

The Test of Wondering Why

Recently, a friend's letter arrived that reminded me of the importance of resting our hearts on what we know to be true about God, especially when faced with circumstances that lead us to question His will.

He wrote: "As a family, God has been speaking to us recently through the death of my youngest sister, Freda, on August 31.

We have no details yet. She sailed on September 18 of last year... after 10 years' patient waiting for the way to open.

"Many of our friends in their letters of sympathy speak of God's mysterious ways, and I know there is an element of mystery.

But I shrink from the suggestion that our Father has done anything

which needs to be explained. What He has done is the best, because He

has done it, and I pray that as a family we may not cast about for

explanations of the mystery, but exult in the Holy Spirit, and say, 'I

thank Thee, so, Father.' It suggests a lack of confidence in Him if we find it necessary to try to understand all He does.

"Will it not bring Him greater joy to tell Him that we need no explanation because we know Him? But I doubt not there will be

a fulfillment of John 12:24." —Rev. Frank Houghton (China Inland

Mission).

We Need No Explanation

Our hearts rejoice in that word for so great a matter. It is, indeed, the only perfect word. But perhaps sometimes in an incomparably lesser trial, the tempter has disturbed us, persuading us to look for an explanation. We find ourselves saying, "I wonder why."
Faith never wonders why.

Among our several hundred of all ages in the Dohnavur Fellowship family, who are being taught in the ways of prayer, there were many for whom this lesson was set when the answer to their prayers was turned to the contrary, just as they thought they had safely received it. For on a certain evening there was a special prayer for the healing touch for me. That night the pain was lulled, and natural sleep was given.

The blissfulness of the awakening next morning is still vivid and shining. I lay for a few minutes almost wondering if I were still on Earth. No night has been like that since. No sleep like that has come nor any such easeful wakening.

I knew something that morning of what it will be when He "shall look us out of pain."

All the dear household rejoiced. Down to the tiniest child who could understand there was gladness and thanksgiving. Had they not asked for healing by the touch of God? Was this not

that? So

they accepted it with a reverent and lovely joy.

But my nurse was careful in her joy, and nothing was done, no carelessness occurred that could account for what followed.

The pain returned and increased. The nights were as they had been. And

some did, I know, find it very confusing and very disappointing. For

was there not prayer? Indeed there was.

The loving care of those who led the prayer of our fellowship had divided the day into watches; there was never an

unprayed-for hour. But the bars closed down once more. Was it strange

that to some, who have not known Him long, there was the trial of

wondering *Why?*

Trust His Heart

"I am learning never to be disappointed, but to praise," missionary Frederick Arnot of Central Africa wrote in his journal long

ago. It was the word of peace to us then.

I think it must hurt the tender love of our Father when we press for reasons for His dealings with us, as though He were not

love, as though not He but another chose our inheritance for us, and as

though what He chose to allow could be less than the very best and

dearest that Love Eternal had to give.

But on a day of more than a little trial, in His great compassion I was allowed to see—for as the ear is unsealed at

times, so
are the eyes opened—and I knew that the enemy had asked to be
allowed
to recover his power to oppress, and that leave had been
granted to
him, but within limits.

I was not shown what those limits were. I saw only the
mercy that embraces us on every side. Was that moment of
insight merely
a pale reflection of an ancient familiar story? So some will
understand
it.

But the comfort that comes through such a moment never
stays to argue about itself. It sinks deep into the heart and
gives it
rest.

Thereafter, not seeing, not hearing, not feeling, we walk
by faith, finding our comfort not in the things seen or heard
in that
illuminated moment (though, indeed, that which was seen or
heard does,
with a sweetness peculiar to itself, continue to console), but
in the
Scriptures of truth: “I know whom I have believed, and am
persuaded
that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him
against
that day....And we know that all things work together for good
to them
that love God” (2 Tim. 1:12; Rom. 8:28, KJV).

With Him who assures us of this there is no variableness,
neither shadow that is cast by turning. His word stands true.
In that
truth we abide satisfied.

And so I have come to this: our Lord is sovereign. He may heal, as He will, by an invisible touch or by blessing the means (His gifts) that are used.

He may "save the exhausted one," as Rotherham renders James 5:15 (*The Emphasized Bible*, Kregel), or sustain with words him that is weary, as He did St. Paul, and use those words for the succor of others (see 2 Cor. 12:9).

The Secrets of the Lord

"But you are not St. Paul." I remember reading that in a book on healing, just after I had been given peace in acceptance of a certain "thorn in the flesh" (2 Cor. 12: 7). I had prayed more than three times that it might depart from me, but it had not departed.

"You are not St. Paul." It was true, of course, but it seemed too facile to be a true answer to this riddle of the universe.

And now, the more I study life as well as books, the more sure I am that there is a darkness folded round that riddle into whose heart of light we are not meant to see. Perhaps that light would be too bright for our eyes now.

I have known lovers of our Lord who in their spiritual youth were sure beyond a doubt that healing would always follow the prayer of faith and the anointing of oil in the name of the Lord. But those same dear lovers, in their beautiful maturity, passed through illness, unrelieved by any healing.

When I looked in wonder, remembering all that they had held and taught in other years, I found them utterly at rest. The secret of their Lord was with them. He had said to them, their own beloved Lord had said it, "Let not your heart be troubled, neither let it be afraid" (John 14: 27). So their hearts were not troubled or afraid, and their song was always of the lovingkindness of the Lord. "As for God, His way is perfect" (Ps. 18:30), they said. "We need no explanation."

Today with this thought in mind I read the "Song of the Redeemed," the ninth song of St. John, heard after a door was opened in heaven: "Great and marvellous are thy works, Lord God Almighty; just and true are thy ways, thou King of saints" (Rev. 15:3).

Some of us cannot enter fully into even earthly music until it has become familiar. Perhaps our various experiences here are means by which we may learn the heavenly melody to which such words are set, so that when we hear the harpers harping on the harps of God we shall catch the thread of that melody, and follow it through its harmonies, moving among them with confidence and gladness, as on familiar ground.

"As for God, His way is perfect." That is the substance of the words. And if His way be perfect, we need no explanation.

Amy Beatrice Carmichael (1867-1951) was a missionary and a prolific author of poetry and prose. She was born in Millisle, Northern Ireland, to Presbyterian parents, and from her youth was sensitive to the message of the gospel and the fate of those who did not know Christ. In 1931, Amy suffered disabling injuries in a fall and never fully recovered. The final two decades of her life were spent confined to her quarters. From her bed, she frequently wrote letters to her friends and staff. One collection of writings provided the content for her best-known book, *Rose From Brier* (Christian Literature Crusade), from which this article is adapted, copyright 1995. Used by permission.