, and clean. Yet there is a marked difference between them, as to their luster and brilliancy. One has a dazzling brightness, while the other is dull, so that the eye passes over it, and derives no pleasure from the sight. What can the reason of this difference be? It is this; the one is cut but in few facets; the other has ten times as many. These facets are produced by a very violent operation. It is requisite to cut, to smooth, and polish. Had these stones been endued with life, so as to have been capable of feeling what they underwent, the one which has received eighty facets would have thought itself very unhappy, and would have envied the fate of the other, which, having received but eight, has undergone but a tenth part of its sufferings. Nevertheless, the operations being over, it is done forever—the difference between the two stones always remains strongly marked. That which has suffered but little, is entirely eclipsed by the other, which alone is held in estimation, and attracts attention. May not this serve to explain the saying of our Savior, whose words always bear some reference to eternity—'Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted'. Blessed whether we

contemplate them apart, or in comparison with those who have not passed through so many trials. O that we were always able to cast ourselves into his arms, like little children—to draw near him like helpless lambs—and ever to ask of him patience, resignation, an entire surrender to his will—faith, trust, and a heartfelt obedience to the commands which he gives to those who are willing to be his disciples! 'The Lord God will wipe away tears from off all faces.'

4. Afflictions tend to wean us from the world, and to fix our affections on things above.

We are all too worldly. We gravitate too much to earth. We have not attained to that conquest of the world by faith, which is our duty to seek, and would be our privilege to obtain. Our feet stick in the mire, and we do not soar aloft on the wings of faith and hope into the regions above us, as we ought. We are like moles, when we should be like eagles—mere earthly men, when we should be as the angels of God. With such a revelation as we possess of the eternal world; with such an opening as is made in the clouds of mortality, by the discoveries of the New Testament; and such a vista as is opened into the realms of immortality, how easy a thing ought it to be, to overcome the world. With the holy mount so near, and so accessible to our faith, how is it that we grovel as we do here? How is it that heaven is opening to present its sights to our eyes, and its sounds to our ears, and that we will neither look at the one, nor listen to the other?

"A Christian ought to be," says Lady Powerscourt, "*Not one who looks up from earth to heaven—but one who looks down from heaven to earth.*" Yet the multitude do neither. Instead of dwelling in heaven, they do not visit it—instead of abiding in it, in the state of their affections, they do not look at it. Hence the need, and the benefit too, of afflictions. They cover the earth with the shades of night, the pall of darkness, so that if there be any light at all, it must come from the skies. How differently things look when seen from the chamber of sickness, or the grave of a friend! Honor, wealth, and pleasure, lose their charms then, and present no beauty, that we should desire them. We seem to regard the world as an impostor that has deceived us, and turn from it with disgust. The loss of a friend, and especially such a friend as a husband, does more to prove the truth of Solomon's description of the vanity of everything beneath the sun, than all the sermons we have ever heard, and all the volumes we have ever read.

Such are a few of the benefits to be derived, and which by many have been derived from affliction. "Take care, Christian," said the late Mr. Cecil, "whatever you meet with in your way, that you do not forget

your Father! When the proud and wealthy rush by in triumph, while you are poor and in sorrow, listen and hear your Father saying to you, 'My son, had I loved them, I would have corrected them too. I give them up to the way of their own hearts. But to my children, if I give sorrow, it is that I may lead them to an unfading and eternal crown of glory!'"

The excellent Joseph Williams, of Kidderminster, one of the best men of modern times, does but give the testimony of all God's chosen and tried people, where in his diary he says, "I find afflictions to be good for me. I have ever found them so. They are happy means in the hands of the Holy Spirit to crush my corruptions, to subdue my pride, my evil passions, my inordinate love to the creature. They soften my hard heart, bring me on my knees, exercise and increase faith, love, humility, and self-denial. They make me poor in spirit, and nothing in my own eyes. Welcome the cross! Welcome deep adversity! Welcome stripping Providences."

Humbled in the lowest deep,
You for my suffering I bless;
Think of all your love, and weep
For my own unfaithfulness:
I have most rebellious been,
You have laid your hand on me,
Kindly visited my sin,
Scourged the wanderer back to thee.

Taught obedience to my God
By the things I have endured,
Meekly now I kiss the rod,
Wounded by the rod—and cured!
Good for me the grief and pain,
Let me but your grace adore;
Keep the pardon I regain,
Stand in awe and sin no more.
—Charles Wesley.

The Widow Directed to the Widow's God

by John Angell James, 1841

NAOMI, RUTH, AND ORPAH

The fullness and appropriateness of scripture are as delightful as they are wonderful. In that precious volume is to be found something suited to every character, every case, and every vicissitude of life. Promises, precepts, and prospects of every variety, present themselves to all who are desirous of being directed, sanctified, and comforted. But if anyone should think there is nothing which meets the preciseness of her case, it cannot be the widow. This living form of human woe is found in very diversified circumstances in the Word of God. And to these I now direct the attention of the reader.

The first example which I present is the little group of widows, consisting of **NAOMI**, and her two daughters-in-law. The book of Ruth where this touching story is to be found, was written probably by Samuel, as an introduction to the historical portion of scripture which immediately follows it; or else it may be regarded as a beautiful episode of the inspired narrative, containing the account of a family, which as it stands in the line of David's ancestry, and therefore in that of the Messiah, is for this reason as important as its short annals are tender and interesting.

We are informed by the sacred writer of this book, that a famine having arisen in the land of Judea, Elimelech, a Jew of some note among his countrymen, fled with his wife Naomi, and his two sons, Mahlon and Chilion, into the land of Moab, to which the famine had not extended. How far he was justified in such a step, by which he left all the public ordinances of true religion, to sojourn in a land of idolaters, we cannot decide. If, indeed, there were no other means of preserving *life*, it would be wrong to condemn him. But if it were only with a view to obtain a comfortable living—more easily, cheaply, and abundantly, than he could do in Judea—he was to be censured; and some have considered the afflictions which befell him in the land of Moab, as an expression of the divine displeasure for resorting to it. **Let us never for any temporal advantages, give up such as are spiritual**; for worldly ease and prosperity, purchased at the expense of true religion, are dearly bought! And at the same time, let us be cautious how we pretend to interpret the affairs of providence, and to declare that event to be a work of divine displeasure, which is only one of the common occurrences of life.

One false step is often productive of a long train of consequences, which extend far beyond the individual by whom the error is committed, and involves others in danger, or distress! This is especially true in the case of a parent. Elimelech, as we have already said, had two sons, Mahlon, and Chilion, who having arrived at

manhood, and being removed from all communion with Jewish women, married two of the women of the idolatrous land in which they now dwelt. This being contrary to the Mosaic law, which prohibited the Jews to intermarry with strangers—was unquestionably wrong. But what could their father expect, who had exposed them to the peril? Religious parents should neither form associations, nor contract friendships with dissolute worldly people, nor choose a residence for the sake of their society. For by doing this, they are almost sure to unite their children in marriage with the ungodly!

The family was now settled in Moab, and Judea seemed, if not forgotten, yet forsaken. Alas! how soon and how suddenly was the domestic circle in this case, as in many others, invaded and broken up, and all the mirthful visions of earthly bliss dissipated like the images of a dream! If the famine did not follow this household across the Jordan, death did! For Elimelech, who sought a portion for them, found a grave far from the sepulcher of his fathers, for himself. Who feels no sympathy for Naomi? There she is a widow! and a stranger in a strange land, distant from the house of her God, the means of grace, the ministers of true religion, the communion of the faithful—and surrounded only by heathen, and their abominable idolatries! Still her sons are with her, and also their wives, who had, it seems, embraced the true religion of their husbands.

Here then was a little circle of relatives, and the worshipers of the true God around her, who endeavored to hush the sorrows of her heart, and wipe away the tears from her eyes. But her cup of sorrow was now to be filled to the brim—for first one son followed his father to the grave—and then the other! Oh widows, think of her situation, bereft by this thrice-repeated blow, of her husband and only two children—and left with two widowed daughters-in-law—and they of pagan origin, in a land of idols!

Observe now the conduct of this forlorn and desolate woman. Did she look round on her gloomy solitude and faint at the dreary prospect? No! She was evidently a woman of strong mind, and of stronger faith. She had not, perhaps, consented—but only submitted to the removal from the holy land of Judea. She felt in her extremity, that though far from the house and people of God—she was not far from his presence. And convinced of his all-mightiness, as well as of his all-sufficiency, she turned to his promise for comfort, and leaned upon his power for support. Recollecting her situation, she gathered up her thoughts, and these led her to Judea.

Moab was now a land of only melancholy associations, containing as it did, besides the wickedness of its inhabitants, the sepulcher of her husband, and of her two sons. We wonder not that she thought of her native country, and determined to return. One only attraction made her linger. How could she leave that grave, and dwell so far from it, which contained so much that was still precious to affection, and to memory. This one feeling overcome, she prepared for her sorrowful journey homewards. She had become endeared to Ruth and Orpah, who resolved not to leave her, and chose rather to abandon their own relatives, than the mother of their departed husbands. The three widows set forth together, a melancholy group. Thinking it right to put their sincerity to the test, Naomi addressed them in an early stage of the journey, in language, the pathos of which will be felt by every childless widow to the end of time. Orpah yielded to her entreaties, embraced her and returned. But no persuasions could induce Ruth, the chosen of the Lord, to separate from her, and she expressed the resolution of her piety and affection in language of exquisite simplicity, beauty, and tenderness—"Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there I will be buried. May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if anything but death separates you and me." Such love was not to be refused, nor such a purpose to be shaken; and they traveled on together towards the land of Judea.

On their approach to Bethlehem, the city of Naomi, a fine testimony was afforded to this godly Jewess, of the estimation in which she was held by her neighbors and friends—for the whole city went forth to meet her, and welcome her back. The very language of their congratulation, however gratifying to her heart, as it was in one respect, pierced it as with a barbed arrow, by reminding her, in the very repetition of her name, which signifies *happy*, of the altered circumstances in which she returned to them. "Is this Naomi?" they exclaimed, "Is this she whom we knew so rich, so prosperous, so happy, as the wife of Elimelech? How changed, how broken, how desolate! Your widow's garments tell us what has become of your husband—but where are your two sons, and who is this younger widow that accompanies you?"

"Alas, alas," she replies, "Jehovah in his righteous judgments, has deprived me of everything that entitled me to the blissful designation that once belonged to me, as a joyful wife, and happy mother. Don't call me Naomi! Instead, call me Mara, for the Almighty has made life very bitter for me, a poor childless widow." Amid all, she

acknowledged the hand of God in her bereavements; and while she gave utterance to her sorrows, she did not darken the tale with the language of complaint. Four times, in the compass of her short reply, did she trace up her losses to the divine hand. "*The Lord has afflicted me!*" How much is included in that expression!

Naomi did not give herself up to the indulgence of indolent and consuming grief—but immediately employed her thoughts in providing for the faithful and devoted Ruth, whose steadfast attachment towards God and herself, had been so convincingly manifested. Her conduct in this business was not that of an selfish and scheming woman, busy and clever in contrivances for bringing about an advantageous marriage for her daughter-in-law. But of one who was well skilled in the provisions of the code of Moses, and who knew that if a man died without children, the next of kin should marry his widow, and thus raise up children to preserve and transmit the patrimonial inheritance in a right line. All her conduct, in bringing about the union of Ruth with Boaz, however different from the habits, and opposed to the feelings of modern times—was directed with strict regard to the Levitical arrangements.

Three different classes of widows may be instructed by this narrative.

1. Those who are called to this sorrowful condition in a foreign land.

And such sometimes occur—such I have known, of whose sorrows I have been the distressed and sympathizing spectator. I shall not soon forget the melancholy scene I witnessed when an American lady was deprived of her husband by death in my own vicinity, and left with five small children, three thousand miles from any relative she had on earth. Her husband occupied a spacious house, and extensive grounds, of which every room, and every tree—as her eye rolled listlessly round on what had once pleased her—reminded her of her utter and gloomy solitude. Others there are who are like her, for whom I cherish a sympathy, which no language can express.

Your case, as a widow, even if surrounded by all the scenes of a home in your native land, and all its friends and dear relations, is sad enough. But to be away from all these; to wear your sad widow's garments, and pour forth your tears among those who have no tie to you, and no interest in you—but what your sorrows create, and what common humanity inclines them to yield to the stranger in distress—this *is* affliction, and is to be, a "widow indeed."

Let me, however, remind you of topics that have, or ought to have, power to soothe even your lone heart. Recollect, that God is everywhere. Like wretched Hagar in the wilderness, you may lift your eye to heaven and say, "My God, you see me!" Yes, God with all his infinite attributes of power, wisdom, and love—is with you! Between you and earthly friends continents may lie, and oceans roll—but all places are equally occupied by your divine Friend, and are equally near to your heavenly home. Even though you had been alone in the midst of an African wilderness, or an American forest, or an Asiatic heathen city, when you were called to surrender your husband; though you had been called to dig his grave, and lay him there yourself—God could sustain you, for he is omnipotent, and all-sufficient. Lean upon his arm! Yes, trust him, though it seems in your case to be a kind of experiment, a sort of proof to test him, and try under how weighty a load of care and grief he can support you.

If it be a alarming and dire situation which you are inviting him to, he will accept, with wondrous condescension, the invitation, and come in the plenitude of his power and grace to your help. Only believe that God can and will sustain you, and you *will be* sustained. The power of God is not weakened by your distance from the scenes of your nativity, the circle of your friends, or the comforts of your home.

2. In the conduct and character of ORPAH, we find a type of those young widows who having been brought to a profession of true religion during the life of a godly husband, relapse at his death into their former worldly-mindedness, and indifference to spiritual realities.

This, perhaps, is not an uncommon case. A female marries a godly man, and through his example and persuasions her mind is impressed with the great concern of salvation, and she becomes a professor of true religion; renounces the world; conforms to the observances of domestic worship; accompanies her husband to the house of God; and seems in earnest about eternal salvation. In the course of Providence, her husband and spiritual guide is removed by death. During the first months of her widowhood, while her grief is fresh and deep, she still keeps up an attendance on all her religious duties, and turns to them as almost her only comfort. But as the pungency of sorrow abates, she becomes less and less dependent on true religion for her comfort. The world smiles on her, and she begins to return its smiles. She insensibly loses her interest in true religion, and feels a reviving love to occupations and amusements, which during the life of her husband, she had seemed to renounce; until at length, her heart, after a little hesitation, goes back to its own country—and its idols!

This is a melancholy occurrence, where the loss of the husband is followed with the loss of the soul!—and she parts from him in the dark valley of the shadow of death never to meet him again—no not in heaven. He left her with the hope of meeting her at the right hand of the Judge, and impressed his last kiss upon her cheek in the pleasing anticipation of embracing her as a glorified spirit in the world of glory! But she will not be there—for she has forsaken God, and returned to the world. What bitter emotions will the remembrance of his holy love, and faithful care of her spiritual interest furnish in that 'dark bottomless pit'—to which her spirit will be consigned.

O woman, once the wife of a godly husband—do not go back! Let not the piety happily commenced amid the joys of marital life, be dispersed by the sorrows of your widowed state! Let the seeds of true religion sown in your soul by a husband's hand, be watered by his widow's tears, and watched by her vigilant and assiduous care. Would you be separated from him in eternity, and by a gulf so wide and so impassable, as that which divides hell from heaven? Oh, pray, and seek, and labor, that his death may be the means of perpetuating the faith which his life commenced. Keep up the recollection of his example, his prayers, his solicitude for your spiritual welfare. Let his blessed memory—wearing the smile of piety and look of love—with his finger pointing you to the skies—be ever before your imagination, as your guardian spirit, ministering to your salvation.

Perhaps you have children, and never can forget with what holy concern he endeavored to train them up for God and heaven. His prayers for their salvation still sound in your ears! His tears over their eternal happiness still drop before your eyes! His last charge, as he consigned them into your hands on his dying bed—to bring them up in wisdom's ways—still thrills through your soul. Oh! and shall these consecrated pledges of your affection; these living monuments of his dear self, these offerings made so solemnly to God—be carried back by you to the world? Will you undo all that you saw him do with such godly labor? Will you take from the altar of God, those whom he had conducted to it—and offer them at the shrine of Mammon!

3. But turn to RUTH, and see there a woman brought by her marriage to the knowledge and worship of the true God—and still retaining in her widowhood, her devotedness to God.

I again refer you to that exquisite burst of filial love, and genuine piety, "Don't urge me to leave you or to turn back from you. Where you go I will go, and where you stay I will stay. Your people will be my people and your God my God. Where you die I will die, and there I will

be buried. May the Lord deal with me, be it ever so severely, if anything but death separates you and me." No! *She* would not go back to her country and to her idols—but determined to go into Judea, and serve the God of Chilion, her husband—and she did! Happy woman—and rich was her reward! What can so gently soothe the sorrows of widowhood, so mollify its wounds, so raise its fallen hopes, and sweeten its bitter cup, as retaining the power of that true godliness, which sanctifies and strengthens the marriage bond.

True it is that when a wife has found in a husband the instrument of her conversion, and many have found it, it seems an additional aggravation to her loss—to be thus deprived of both her 'earthly companion' and 'heavenly guide'. But when she holds fast the faith which she learned from him, she is by this means prepared to bow with submission to the loss, and to feel her solitude more tolerable. How sacred and how tender are her recollections, if she retains her steadfastness. Nothing but what is pleasant comes from the past into her mind. No remorse of conscience smites her, as it must do the widow who departs from the true religion she had professed in her marriage state. The godly widow never in her dreams, or in her waking hours sees her husband's frowning image looking with reproachful eye upon her. Maintaining with unbroken consistency her profession, she is soothed and comforted still, by all the holy kindnesses of those of her godly friends, whom his true religion brought around her, and whom her own, now retains. Her heart is dead to the world—and no distance of time from his decease seems to revive her former idolatrous fascination with the world. In communion with God—that God to whom her godly husband led her, and to whom they so frequently approached together—she finds her consolation. The seasons of their joint devotion still please and edify in recollection. The books they read together are re-perused—the place which he occupied in the sanctuary, and in the scene of domestic piety, still present him to her memory, and stimulate her devotion—the spot where they kneeled and poured out together their 'cares and joys' in prayer and thanksgiving to God—rekindles from time to time the flame of piety in her soul.

Then her children, if she has any, are still the objects of her solicitude and care. She feels a sweet and sacred obligation upon her conscience, to carry on that system of spiritual training which she commenced under the direction of, and with the help of, her most dear husband.

She knows it to be at once her duty and her privilege to train up for God—those whom she had so often heard him commend with such

earnestness to their heavenly Father. Often as she talks of their sainted parent until her tears and sobs almost choke her utterance! She reminds them that if they follow his faith and patience—they shall soon all meet in the presence of Christ to part no more!

Widow of the departed Christian—do not forsake the God of your husband—and your own God also! Follow him in his godliness, and follow him to glory, and let it be the solace of your widowhood to remember, that—

The saints on earth and all the dead,
But one communion make;
All join in Christ their living head,
And of his grace partake!

And in order to cleave to your husband's God—cleave to his godly relatives. Imitate Ruth in this. It may be that like her, you have been called out of a circle in which true piety had neither place nor approval. Your own relatives are of the earth, earthly—and holding opposing views and sentiments with regard to true religion—they are likely, if much associated with—to divert your thoughts, and turn the current of your affections away from things unseen and eternal, to things seen and temporal. They will, perhaps, wish to bring you back to your former indifference to true religion—and propose means to divert and amuse you, in ways which are very alien from all your present godly convictions and tastes. It will be their especial effort, probably, to draw you out of the circle of your husband's religious friends, and bring you back to the mirthful circle you have left.

Such efforts must be judiciously and kindly—but, at the same time, firmly resisted! Without alienating yourself from your own worldly friends—you must not allow yourself to be separated from his godly ones. In their society you will find, not only the most precious and sacred consolations—but the most likely means to establish you in the faith and hope of the gospel, and to perpetuate your enjoyment of its rich privileges.

This is important on account of your CHILDREN also. You are desirous of bringing them up in the fear of God, and the love of Christ, according to the plan and design of their departed father. And to accomplish this, it is necessary to keep them as much as possible from such associations as would defeat your hopes, and to place them in the way of others, whose example and influence would conduce to their accomplishment. **Character, in a great measure, is formed by imitation**—and if we place the young and susceptible mind in the way

of such examples as are altogether worldly, even though they may not be openly wicked—we are exposing them to great hazard, and are putting in jeopardy their eternal salvation!

The Widow Directed to the Widow's God

by John Angell James, 1841

THE WIDOW OF ZAREPHATH

An example of trust in God—and kindness to needy widows.

The prophet Elijah, after having been miraculously fed during a long famine, by ravens at the brook Cherith, found it necessary to leave his retreat in consequence of the drying-up of the stream which had hitherto supplied him with water. There is a mysterious sovereignty running through all the ways of God, extending also to his miraculous operations. He works no such miracles, nor gives such wondrous signs, than the exigency of the case needs. He who sent meat by a bird of prey, could have caused the brook still to resist the exhausting power of the drought, or have brought water out of the stones which lay in its dry bed—but he did not see fit to do so. When the brook fails, however, God has a Zarephath for his servant; and a widow, instead of ravens, shall now feed him. For all creatures are equally God's servants, and he is never at a loss for instruments either of 'power to destroy his enemies'—or of 'love to support and help his friends'. What he does not find, he can make—and here, therefore, is a firm ground of our confidence in him, "Those who know his name will put their trust in him."

"Go at once to *Zarephath* of Sidon and stay there. I have commanded a *widow* in that place to supply you with food." Everything in the injunction must have been confounding to human reason. "What! go to Zarephath! a city outside the boundaries of the land of promise!—the native country of Jezebel, my bitterest foe! Go to such a distance in a time of famine! What am I to do, and how am I to be fed on my long and toilsome journey? And when I shall have arrived there, am I to be dependent on a woman, and she a widow?" Did Elijah reason, and question, and cavil thus? Nothing of the sort—for what is difficult to reason, is easy to faith! God had commanded, and his commands imply promises. It was enough, "Go, for God sends you!" And he went—doubting nothing, asking nothing, fearing nothing!

Arrived at the vicinity of the place about evening time, and looking around, of course, for the female hand that was at once to guide him to a home, and feed him too—Elijah saw a poor woman gathering a few sticks, which the long drought had scattered in abundance. Her occupation, as well as her appearance, proclaimed her poverty. He saw no one else. "Can that be my benefactress?" we can imagine him asking himself. Remembering, however, the ravens who had been his caterers for a whole year, he knew that help could come by the hand of even the feeble instrument of a poor widow! An impression, such as those who had been accustomed to receive revelations from God well understood, assured him that his deliverer was before him.

"So he went to Zarephath. When he came to the town gate, a widow was there gathering sticks. He called to her and asked—Would you bring me a little water in a jar so I may have a drink?" Such a request was asking for more than gold. Yet awed by the prophet's appearance, and influenced by the prophet's God, she set out immediately in quest of the precious liquid—but was stopped to hear another request—"Bring me a piece of bread, too." This second request drew from the poor woman one of the most touching statements that poverty ever made—"I swear by the Lord your God that I don't have a single piece of bread in the house. And I have only a handful of flour left in the jar and a little cooking oil in the bottom of the jug. I was just gathering a few sticks to cook this last meal—and then my son and I will die!"

Alas! poor mother, your condition is sad indeed! You are, in your own apprehension, about to make your last meal, with your fatherless child, and then with him to yield yourselves to death. It was time for the prophet to visit this widow, to whom he was evidently sent, more on *her* account than his own. How little could she have imagined when she uttered that sorrowful confession of destitution—that help was at hand, and a rich supply at her very door! How opportunely does God provide supports for our distresses. It is his glory to begin to help—when hope seems to end—and to send assistance in his own way, when ours all fail—that our help may be so much the more welcome and precious, by how much the less it is expected—and thus redound to his own praise, as much as it is for our comfort.

Elijah full of prophetic impulse, as well as urged by hunger, said to her, "Don't be afraid! Go ahead and cook that 'last meal,' but bake me a little loaf of bread first. Afterward there will still be enough food for you and your son. For this is what the Lord, the God of Israel, says: There will always be plenty of flour and oil left in your containers until the time when the Lord sends rain and the crops grow again!" What

answer to this, would he have received from all who were not as full of faith as this poor widow? She might have said, "Charity begins at home. My child has claims upon me, and I have a claim upon and for myself, which it is impossible to forego or forget for any other claim—and I am surprised at a request which would take the last morsel from both of us—to feed a stranger!"

And I do not hesitate to say, that her compliance with the injunction, can be justified only on the ground of her faith in the promise. That she did believe the promise is evident—and equally so, that this faith was the gift of God to her soul. This was faith, and of no ordinary strength; it made her willing "to spend upon one she had never seen before, a part of the little she had, in hope of more; to part with the means of present support, which she saw, in confidence of future supplies, which she could not see; and thus oppose her senses and her reason to exercise her belief in God's word." (Hall). She went and did according to the saying of Elijah. And now, we ask, was she deceived by the failure of the promise—or rewarded by the fulfillment of the promise? When did one word that God has spoken fall to the ground? Thus stands the record—"So she did as Elijah said, and she and Elijah and her son continued to eat from her supply of flour and oil for many days. For no matter how much they used, there was always enough left in the containers, just as the Lord had promised through Elijah."

Behold then, this man of God cheerfully sitting down in her solitary cottage. Surely 'the voice of rejoicing and salvation is in the tabernacles of the righteous;' for 'the right hand of the Lord,' on their behalf, 'does valiantly.' They rejoice together, not only on account of temporal blessings—but much more on account of those which are spiritual. Israel had lost Elijah—and a poor widow in a heathen land has found him! Thus often does it fare with a people, who, though they have been privileged with the most faithful preaching of the gospel, will not turn unto the Lord with all their heart, and walk uprightly before him. They are cursed with a famine of the Word of God; the children's bread is taken from *them*, and imparted to others whom they account no better than dogs, who however 'will receive it,' and are languishing for it. Indeed our Lord himself thus applies this part of sacred history to the case of the people of Nazareth, who refused to receive his ministry—"Certainly there were many widows in Israel who needed help in Elijah's time, when there was no rain for three and a half years and hunger stalked the land. Yet Elijah was not sent to any of them. He was sent instead to a widow of Zarephath—a foreigner in the land of Sidon."

Here then the prophet dwells quite happy under the widow's roof. All distress has disappeared. "For the jar of flour was not used up and the jug of oil did not run dry, in keeping with the word of the Lord spoken by Elijah." Neither does their *spiritual sustenance* fail. Well might this poor widow rejoice in the privilege of sitting daily at the feet of this man of God, for instruction in divine things! Can we doubt for a moment that the prophet most gladly opened his mouth in divine wisdom, to impart it to the soul of this simple believing sister? Can we doubt that they prayed together, that they read together out of Moses and the prophets, that they conversed together of the day of Christ, which Abraham saw with gladness? And would they not, do you think, occasionally raise a spiritual song to the honor of their Lord and Savior? How swiftly and how pleasantly must the hours have passed with them; and well might the angels of God have rejoiced, as no doubt they did—over this little church in the wilderness! Behold here then, my brethren, the bright and happy termination of a path, which commenced in such thick darkness! *Only let all the children of God implicitly follow his guidance, and he will assuredly conduct them to a glorious end!*

The trials of this poor widow, however, consisted not of her poverty alone. The child miraculously snatched from the jaws of famine was still mortal, as the event proved—for he sickened and died. In her behavior under this new trial, we see that her faith, as a believer, was sadly mixed with her infirmity as a woman; and that her faith did not shine with the same luster in this new trial, as it did in the former one. **What poor changeable creatures we are—and how insufficient is 'past grace' for present duties and afflictions!** Perhaps, we are sometimes as apt to presume upon past experience, as we are, at other seasons, to forget it.

She said to Elijah, "What do you have against me, man of God? Did you come to remind me of my sin—and kill my son?" This was the language of ignorance and intense emotion, which we would hardly have expected from one who had seen the miracle of the barrel of flour, and cruse of oil. **This shows how sorrow is apt to becloud the judgment and to exasperate the feelings**—and at the same time, how affliction is apt to revive the recollections of past and even pardoned sin! Elijah, with a touching gentleness, which instructs us how to bear with the 'petulant complaints of intense grief', bore with her admonition, and restored the child to life, and to the arms of his joyful and grateful mother. Her faith and confidence—a little shaken by the trial—returned with her son's life, and she lived, with him, to praise and glorify God.

And now let those to whom this beautiful narrative is especially applicable, take it to themselves, and **apply** it their own sad and sorrowful hearts. And who are they? The widows that are left in circumstances of deep poverty, who have only a handful of flour, as it were, in the barrel, and a little oil in the cruse; and who after eating this last supply, are preparing to yield themselves to destitution or death.

Afflicted woman, my heart bleeds for you! The provider for your own comfort and that of your children is gone! The hand of the diligent that once made you, if not rich, yet comfortable—lies lifeless in the grave—and it is your bitter lot to see the little which he left you, continually being consumed—without your knowing, or even being able to conjecture—how the empty barrel is to be replenished! It is for such as you, to remember the words of Jehovah, "And let your widows trust in me!" You have no *other* trust, and none are so much encouraged to trust in God, as they whose sole confidence, the Lord is.

Now, above all times, is the time to look up with hope to God—when we have no other to look up to. What promises are upon record for your consolation. Having already laid them before you, I will only refer to a few of them. What sweet language is that in Psalm 34:1-10, and Psalm 37. Turn to your bible, and read those comforting portions of Holy Scripture. "Do not be afraid, for I have ransomed you. I have called you by name; you are mine. When you go through deep waters and great trouble, I will be with you. When you go through rivers of difficulty, you will not drown! When you walk through the fire of oppression, you will not be burned up; the flames will not consume you. For I am the Lord, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior!" Isaiah 43:1-3.

Then how cheering to the believer is the prophet's assurance, "These are the ones who will dwell on high. The rocks of the mountains will be their fortress of safety. Food will be supplied to them, and they will have water in abundance." Isaiah 33:16. Can anything be more encouraging than the apostle's application to the individual believer, of the promise made to Joshua? So that we may boldly say, we Christians, yes, every one of us individually—The Lord is my helper. Be content with such things as you have, then, for he has said—I will never leave you, nor forsake you." The force of this passage in the original, exceeds the power of translation—it contains five negative particles within the compass of these few words, so that literally rendered it would be, "No, I will not leave you; no, no, I will not

forsake you!" It is one of the most emphatic and beautiful examples of the force of a negative declaration, in all the scripture.

God seems to draw back with dread and abhorrence at the thought of forsaking his people. Trust him. Not that I mean to insinuate that you are authorized to expect miraculous supplies. Your garments will not be rendered undecaying, like those of the Israelites in the wilderness; nor your provisions inexhaustible, like those of the widow before us. But the God of providence can find you means and instruments of assistance, as effectual as if the laws of nature were suspended in your behalf! All hearts are in his hands! All events are at his disposal! All contingencies are in his knowledge and under his direction. What is wanting on your part is FAITH. *Only believe*, and perhaps you are really limited to faith—you can scarcely do anything else.

Not that I mean to discourage **effort**. On this subject I have dwelt in a former part of the volume. You must, in proper season and manner, exert yourself for your own support, and for that of your children. But what I mean is, that when after every effort, and fixed determination, and utmost energy, to provide for your necessities; you do not see through what channel, and to what object, your efforts are to be directed; you are to believe that God will, in ways unknown and unthought of by you, provide you his assistance. This is your faith. In ten thousand times, ten thousand instances—he has helped poor dependent widows as effectually without a miracle, as he did the woman of Zarephath by a miracle. The barrel of flour, and cruse of oil has been replenished as truly—though not as mysteriously—as in the case before us.

And why is this case recorded—but to encourage you to trust in God. It was a miracle it is true, and like other miracles had the high design of 'confirming the revelation of God' by his prophet. But it was a miracle of supply to one in destitution, intended visibly to typify and illustrate God's 'ordinary providence in supplying the needs of his people', and to encourage through all ages, the exercise of godly confidence in him. Read it with this view of it; and when the last supply is exhausted, from time to time, read it again and again, to raise the hope of a future provisions from him, who hears the young ravens when they cry. You do not know *when* or *how* it will come—but believe that it *will* come!

O what a God-honoring grace is faith! And as faith honors *Him*—so he delights to honor *faith*! All things are possible, and all things are promised—to him that believes. As no miracle could be wrought, in the

time when these wondrous miraculous operations were common, without faith; so now, in cases of providential interposition, no manifestation of God's power and grace is to be looked for—except in answer to faith. I would not encourage wild enthusiasm—but I believe that God says to his dependent and destitute people, "Be it unto you according to your faith." Do not, then, look only to see the barrel of flour gradually sinking lower and lower. But look up unto God, who can replenish it, and with much in the former to generate doubt and fear, feel also that there is as much in the latter, to encourage faith and hope.

But there is another lesson to be learned by the conduct of the widow of Sarepta, and that is, **not to let your own grief and comparative destitution, steel your hearts against the needs of others, and close your hands to their necessities.** She shared with Elijah the last meal she was preparing for herself and her son. Grief is apt to make us selfish, and limited circumstances to produce an indisposition to give to others in dire need. Take heed against such a state of mind as this. Do not exhaust all your tears upon yourself. There are many as destitute as you are, perhaps some far more so. You are prepared by your own experience of poverty, to sympathize with others in similar destitution—and will find in sympathy to them, a relief for your own sorrows. Nothing tends more to relieve that overwhelming sense of wretchedness, with which the heart of the sufferer is sometimes oppressed, than a generous pity for a fellow weeper!

The Widow Directed to the Widow's God

by John Angell James, 1841

THE WIDOW CASTING IN HER TWO PENNIES INTO THE TREASURY

Illustrating the character of the poor, but liberal widow

"Jesus went over to the collection box in the Temple and sat and watched as the crowds dropped in their money. Many rich people put in large amounts. Then **a poor widow** came and dropped in two pennies. He called his disciples to him and said, "I assure you, this poor widow has given more than all the others have given. For they gave a tiny part of their surplus, but she, poor as she is, has given everything she has." Mark 12:41-44

Piety and liberality should be always associated. Piety should stimulate charity; charity should be the fruit of piety. On one occasion, Christ placed himself opposite this receptacle of benevolence, to watch the offerings of the people. The affluent passed on and deposited their wealth; for "put in large amounts." This is so far to their credit; they who possess much, should give much. God expects it, yes, demands it. Among the richer worshipers came one who united in her circumstances the double affliction of poverty and widowhood. She, of course, will offer nothing. She needs to receive, rather than to impart. All she has to bestow, it may be presumed, is her good wishes. But, no! *her* hand is not empty. She drops in two pennies. Perhaps the smallness of the sum excited a smile of contempt from some proud contributor, as he followed her, and magnified, by contrast, the amount of his own contribution.

But there was another eye which watched the widow's offering, and another mind that drew a contrast. And Christ called his disciples to him and said, "I assure you, this poor widow has given more than all the others have given." Yes, *there* is the scale on which the Savior estimates the amount of our contributions to the cause of true religion and humanity; not abstractly by the sum given—but by the sum given in proportion to the wealth possessed. A penny from one, is vastly, incalculably more, than a dollar from another. 'Much' and 'little', are relative terms. That would be generosity in one, which would be stinginess in another. No commendation had been pronounced on the gifts of the wealthy; for they had, perhaps, after all, given little—compared with what they retained.

But this widow's offering has immortalized her. She gave *all she had*. We do not stay to enquire about the prudence of her contribution, whether it was proper to bestow her last penny; doubtless there were some circumstances in her case which justified the act, and with which the Savior was acquainted. There were, perhaps, no needy children, whose needs should have reminded her that charity begins at home—perhaps it was a thank-offering for some special mercy received; some gracious support in one of those troubles, which widows, and especially poor widows, only know. At any rate, the gift and its principle, attracted the notice, and drew forth the eulogy of the Savior. It was but two pennies—but that was as much a manifestation of her disposition, as David's almost countless amount of gold, was of his.

Our Lord Jesus Christ still holds his seat opposite the treasury of the temple, and watches from his throne in heaven, the offerings of those who give to the cause of true religion and humanity. His celestial glory

has diminished nothing of his special regard to the beneficence of his people. It should be our aim in all the good we do, to approve ourselves to his all-seeing eye, both by the purity of our motives, and the amount of our donations. Alas! what are we the better for the notice of those perishing and impotent eyes, which can only view the outside of our actions; or for that word of applause which vanishes on the lips of the speaker? Your eye, O Lord, is piercing and retributive. As to see you, is perfect happiness, so to be seen of you, is true contentment and glory.

It may be fairly inferred from this passage, that the Lord Jesus, while he beholds with favor the gifts of all, receives with especial acceptance the offerings of the poor widow. It is often the sorrow of such, in this age of Christian missions, that they cannot share in the glorious undertaking of converting the world to Christ. In happier times, when the candle of the Lord shone in their tabernacle, and the light of prosperity irradiated their path, they too had something to give, and delighted to give it, to pour the blessings of salvation on this dark earth—but now they feel shut out from the feast of benevolence, and denied all fellowship in the great work of evangelizing the nations; for they have nothing to give. Nothing? "Nothing," you reply, "worth my giving, or any society's receiving!" Is that the language of pride, despondency, or stinginess? Can you not, then, stoop to give a penny, after you have had the privilege of giving a dollar? Do you blush to offer the copper, after the silver and gold have glittered in your hand, as you approached the treasury? O woman, cast away that feeling, and carry your two pennies, and if given "with a glad heart and free," that little offering will draw upon it a more benignant smile from the Lord of all, than ever he bestowed upon your costlier gifts in the days of your prosperity. If you are ashamed to give it, he is not ashamed to receive it, nor backward to reward it. Ashamed of your little! Why it is relatively more than the hundreds of the rich. It is all self-denial, and sacrifice, and generous zeal.

"In the obscurity of retirement, amid the squalid poverty, and the revolting privations of a cottage, it has often been my lot to witness scenes of magnanimity and self-denial, as much beyond the belief, as the practice of the great; a heroism borrowing no support, either from the gaze of the many, or the admiration of the few, yet, flourishing amid ruins, and on the confines of the grave; a spectacle as stupendous in the moral world, as the Niagra falls, in the natural; and like that mighty cataract, doomed to display its grandeur, only where there are no eyes to apprehend its magnificence."

Yes, there is an eye that looks on both—but with more admiration on the little offering of benevolence that drops unheeded and unheard by man, into the receptacle of mercy—than on the river that falls with the roar of thunder into the basin of its mighty waters. Think of aged widows sacrificing the sugar of their tea, and poor men giving up the small portion of their beverage at dinner, to save a penny or two for the missionary cause—O how little are the offerings of the rich, though the announcement of their hundreds from the platform makes the building to shake with applause; compared with the penny of such self-denying friends to the cause as these—but whose contributions find their way in silence, to the mighty aggregate of funds. Ashamed, my friends! Your pennies are the richest trophies of our cause; and if it were possible to divide the results of our success, and apportion so much usefulness to each particular contribution of property, we would find, perhaps, the richest allotment assigned to the widow's pennies.

Is there a less worthy motive, which holds back your slender offering? Is there a feeling of grudging? A reasoning in this strain—"Surely they cannot take the poor widow's penny for the cause of missions." Certainly not, unless she feels it to be one of poverty's deepest woes, to have nothing to give to *such* an object, and would esteem herself unhappy, if her little contribution were despised. Have you *nothing* then to give for widows poorer than yourself? "Poorer than myself," you exclaim, in a tone of indignant surprise, "who *can* be poorer than I am?" I answer, the Pagan woman, left forlorn and desolate, without a Bible, or a minister, to direct her to the widow's God—and there are millions of such. *You* have the gospel, which abolishes death, and brings life and immortality to light. *You* can look beyond the grave, and see the orb of celestial day rising in majesty before the eye of Christian hope, and gilding with his glorious effulgence, the dark clouds which collect over the valley of the shadow of death. *You* hear voices of joy, and sounds of life, floating like heavenly music, over the still chambers of mortality. In pity, then, to those who clasp their idols in silent despair, give a little, even of your little, to send them the gospel, which keeps you from sorrowing as others which have no hope. Have compassion on the widows who sit down by the grave of a husband, who has gone away in the darkness of paganism, or who still, in some parts of India, are doomed to mingle their ashes with his, in that funeral pile, the flame of which is kindled by the hand of a first-born son. Is there not, then, a widow far more wretched than yourself, for whom the scant penny of poverty, or the two pennies of all but absolute destitution, should be consecrated to God?

The Widow Directed to the Widow's God

by John Angell James, 1841

THE WIDOW OF NAIN

Addressed to widows who are called to lose their children also.

Soon afterward Jesus went with his disciples to the village of Nain, with a great crowd following him. A funeral procession was coming out as he approached the village gate. The boy who had died was the only son of a widow, and many mourners from the village were with her. When the Lord saw her, his heart overflowed with compassion. "Don't cry!" he said. Then he walked over to the coffin and touched it, and the bearers stopped. "Young man," he said, "get up." Then the dead boy sat up and began to talk to those around him! And Jesus gave him back to his mother. Luke 7:11-15

The mercy of Christ—as it never lacked objects in this sorrowful world—so it was never wearied in relieving them. One day he healed the servant of the centurion, upon being earnestly solicited to do it, to show what efficacy there is in 'the prayer of faith'; the next day, he restored to life the son of a widow, without being asked, to demonstrate his 'sovereignty in the bestowment of his favors'. One act of beneficence seemed only to make him more ready and more willing to perform another; in this also he is an example to his people, who are not to satisfy themselves with any measure of good works.

But let us attend to the present instance of his miraculous kindness. As he drew near to a small town called Nain, a funeral procession was coming out at the gate, and was slowly moving towards the place of sepulcher, which, with the Jews, was always outside the walls of their cities. It was not 'accidental' that the Savior came up just at that time—but was 'ordained' for the glory of God. Here was a spectacle to move a harder heart than that of Christ. The victim of death was in this instance, a young man, cut off in the flower of his age, and on that account, a loss to society—but a still heavier loss to that venerable form, which, with the attire of a *widow*, as well as the moans of a *bereaved mother*, is following the corpse to its last home.

It is a short—but simply touching narrative, which the historian gives, "A funeral procession was coming out as he approached the village gate. The boy who had died was the only son of a widow." When the scripture would convey the most impressive idea of the depth of

human sorrow, it uses this form of speech, "As one that is in bitterness for an only son." There it is before us, in that forlorn widow. It is afflictive to see a loving *couple* following an only child to the grave. But then, they consider, as with tearful eyes they look upon each other, that there might have been a grief still harder to be borne, than even *this*. "Thank God," they exclaim, "we are spared to each other," and thus they find, even at the opening grave of an only child, a supporting thought in the presence of each other. But here is a case in which there is no one to share the grief, and support the fainting heart of this sorrowful woman—her husband was already in the grave—and her son, her only son, is about to be laid on the coffin of his father. At this juncture the Son of God drew near—

"His heart is made of tenderness,
His affections melt with love."

The widow's sorrows touched that heart! "When the Lord saw her, his heart overflowed with compassion. 'Don't cry!' he said." Oh if she was not too much absorbed in grief to heed him, what must she have thought of such an injunction! "Who has cause to weep if it is not I. If tears are ever in season—they are now. Stranger, cease to taunt me with such an exhortation, unless you can restore to my widowed arms, the child that lies sleeping there in death." She knew not who it was that spoke to her—but she shall *soon* know to her unutterable joy. As the Lord of life and death, he approaches the coffin—and frees the prisoner! "Young man, I say unto you, arise."

That is the voice which shall one day burst every tomb, call up our vanished bodies, from those elements into which they are resolved, and raise them out of their beds of dust—to glory, honor, and immortality. The grave shall restore all it receives, whether that grave be in the sea, in the dry land, in the forest, the wilderness, or in the crowded cemetery. "Why should it be thought a thing incredible, that God shall raise the dead?" It is no harder for the Almighty word, which gave being unto all things, to say, "Let them be restored," than "let them be made." The sleeping youth obeyed the mandate, rose upon the coffin, cast off his grave clothes, and threw himself into the arms of his astonished, enraptured, and overwhelmed mother!

Blessed type of that wondrous scene just alluded to, when at the sound of the last trumpet, this mortal shall put on immortality, and this corruptible shall put on incorruption, and death shall be swallowed up in victory. I attempt not, for who could succeed in the effort, to portray the mother's joy, and her renewed communion with her lost

child—perhaps all she could find composure enough to say, was "Rejoice with me, for this my son was dead, and is alive again!"

I now turn to those who are appointed to bear like sorrows, without the immediate expectation, or the hope of her relief. I mean those widows, and such there are, who have been called to part from an only child. Forlorn, indeed, is your situation—desolate your house—bereaved your heart of its last earthly hope. Not to sympathize with you, not to concede the greatness of your calamity, would be the most cruel insensibility, such as I pray God to preserve me from.

But stop, is *all* dead? Your *husband* is dead, your *parents* are dead, your *children* are dead! But is not *God* alive—is not *Christ* alive—is not the *Bible* alive? Has the tomb swallowed up all? No! Be this your exultation, "*The Lord lives* and blessed be my rock, and let the God of my salvation be exalted!" True, you cannot expect that the power of Christ will be exerted, at least, until the resurrection, to call your only child from the grave—but the same heart which pitied the widow of Nain, pities you. Jesus sees you as certainly, and compassionates you as tenderly as he did her—although his compassion may not be exerted in precisely the same manner.

Perhaps that only son was the last thing that stood between you and the Savior—to detain your heart from him. You had not been weaned from the world until he was taken. You still sought your happiness 'on earth'. Your whole soul was bound up in that child. Even for God and Christ, you had no supreme love, while he lived—and as there was a purpose of eternal mercy to be fulfilled, by the death of that child, it pleased God to remove him. You would not come to Christ while that obstacle was in the way, and therefore God displaced it—now, the way to the cross is all clear. The Savior has come to the widow, not indeed to raise her son—but to save her soul—not to say to him, "Arise young man;" but to say to you, "Arise, and be saved." If by the loss of your only son, you should gain the salvation of your immortal soul, you will find a present solace for your sorrows, and an eternal source of gratitude that they were sent.

But what are you to do without him? Let God answer that question; "*I will never leave you, nor forsake you.*" Your child was your comforter. Be it so—but is there not a divine comforter, who frequently reserves his choicest consolations, for the most disconsolate seasons? Your son was your support. This, I admit, is trying to faith and confidence in God. A dependant widow, to lose the only child on whom she leaned for support, seems the last extremity of human destitution. It is in

such extremities God loves to put forth his power. **He often brings us into a very wilderness, to show us his own all-sufficiency!** He strips us of the last comfort, and then says to us, "Now trust in me for everything." "But now, O Israel, the Lord who created you says—Do not be afraid, for I have ransomed you. I have called you by name; you are mine. When you go through deep waters and great trouble, I will be with you. When you go through rivers of difficulty, you will not drown! When you walk through the fire of oppression, you will not be burned up; the flames will not consume you. For I am the Lord, your God, the Holy One of Israel, your Savior!" Isaiah 43:1-3.

There are other considerations which should induce submission, even to *your* melancholy lot. Heavy trials are sometimes sent to prevent heavier ones still. There are calamities, worse than death; either our own death, or the death of our nearest friends. **It is better to die in honor, than to live in sin and disgrace!** How many widows are there whose only sons are breaking their mother's hearts by their misconduct? Is not many a mother at this moment exclaiming thus, in her solitude, O my child, would God the grave had covered you, while you were yet in good reputation, and comparative innocence! Alas! that you should have lived to disgrace yourself, and bring down your widowed mother's grey hairs in sorrow to the grave!"

I remember to have read, or heard somewhere, the following anecdote. A widowed mother had an only son, who while yet a youth, was seized with an alarming illness. Her heart was in the greatest tumult of grief at the prospect of his death. She sent for her minister to pray for her child's recovery. It was his 'preservation from death' that was to be the subject of the minister's petitions, rather than the mother's submission to the will of God. Like a faithful pastor, he begged her to control her excessive grief and solicitude, and resign her son to God's disposal—but to no avail—it seemed as if she neither could nor would give him up. Prayer was to pluck him from the borders of the grave, whether God were willing to spare him or not. Her son lived—the mother with ecstatic joy, received him back, as from the borders of the tomb. He grew to adult age. But it was to die in circumstances ten thousand times more afflictive to the mother's heart, than his earlier death would have been. As he came to manhood he turned out profligate, extravagant, dishonest. His crimes became atrocious—he was detected, tried, convicted, and sentenced to be hanged! And seven years from the day when that minister prayed for his life, he was visited in prison, by his wretched mother—on the day of his execution!

Oh! widow is there not a heavier calamity than the death, in ordinary circumstances, of an only son? I would not for a moment suggest that it is probable your son would have come to this—but it is possible! Or if not to this, yet to something that would have embittered all your future days. Would not this distressed woman, look with envy upon others whose children had died in honor and good reputation, and think their affliction not worthy of the name, compared with hers? Would she not look back with deep remorsefulness upon her own rebellious grief and unwillingness to give up her child at the will of God?

Before I close this chapter, I would suggest, that as the death of an only child removes from your widowed heart, the last hope or object of a terrestrial nature, which seemed to give interest to earth, or occupation upon it—you should look for objects of another kind—even such as are spiritual, heavenly, and divine! Seek, then, not only for a richer enjoyment of personal religion, as the chief source of consolation—but cherish a warmer zeal for its diffusion, as the best and happiest occupation that can employ your faculties, or your time. Now that God has taken from you *your* son, adopt the cause of *his* Son. Consecrate yourself afresh to the interests of evangelical piety. What have you now to do on earth—what is left for you to do—what can you find to do—but distribute by your property, if you possess much—and by your personal labors, if you are in health—distribute the benefits of the gospel, the blessings of salvation, to those who are destitute of them!

Live, now, wholly for God, and the salvation of the human race. Soften the weight of your cross—by making known the glory of the cross of Christ. Instead of retiring into seclusion—to nourish your woe—to leave your sorrow to prey upon your heart—or to let life fret itself away amid the indolence of grief—rouse your spirit for holy action! Let your loss be the gain of others, by your employing your time and resources for their benefit. Freed from every tie that bound your soul to personal or relative objects, feel at liberty for doing good to others. *Active benevolence is the best balm for such wounds as yours!* Allow yourself no leisure for dark and melancholy thoughts to collect, or for busy memory to torment you with distressing recollections. Your departed child does not need your property—give it to God. Your departed child does not need your time, nor your solicitude—give them to God. In pitying the sorrows of others, you will find a sweet solace for your own. Occupy your lonely heart, and hours as lonely as your heart—with projects of mercy, and purposes of beneficence. If your affliction shall lead to such a result, you may then say of *active*

benevolence, that it is one of the best reliefs that mourners have, and makes their sorrows blessed!

The Widow Directed to the Widow's God

by John Angell James, 1841

ANNA THE PROPHETESS

A pattern for aged widows

"**Anna**, a prophetess, was also there in the Temple. She was the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher, and was very old. *She was a widow*, for her husband had died when they had been married only seven years. She was now eighty-four years old. She never left the Temple but stayed there day and night, worshiping God with fasting and prayer. She came along just as Simeon was talking with Mary and Joseph, and she began praising God. She talked about Jesus to everyone who had been waiting for the promised King to come and deliver Jerusalem." Luke 2:36-38

The Holy Spirit of God, while he passes over in silence the names of mighty kings and potentates, with all their civil and military achievements, their battles and their victories—writes the life, and pronounces the eulogy of a poor and godly aged widow, of whom the world knew little and cared less—to preserve her memory to the end of time, and to show how grateful to him such a kind of life is. Anna was one among the few who, in that dark degenerate age, preserved the light of true piety from being quite extinct, and who waited for the Messiah. Having lost her husband, after a short union of seven years, she continued a widow ever afterwards; and was eighty-four years of age, at the time of our Lord's birth. Gifted with the spirit of prophecy, she delivered the messages of God to the few who were disposed to receive them, and spoke of him that was to come—who would bring deliverance for his people.

Her *abode* was in one of the dwellings which surrounded the temple, and her sole *employment* was devotion. She had long been dead to the world, and the world to her; and, with her heart in heaven, she had neither interest nor hope upon earth. It was her privilege, as it was of good old Simeon, before she closed her eyes on earthly things, to see Him of whom the prophets spoke. Having uttered her gratitude that the light had not departed from her eyes, until she had seen the

Lord, she confessed him before others, and commended him to their regards. Happy saint, to see this new-born Savior as the star of your *evening*—you have lived to good purpose, in thus having your existence prolonged, to welcome to our world, him who came to be its Redeemer—and now what can induce a wish to remain longer away from your Father's house? You may be willing to lay down your aged body, and your widowhood, and go to that world, where you shall flourish in the vigor of immortal youth!

And now, leaving Anna, I turn to the **aged widow**, who has little to do but to wait and watch for the coming of her Lord. *Mother in Israel*, I address you with sentiments of reverent respect, while I call upon you to indulge the reflections, and perform the duties, appropriate to your circumstances. Your age, connected with your widowhood, renders you an object of deep concern. You have outlived, not only the husband—but the friends of your youth. As regards those who started with you in life, you are alone in the world; and you sometimes feel a sadness come over you, because there are none who can talk with you of the scenes of your childhood and youth—which are as a tale written only in your own memory. Spend the evening of your days, in adoring the God that has kept you thus long, and in admiring the varied displays of his attributes, and the rich and seasonable communications of his grace, which it has been your privilege to enjoy. From what **dangers** he has rescued you—amid what **temptations** he has delivered you—through what **difficulties** he has conducted you—under what **trials** he has supported you—and what **mercies** he has showered upon you—during a widowhood of thirty, forty, or fifty years! How much of his power, wisdom, patience, faithfulness, and love—have you seen in all these varied scenes, through which you have been called to pass!

Let it be the employment and delight of your soul, in the long evening of your life, to retrace, with gratitude and admiration, the wondrous course and journey of your existence. When by infirmity of body, you are shut out from the public ordinances of true religion, and the communion of the saints; when through failing sight you can no longer read the Word of God, and you can only *think* upon its contents, dwell upon the past with thanksgiving and love. When you became a widow, perhaps early in life, you trembled, and asked, "How am I to be sustained?" and lo! there you are—a widow of seventy or eighty years, acknowledging to the glory of God, that he has never left you, nor forsaken you!

And now, during the remainder of your days, and of your widowhood, withdraw your attentions from this world, and prepare for that glory,

on the verge of which you are now living! Almost every tie to earth is cut, or hangs very loose about your heart. Heaven has been accumulating its treasures, and multiplying its attractions for many years, and earth growing poorer and poorer, until one would suppose it has scarcely anything now left to make you, as you are about to leave it—cast one lingering longing look behind. Let it be seen that you are dwelling on the borderland, waiting and longing to pass over to your eternal home. Let it not distress you, if you cannot be so vigorous in the service of God, as you once were. Do not be cast down, if you cannot *hear* with the same attention—or *pray* with the same length, fixedness of thought, and fervor of emotion—or that you cannot *remember* with the same power and accuracy, as you once did. It is the decay of *nature*, rather than the decline of *grace*—and your divine Lord will make the same kind excuse for you, which he once did for his slumbering disciples, and say, "The spirit indeed is willing—but the flesh is weak!"

Be it your aim, in a peculiar sense—to live by faith. You must have been long since weaned, or ought to have been, from living upon frames and feelings. *Your* frames and feelings have far less of liveliness than they once had, and you must be brought to a simpler and firmer reliance upon the faithfulness and unchangeableness of God. You must rest upon the simple promise, and rely upon the pure and unmixed word. Aged saint, believe, believe—hold on to the end, by faith. By faith lay hold of God's strength, to support your faltering steps, and sustain you to the end.

Be as cheerful as you can—for the smiles of an aged Christian, happy in the Lord, are as beautiful as the rays of the setting sun, of a midsummer's day. Yes, though an aged widow, apparently forlorn and desolate—send forth notes of cheerful praise. Like good old Anna, who when she came in and saw the Lord, gave thanks, and spoke of Christ to those around—so you should likewise do. Encourage the younger widows to put their trust in God. Tell them how he has appeared to sustain you. Bear testimony for him, and remind them, that he is the same yesterday, today, and forever.

Let it appear to all who come round you, that though God sees fit to detain you upon earth—your affections have gone on before you into heaven; that your heart is dead to the world—though your body lives in it; that though you are willing to wait all the days of your appointed time, until your change comes—that still the coming of the change will be a joyful moment. It is an unfitting sight, to behold an aged widow clinging to earth, even when its attractions, one would think, are gone;

and loving the world, when its charms are all faded, and it is but the skeleton of what it was to her.

But, at the same time, let there be no impatience to be gone. Your husband is dead; perhaps your children also, and there be few in whom your heart takes a deep interest or concern. You can see no reason why you should linger and loiter another hour in the world, which is one vast sepulcher, where all that was dear to you lies buried—and why, therefore, should such a tomb as this world—be your dwelling place? Just because it is God's will to keep you here! Let there be no peevish wishes for death—no fretful complaints of life. It may be you are dependent, and are afraid you are a burden to your friends; and this adds to your impatience to be gone—but strive against it. **God loves his children too well to keep them one moment longer from his house and home above—than is best for his glory—and their happiness!**

The Widow Directed to the Widow's God

by John Angell James, 1841

Letter to a friend who had lost a near relative

Your long and intimate letter gave me great pleasure. There is a sympathy in the feeling of people who have been recently afflicted, which cannot be expected to be found in others; a mutual chord, which, touched, vibrates with a kindred sound. We have not suffered exactly alike. But we have suffered; and that circumstance has made us love each other better than we did before.

When I view myself, riven asunder, root and branch, not the limbs torn away—but the very body of the tree sundered from top to bottom, nature must feel the parting agonies, must at times, be ready to sink under the consciousness of her dissolution. All this must be to those who have interests to be smitten, friendships to be broken, and hearts to feel.

Yes, dear friend, our hearts have bled. The wound inflicted has been deep. We have felt that the stroke was full of anguish, that it went to our very souls. We will not deny that this is all true. We will not please ourselves with the delusion that the deep, deep wound which the hand of God has inflicted, can ever cease to bleed. But, O my friend! 'is there not balm in Gilead? is there not a physician there?' Is not that physician our Savior; wise to discern, prudent to manage, strong to

save? Has not the kind hand which smote so deeply, accompanied the stroke with many softening, mitigating circumstances? Oh yes; I trust we both feel that it is so. It is God who has afflicted us, the infinitely wise, compassionate, and faithful Jehovah, the Lord our God. And does it not argue great lack of confidence in him, if we sink into despondency when he chastises us? Does it not show, either that we think we could manage things better than he can, or that there is something which we have not cordially submitted to his disposal?

And now, O God, you are the potter, and we the clay. O how this quells the murmurings of self-will; how it settles the restlessness of the troubled spirit; how it plucks the sting from the rod of affliction! God knows best! Precious truth! It is an anchor to the soul, sure and steadfast, which keeps it from shipwreck, amid all the storms and tempests of the troubled sea of life. Oh, for a firm, unwavering faith! This is all that is needed. With this we may say, "Cheerful I tread the desert through."

By faith, we may rejoice when our beloved Christian friends are taken from the stormy ocean to the peaceful haven--from the weary wilderness to the happy home--from the field of conflict to the crown of victory; and trace with holy courage, our way through the same difficulties to the same glorious reward.

But, ah! this, a firm unwavering faith, is too often lacking. We miss our dear friend. The heart which sympathized in all our pleasures and pains, has ceased to beat; the ear which was always open to listen to our afflictions and wishes, is closed; the kind voice of affection and unselfish love, is hushed; the arm which supported us, is withdrawn. It is a chilling thought. Cherished alone, we feel its freezing, benumbing influence fastening upon all the springs of comfort and hope, and turning every stream of joy into one wilderness of cold and motionless despair.

But, my dear friend, we must not view our trials thus. We must think much and often of the blessedness of those whose removal we lament, of the perfection of the divine government, of the certainty of the promise, that 'all things shall work together for good to those who love God,' of the rapid approach of that hour which will unite us eternally to those in Christ whom we love, of the danger of creature-comforts, and of the suffering life on earth of our glorious High-priest and head, and his assurance that it is through much tribulation we must enter the kingdom. Oh, my dear friend, if we are Christians, there is a glorious prospect before us—as much of the good things of this life as an

infinitely wise and kind Father sees to be best for us, and hereafter an eternity of unmingled and ineffable bliss!

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by John Angell James, 1841

CONCLUSION

And now, in conclusion, what can I add for your instruction or comfort, except it be a few words on that blessed, though mysterious union, which exists between Christ and his believing people. Looking sorrowfully, as you now do, on the broken bonds of that close and tender union, which was once the source of your chief earthly happiness, and the dissolution of which has left you a lonely pilgrim, in this world's great wilderness, comfort yourself with the thought, that if joined unto the Lord by faith, and made one spirit with *him*, there is at least one union which even *death* cannot dissolve, and one tie which nothing can weaken or rupture.

How tender and how beautiful is the representation, which sets forth Christ as the husband of his believing people. You can feel this now, as you never felt it before. He not only loves you with an affection, compared to which even that of your husband was cold—but will ever live to manifest his affection. Death has severed you from your earthly husband—but it can never take from you this heavenly bridegroom. Standing at the grave of all that was most dear to you on earth, and reading in mournful silence, and with many tears, that simple record of mortality upon his tomb, which contains the history and the date of your sorrows—take up the triumphant exultation of the apostle, and exclaim, "No, in all these things we are more than conquerors, through him who has loved us; for I am persuaded that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

Nor is this the language of vain boasting—but of well-founded confidence. No, nothing shall burst the bond, which unites the redeemed soul to its redeeming Savior. This Divine Head will hold in close, vital, and inseparable union, every member that is incorporated into him by faith. And as you cannot be severed by death from Christ, so neither is your departed husband—if he was a true believer. The

righteous sleep in Jesus. In death they are still one with him. The spirit has been disunited from its mortal and corruptible body—but not from its immortal and incorruptible head. All the rights and privileges which belong to believers, in virtue of their union with Christ, remain with them in and after death undiminished, unimpaired. Dead they are—but they are dead in Christ—they are as much comprehended in his covenant; summed up in him as their head; represented by him as their advocate, as they possibly could be, while here on earth.

Whatever is meant by their being in Christ, is meant of them now they are dead, and shall be made good to them at his appearing. Therefore you are one with him you have lost still—you meet in Christ's spiritual body, and are bound by a mystical tie in the same sacred fellowship.

What is to follow? The heavenly bridegroom will take home his bride to his mansions of glory, which he has gone to prepare for the object of his love. How tender, yet how sacred and how solemn is the adjuration of the apostle, where he says, "Now we beseech you, brethren, by the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, and by *our gathering together unto him.*" There is now a scattering—but then there is to be a gathering. His chosen, redeemed, regenerated, sanctified people, now severed from each other, though still united in him, shall be then collected into his presence, and gathered around his throne! Not one of its members shall be missing—but the spiritual body will be complete with its Divine Head. Mortality will be swallowed up of life.

Heaven will be a region of vitality—a living world, a world of life. The widow's God shall be there—but not the widow, as a widow. Her tears will be wiped away; her loss will be repaired; her sorrows will be turned into joy, for she will be associated again with the companion of her pilgrimage. Not indeed in the bonds of a fleshly union—but in the ties of a spiritual fellowship; for they shall be as the angels of God, and shall dwell together forever in that glorious state, of which it is said, *there shall be no more death!*