

Lesson 1

The Shepherd's Crucible

Sabbath Afternoon, June 25

As Jesus, the great Teacher, presents His lessons to be learned from the open book of nature, He opens the eye of their understanding to reveal the attention that is given to objects in proportion to the rank they occupy in the scale of creation. If the grass of the field, which today is so beautiful, delighting the senses, [and] is tomorrow cut down and burned, receives so great attention from God, how much more will He not bestow upon man formed in His image. We cannot form exaggerated ideas of the value of the human soul, and the attention given by Heaven to man. He then gives the comforting assurance, "Fear not, little flock; for it is your Father's good pleasure to give you the kingdom."

Jesus is the good Shepherd. His followers are the sheep of His pasture. A shepherd is always with his flock to defend them, to keep them from the wolves, to hunt up the lost sheep and carry them back to the fold, to lead them beside green pastures and beside living waters.

—*Lift Him Up*, p. 215.

Let us never forget, even when we walk in the valley, that Christ is as much with us when we walk trustingly there as when we are on the mountaintop. the voice said to us, "Will you not roll your burden upon the Burden Bearer, the Lord Jesus Christ? Will you not live on the sunny side of the cross? saying, 'I know [Him] whom I have believed, and am persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him against that day.' 'Whom having not seen, ye love; in whom, though now ye see Him not, yet believing, ye rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory: receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls' " (1 Timothy 1:12; 1 Peter 1:8, 9).

. . . I must trust in Him irrespective of the changes of my emotional atmosphere. I must show forth the praises of Him who has called me "out of darkness into His marvelous light" (1 Peter 2:9). My heart must be steadfast in Christ, my Saviour, beholding His love and gracious goodness. I must not trust Him now and then, but always, that I may manifest the results of abiding in Him who has bought me with His precious blood. We must learn to believe the promises, to have an abiding faith so that we may take them as the sure word of God.

—*Mind, Character, and Personality*, vol. 2, pp. 811, 812.

Satan is our destroyer, but Christ is our restorer. We must put faith into constant exercise, and trust in God, whatever our feelings may be. . . . You can say with the psalmist, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me. Thou preparest a table before me in the presence of mine enemies: thou anointest my head with oil; my cup runneth over. Surely goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord for ever."

—*Lift Him Up*, p. 332.

Sunday, June 26

A Guide for the Journey: The Shepherd

As the shepherd loves his sheep, and cannot rest if even one be missing, so, in an infinitely higher degree, does God love every outcast soul. Men may deny the claim of His love, they may wander from Him, they may choose another master; yet they are God's, and He longs to recover His own. He says, "As a shepherd seeketh out his flock in the day that he is among his sheep that are scattered; so will I seek out My sheep, and will deliver them out of all places where they have been scattered in the cloudy and dark day." Ezekiel 34:12.

In the parable the shepherd goes out to search for one sheep—the very least that can be numbered. So if there had been but one lost soul, Christ would have died for that one.

The sheep that has strayed from the fold is the most helpless of all creatures. It must be sought for by the shepherd, for it cannot find its way back. So with the soul that has wandered away from God; he is as helpless as the lost sheep, and unless divine love had come to his rescue he could never find his way to God.

—Christ's Object Lessons, p. 187.

However much a shepherd may love his sheep, he loves his sons and daughters more. Jesus is not only our shepherd; He is our "everlasting Father." And He says, "I know Mine own, and Mine own know Me, even as the Father knoweth Me, and I know the Father." John 10:14, 15, R. V. What a statement is this!—the only-begotten Son, He who is in the bosom of the Father, He whom God has declared to be "the Man that is My fellow" (Zechariah 13:7),—the communion between Him and the eternal God is taken to represent the communion between Christ and His children on the earth!

Because we are the gift of His Father, and the reward of His work, Jesus loves us. He loves us as His children. Reader, He loves you. Heaven itself can bestow nothing greater, nothing better. Therefore trust.

—The Desire of Ages, p. 483.

While we review, not the dark chapters in our experience, but the manifestations of God's great mercy and unfailing love, we shall praise far more than complain. We shall talk of the loving faithfulness of God as the true, tender, compassionate shepherd of His flock, which He has declared that none shall pluck out of His hand. The language of the heart will not be selfish murmuring and repining. Praise, like clear-flowing streams, will come from God's truly believing ones. "Goodness and mercy shall follow me all the days of my life: and I will dwell in the house of the Lord forever." "Thou shalt guide me with Thy counsel, and afterward receive me to glory. Whom have I in heaven but Thee? And there is none upon earth that I desire beside Thee." Psalm 23:6; 73:24, 25.

—Testimonies for the Church, vol. 6, pp. 367, 368.

Monday, June 27

Locations on the Journey

Human beings suffer much because they step out of the path that God has chosen for them to follow. They walk in the sparks of the fire they themselves have kindled, and the sure result is affliction, unrest, and sorrow, which they might have avoided if they had submitted their will to God. . . . Whatever path God chooses for us, whatever way He ordains for our feet, that is the only path of safety. With the eye of faith, with childlike submission as obedient children, we must look to God, to follow His guidance, and difficulties will clear away. The promise is, “I will instruct thee and teach thee.”

—*Sons and Daughters of God*, p. 175.

If your steps are ordered by the Lord, . . . you must not expect that your path will always be one of outward peace and prosperity. The path that leads to eternal day is not the easiest to travel, and at times it will seem dark and thorny. But you have the assurance that God’s everlasting arms encircle you, to protect you from evil. He wants you to exercise earnest faith in Him, and learn to trust Him in the shadow as well as in the sunshine.

The follower of Christ must have faith abiding in the heart; for without this it is impossible to please God. Faith is the hand that takes hold of infinite help; it is the medium by which the renewed heart is made to beat in unison with the heart of Christ.

—*Messages to Young People*, p. 102.

Our sorrows do not spring out of the ground. In every affliction God has a purpose to work out for our good. Every blow that destroys an idol, every providence that weakens our hold upon earth and fastens our affections more firmly upon God, is a blessing. The pruning may be painful for a time, but afterward it “yieldeth the peaceable fruit of righteousness.” We should receive with gratitude whatever will quicken the conscience, elevate the thoughts, and ennoble the life. The fruitless branches are cut off and cast into the fire. Let us be thankful that through painful pruning we may retain a connection with the living Vine; for if we suffer with Christ, we shall also reign with Him. The very trial that taxes our faith the most severely and makes it seem as though God had forsaken us is to lead us more closely to Him, that we may lay all our burdens at the feet of Christ and experience the peace which He will give us in exchange. God loves and cares for the feeblest of His creatures, and we cannot dishonor Him more than by doubting His love to us. O let us cultivate that living faith that will trust Him in the hour of darkness and trial!

—*My Life Today*, p. 93.

Tuesday, June 28

Unexpected Detour 1: The Valley

When Henry White, our eldest son, lay dying, he said, “A bed of pain is a precious place when we have the presence of Jesus.” When we are obliged to drink of the bitter waters, turn away from the bitter to the precious and the bright. In trial grace can give the human soul assurance, and when we stand at the deathbed and see how the Christian can bear suffering and go through the valley of death, we gather strength and courage to work, and we fail not, neither are we discouraged in leading souls to Jesus.

Those who have borne the greatest sorrows are frequently the ones who carry the greatest comfort to others, bringing sunshine wherever they go. Such ones have been chastened and sweetened by their afflictions; they did not lose confidence in God when trouble assailed them, but clung closer to His protecting love. Such ones are a living proof of the tender care of God, who makes the darkness as well as the light, and chastens us for our good. Christ is the light of the world; in Him is no darkness. Precious light! Let us live in that light! Bid adieu to sadness and repining. Rejoice in the Lord always; and again I say, Rejoice.

—*Selected Messages, book 2, p. 274.*

The word is: Go forward; discharge your individual duty, and leave all consequences in the hands of God. If we move forward where Jesus leads the way we shall see His triumph, we shall share His joy. We must share the conflicts if we wear the crown of victory. Like Jesus, we must be made perfect through suffering. Had Christ’s life been one of ease, then might we safely yield to sloth. Since His life was marked with continual self-denial, suffering, and self-sacrifice, we shall make no complaint if we are partakers with Him. We can walk safely in the darkest path if we have the Light of the world for our guide.

—*Selected Messages, book 1, pp. 28, 29.*

Let us remember that the life of God’s children in this world is a pilgrim life. We have not wisdom to plan our own lives. It is not for us to shape our future. “By faith Abraham, when he was called to go out into a place which he should after receive for an inheritance, obeyed; and he went out, not knowing whither he went.” Hebrews 11:8. . . .

Too many, in planning for a brilliant future, make an utter failure. Let God plan for you. As a little child, trust to the guidance of Him who will “keep the feet of His saints.” 1 Samuel 2:9. God never leads His children otherwise than they would choose to be led, if they could see the end from the beginning and discern the glory of the purpose which they are fulfilling as co-workers with Him.

—*The Ministry of Healing, pp. 478, 479.*

Wednesday, June 29

Unexpected Detour 2: The Surrounded Table

In the discharge of our duties we are neither to despise nor to fear our enemies. . . . Putting our trust in God, we are to move steadily forward, doing His work with unselfishness, in humble dependence upon Him, committing to His providence ourselves and all that concerns our present and future, holding the beginning of our confidence firm unto the end, remembering that we receive the blessings of heaven, not because of our worthiness, but because of Christ's worthiness and our acceptance, through faith in Him, of God's abounding grace.

—*Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 7, p. 108.

If we encounter difficulties, and in Christ's strength overcome them; if we meet enemies, and in Christ's strength put them to flight; if we accept responsibilities, and in Christ's strength discharge them faithfully, we are gaining a precious experience. We learn, as we could not otherwise have learned, that our Saviour is a present help in every time of need.

— *Testimonies for the Church*, vol. 5, p. 34.

Christ did not tell His disciples that their work would be easy. He showed them the vast confederacy of evil arrayed against them. They would have to fight "against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places." Ephesians 6:12. But they would not be left to fight alone. He assured them that He would be with them; and that if they would go forth in faith, they should move under the shield of Omnipotence. He bade them be brave and strong; for One mightier than angels would be in their ranks —the General of the armies of heaven. He made full provision for the prosecution of their work and took upon Himself the responsibility of its success. So long as they obeyed His word, and worked in connection with Him, they could not fail. Go to all nations, He bade them. Go to the farthest part of the habitable globe and be assured that My presence will be with you even there. Labor in faith and confidence; for the time will never come when I will forsake you. I will be with you always, helping you to perform your duty, guiding, comforting, sanctifying, sustaining you, giving you success in speaking words that shall draw the attention of others to heaven.

—*The Acts of the Apostles*, p. 29.

Thursday, June 30

A Certain Promise for the Journey

How shall we know for ourselves God's goodness and His love? The psalmist tells us—not, hear and know, read and know, or believe and know; but—“Taste and see that the Lord is good.” Instead of relying upon the word of another, taste for yourself.

Experience is knowledge derived from experiment. Experimental religion is what is needed now. “Taste and see that the Lord is good.” Some—yes, a large number—have a theoretical knowledge of religious truth, but have never felt the renewing power of divine grace upon their own hearts.

—*Testimonies for the Church, vol. 5, p. 221.*

God has provided a balm for every wound. There is a balm in Gilead, there is a physician there. Will you not now as never before study the Scriptures? Seek the Lord for wisdom in every emergency. In every trial plead with Jesus to show you a way out of your troubles, then your eyes will be opened to behold the remedy and to apply to your case the healing promises that have been recorded in His Word. In this way the enemy will find no place to lead you into mourning and unbelief, but instead you will have faith and hope and courage in the Lord. The Holy Spirit will give you clear discernment that you may see and appropriate every blessing that will act as an antidote to grief, as a branch of healing to every draught of bitterness that is placed to your lips. Every draught of bitterness will be mingled with the love of Jesus, and in place of complaining of the bitterness, you will realize that Jesus' love and grace are so mingled with sorrow that it has been turned into subdued, holy, sanctified joy.

—*Selected Messages, book 2, pp. 273, 274.*

When God's people take their eyes off the things of this world and place them on heaven and heavenly things they will be a peculiar people, because they will see the mercy and goodness and compassion that God has shown to the children of men. His love will call forth a response from them, and their lives will show to those around them that the Spirit of God is controlling them, that they are setting their affections on things above, not on the things of the earth.

. . . As we think of how Christ came to our world to die for fallen man, we understand something of the price that was paid for our redemption, and we realize that there is no true goodness or greatness apart from God. . . .

We are almost home; we shall soon hear the voice of the Saviour richer than any music, saying, Your warfare is accomplished. Enter into the joy of thy Lord. Blessed, blessed benediction; I want to hear it from His immortal lips. I want to praise Him; I want to honor Him that sitteth on the throne. I want my voice to echo and re-echo through the courts of heaven. Will you be there? God help us, and fill us with all fullness and power, and then we can taste of the joys of the world to come.

—*In Heavenly Places, p. 368.*

Friday, July 1
For Further Reading

Lift Him Up, “Brought Back by the Shepherd,” p. 214;

Sons and Daughters of God, “God’s Goodness and Mercy Inspire Courage,”
p. 198.