

Weaned from the Temporal



Learning by Living (Part 8)
by Derek Prince

It's good to be with you again, sharing on this week's very personal theme, lessons I myself have learned in serving the Lord and His people. Now, back to our theme, "Learning by Living."

The lesson I am going to share today is one which you may perhaps be reluctant to listen to, yet it is one of vital importance for you to receive. In fact, there is no one listening to my voice right now who does not need to give careful heed to what I have to say and to take it to heart.

I learned this lesson when the Lord called home to Himself my first wife, Lydia—after thirty years of close and happy married life.

I would like to say right now, that only those who have passed through a similar experience can fully understand what is involved.

I heard about a young minister in a congregation who was trying to encourage those members, older members, who had experienced bereavement, who had lost a spouse. And he would say to them, "I understand what you are going through. I can sympathize with you." Then the Lord suddenly took his own wife. And after that he stood up and said, "I have to apologize to you people." He said, "I told you that I understand. But," he said, "it was not true. I did not understand, but I do now."

So I am going to share with you the understanding that God gave me, not in theory, but through experience.

There were two main Scriptures that helped me, and I want to share them with you. Remember, there is hardly anyone listening to me, who will not at some time or other have to go through the experience of bereavement, of losing the closest person in your life.

The first Scripture that helped me was Job 1:21:

> "...The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord."

Now Job had been stripped of everything, his whole family, all his possessions. He had not actually been deprived of his wife, but his wife had taken such a negative attitude towards him that, I sometimes wonder whether he would not have wished she had been taken, too.

However, the point I want to bring out is this: Job said something very simple, but profound. "The Lord gave and the Lord hath taken away. Blessed be the name of the Lord."

What God challenged me with was this: "You trusted Me to give. Do you trust Me to take?" I knew that God had given me my wife. It had come about in such a wonderful, supernatural way. There was no question in my mind or in the mind of either of us. God had brought us together. I rejoiced in that. We had a wonderful life together. I had accepted what the Lord gave. The question was, Would I accept that the Lord had taken away?

I always used to think when I read that passage in Job that Job was speaking in resignation. "Well, there is nothing I can do about it. The Lord gave and the Lord has taken away." But through my own experience I came to believe that Job had said that in wonderful trust. Not resignation, but trust. There is a tremendous difference. And I want to say this to you and to myself, if we trust God to give, then we must also trust Him to take away, see. We cannot have faith for the one and not for the other.

I remember years back, a lady came to me and asked me to pray for her son, twelve years old, who was in hospital with a incurable kidney disease. I was not quite sure how to pray, so I was just asking questions, I was just kind of feeling my way into the situation. And I said, "Have you ever truly given your son to the Lord?" Well, the lady had become hysterical, you see. She thought I was trying to say, "Well, you are going to lose your son." I wasn't. I was simply saying, "Have you really given back this gift of a son that God gave to you?"—which is what God requires us all to do. But her reaction showed me very, very, clearly that she had never really given her son back.

So there is another example, if we trust the Lord to give us a child, can we trust the Lord to take the child? That is a very hard experience to go through. But the key to victory is trust. "The Lord gave, the Lord has taken away." I say that now, not with resignation, but with trust. Even with triumph.

Moses told Israel that "He is a God of faithfulness. His way is perfect and all His works are just." Do you believe that? I do. And that is what carried me through. I trust Him. "His way is perfect." There is never anything wrong with what God does. He never makes a mistake. I trust Him to give, and I trust Him to take. That is really the only way we can go through life.

If we only trust God to give and then rebel when He takes, how much trust was there in any of it to start with?

Now I want to share with you the other passage of Scripture that helped me in my hour of bereavement when the Lord took my first wife home. It is found in Isaiah 40. I am going to read the first verse and then skip some verses and read verses 6, 7 and 8. The first word in it is: "Comfort, comfort my people, says your God." How many of you need comfort right now? I want to tell you God has provided comfort. "Comfort, comfort my people, says your God."

Then I want to go on to verses 6, 7 and 8, which are the message of comfort. And I want you to see that there is a kind of amazing, unexpected feature in this message of comfort. Because it does not sound the least bit like a message of comfort to start with.

> "A voice says, 'Cry out.' And I said, 'What shall I cry?' 'All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field. The grass withers and the flowers fall, because the breath [or the Spirit] of the Lord blows on them. Surely the people are grass.'"

Now what comfort is there in that? All humanity is just like grass. It grows up, blooms, withers, and dies. There are no exceptions. Every human being is in that same category. We are really just as ephemeral and impermanent as the grass in the fields.

Furthermore, you notice that the grass withers because the breath, or the Spirit, of the Lord blows upon it. It is the Lord who causes the grass to wither.

You say, "Lord, what comfort is there in this message?" I want to tell you, the whole comfort is in the next verse.

> "The grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of our God stands forever."

That is the comfort. In the midst of all that is impermanent and fading, there is one thing that is enduring and permanent, unshakable, unmovable, eternal, the Word of God.

So you see in that passage, we are confronted by two opposites: the impermanence of everything physical and material, and then the permanence of God's Word.

Now the impermanence of everything in this world has always been, for many, many, centuries; in fact as long as there has been literature and thought, it has been the theme of poets and philosophers.

I used to be a great lover of Shakespeare, especially of his sonnets, and I just recall some of the things he said. He was tremendously occupied with this theme. He began one sonnet like this: "When I consider everything that grows, holds in perfection but a little moment. And this huge stage presenteth naught but shows, we are on the stars, in secret influence cometh." See? "...Everything that grows, holds in perfection but a little moment." That is the truth. And somehow Shakespeare in his thinking saw behind all this the invisible influence of some kind of forces which he identified with the stars.

And then he said elsewhere, in a poem to a lady whom he loved passionately: "Every fair, from fair, sometimes declines, by chance or nature's changing course, untrimmed." That is the truth. "Every fair, from fair, sometimes declines."

But there is no comfort in all that is there? You see, the only people who can find comfort in the midst of sorrow and bereavement are those who have put their faith in God's eternal, unchanging Word. That is the only source of comfort. Thank God I knew it and I knew the way to it and I was able to avail myself of it.

Listen to two things that Peter says, 1 Peter 1:23–25:

> "For you have been born again, not of perishable seed, but of imperishable, through the living and enduring word of God. For, 'All men are like grass, and all their glory is like the flowers of the field; the grass withers and the flowers fall, but the word of the Lord stands forever.'"

You see, he is quoting that same passage in Isaiah. But he says, "We have received this eternal, imperishable word of God inside us. It has brought forth a new eternal, imperishable nature inside us." You see, the nature of the plant is always determined by the nature of the seed that brings forth the plant. If the seed is eternal and imperishable, the nature it brings forth is eternal and imperishable.

When we have been born again, through faith in Jesus Christ, we have something in us that is not subject to all the vagaries of time. It is eternal, it is permanent, it lasts, it will go on.

And then Peter says in his second epistle, chapter 1, verse 4:

> "Through these he has given us his very great and precious promises, [the promises of his word], so that through them you may participate in the divine nature and escape the corruption in the world caused by evil desires."

You see, there is a way of escape from this cycle of corruption, into something that is divine and eternal. But it is through the exceeding great and precious promises of the Word of God.

Let me sum it up this way: God lets us taste the imperfect and temporal, in beauty and friendship and pleasure. Then He weans us from these so that we may enjoy the perfect and the permanent.

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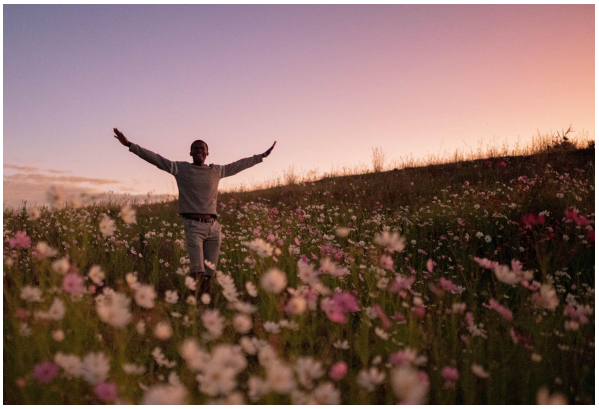

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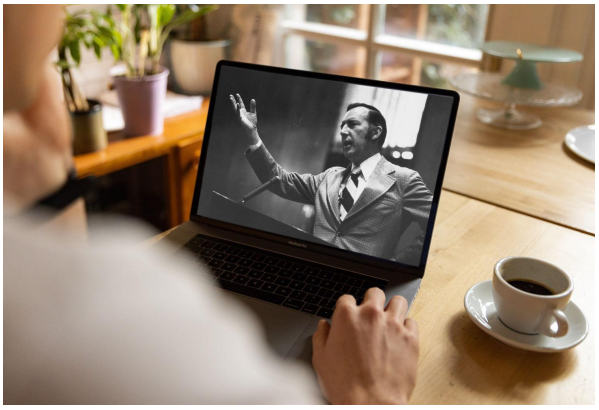

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