

The Tenderness and Compassion of General Robert E. Lee



FITZHUGH LEE
The Library of
Congress

CAPTAIN ROBERT E. LEE, son of General Robert E. Lee wrote about the compassion and tenderness of his father in a letter the general sent to his nephew Fitzhugh's wife after Fitzhugh was wounded near Culpepper, Virginia.

I am so grieved, my dear daughter, to send Fitzhugh to you wounded. But I am so grateful that his wound is of a character to give us full hope of a speedy recovery. With his youth and strength to aid him, and your tender care to nurse him, I trust he will soon be well again. I know that you will unite with me in thanks to Almighty God, who has so often sheltered him in the hour of danger, for his recent deliverance, and lift up your whole heart in praise to Him for sparing a life so dear to us, while enabling him to do his duty in the station in which He had placed him. Ask him to join us in supplication that He may always cover him with the shadow of His almighty arm, and teach him that his only refuge is in Him, the greatness of whose mercy reacheth unto the heavens, and His truth unto the clouds. As some good is always mixed with the evil in this world, you will now have him with you for a time and I shall look to you to cure him soon and send him back to me . . .¹

And by his wounds
we are healed.
—ISAIAH 53:5

While we can see the tenderness of Lee through this letter, we also sense his awareness of God's mercy in bringing deliverance to his own nephew. Lee's faith in God was strong. He knew that Fitzhugh would soon be healed, and he expected him to return to the battlefield, believing that the same God who protected and delivered him the first time could do it again.

Lee believed that his nephew's wounds would teach him a greater dependence on God. Christians sometimes get wounded in the Lord's service. We can either let our wounds destroy us or become a means to draw us closer to Christ.

Are you wounded? Try letting the Lord "nurse" your wounds.

The Goodness of God

MARY BETHELL was a godly woman who lived in difficult circumstances spawned by the Civil War, yet she still rejoiced in God's blessings. She reflected on the past two years in her diary saying:

January 1, 1861. *Ground white with snow. This is new years day, the old year is gone forever with all its sorrows and joys. When I look back to the events of last year, I am led to say that the Lord has been good to me. I had more of joy last year than sorrow, my family was blessed with health, and I had no serious trouble (except when my husband went to Memphis, and Emeline and Dick died last year, and Cinda's twin babies).*

January 1, 1862. *I am entering upon another new year, I am determined and resolved to live nearer to God, to deny myself, take up my cross and follow the Savior. I hope that I may be built up this year in the most holy faith that I may advance in the divine life.*²

Often in our difficulties, we fail to see God's goodness. Like Mary who stood outside the garden tomb weeping, tears blur our vision of a risen Christ. If we will think over the past year we can rejoice like Mary Bethell who found God's blessings in spite of life's unexpected calamities. We are reminded in Psalm 30:5 that "weeping may remain for a night, but rejoicing comes in the morning." When Mary Magdalene stopped weeping and refocused her eyes, she saw the risen Christ right in front of her. Sometimes tears blur our vision. But if we look through the eyes of faith, we will find that Jesus is there all the time.

They asked her,
"Woman, why are
you crying?" . . .
Jesus said to
her, "Mary!"
—JOHN 20:13, 16

God's Mercies Are New Every Morning

DURING 1864 Southern lady Emma LeConte felt hopeless and despairing as she walked through a valley of trials. But she soon realized that “the darkest hour comes before dawn.” With the beginning of a new year, Emma was ready to move on and put the past behind her as she wrote in her journal:

Jan. 1, 1865. What a bright new year! If only the sunshine be a presage of happier days! Cold but clear and sunny—such a contrast to yesterday's tears. With this bright sun shining on me I can't feel as mournful as I did yesterday. I will try to throw off the sad memories I was brooding over and hope for better things. I will try to forget my struggles and failures and disappointments and begin again with new resolutions.³

For Emma LeConte the previous year had been one of seeming hopelessness. Yet with the dawning of a new day in Christ comes a fresh start and a new hope. The writer of Lamentations was the prophet Jeremiah, who is called by biblical expositors, “the weeping prophet.” Jeremiah faced the overwhelming task of preaching to a sinful nation that would not turn back to God. Yet the Holy Spirit reminded the prophet that God's mercies are fresh and new every morning and he will be faithful to his promises.

We can endure problems with the knowledge that our Lord will give new mercies every morning.

I well remember them, and my soul is downcast within me. Yet this I call to mind and therefore I have hope: Because of the Lord's great love we are not consumed, for his compassions never fail. They are new every morning; great is your faithfulness.

—LAMENTATIONS
3:22–24



Life's Unanswered Questions

IN THE SUMMER of 1864, while the Forty-ninth Tennessee Regiment was worshipping in a Georgia woods. Chaplain James McNeilly was leading the meeting when a stray bullet from a battle in another location passed through the head of one of the worshipers and lodged in the chest of another. The soldiers stopped singing when they saw the man die with the bullet in his head. Then they attended to the man who suffered a chest wound.

This incident made the soldiers think about eternity and the mystery of life and death. Why didn't God save the faithful? How did he allow this to happen during a worship service?⁴

Life can be full of unanswered questions concerning God's intervention and providential care for us. Suffering and death are mysteries to us. Until we reach our eternal home, we will never have all the answers to the questions of human suffering. However, we can take comfort in knowing that when we Christians suffer patiently, we are most like our Lord Jesus Christ.

Many Christians during the Civil War resigned themselves to the providence of God in their affairs. When things happened they could not understand, they knew that the Lord was in control.

Sadly, we do not have the chaplain's words to his men after this incident, but he may have told them that God's ways are higher than our ways and his thoughts than our thoughts. We cannot know why God allows such tragedies to happen, but we know that he never makes a mistake.

O the depth of
the riches both
of the wisdom and
knowledge of God!
How unsearchable
are his judgments,
and his ways past
finding out!

—ROMANS 11:33 (KJV)



The Secret of True Happiness

MARY BETHELL'S faith stands as a testimony of how the Word of God and prayer can have a positive effect on one's outlook. We can view life from either a positive or pessimistic standpoint. Someone said, "Two men looked through prison bars, the one saw mud, the other saw stars." Mary chose to look at life through the divine lens of Scripture. Therefore, her outlook even in undesirable circumstances remained positive. During the Civil War she remained content. As you read the following excerpt from her diary, notice how Mary looked on the bright side of life:

A New Year and a New Covenant January 1, 1862 New Year's day.
And I live to see another year, I have had some trials last year, my two sons George and Willie left me for the war. They joined the army for twelve months, but the Lord has been with them, and gave them excellent health and every comfort, while many poor soldiers have sickened and died, my sons have been spared to enjoy good health . . . the Lord has been very good to me the past year, I have had good health, and all my children and servants have had good health, and I have enjoyed myself at times, had some refreshing seasons for the Lord. I will praise the Lord for his goodness to me and my family, I will now, on this new years day renew my covenant with God my Saviour. I give myself to him, and pray that I may spend this year to his honor and glory, and that I may live to be useful and happy!!⁵

True Christian joy does not come from outward circumstances, but from the peace and contentment we have in him. Paul did not allow adverse circumstances to rob him of the joy he had within. He drew his strength from the Lord and found his greatest joy in serving him. Are you unhappy with your circumstances? Maybe you need to look within.

I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances. I know what it is to be in need, and I know what it is to have plenty. I have learned the secret of being content in any and every situation, whether well fed or hungry, whether living in plenty or in want.

—PHILIPPIANS 4:11, 12

