

## God, Comforting as a Mother

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“As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you”—Isaiah 66:13.



It would appear from the Bible, that all the relations and affections of our humanity were really impressions of the Divine. All doubt, indeed, as to the correctness of this idea would seem to be removed by the inspired history of man's creation.

We read: “God created man *in his own image*, in the *image of God* created he him.” The human soul, cast as it were in this Divine mould, comes forth imprinted and enstamped with the likeness of God. There is the transfer of the Divine to the human. The creature starts into being, a reflection of its Creator. Marred by sin though this image is, yet not utterly effaced are the lines and traces of the sacred original. The temple is in ruin, but it is still a temple, and beauty lingers round it, and God reenters it. The splendor of the creature is spoiled, but it is still God's offspring, and he disowns not his child. Man is fallen, but God, looking down upon the spoiled and scattered parts of the ruined structure—like the strewn fragments of a broken mirror—beholds in each the dim and multiplied but real resemblance of himself. Trace each feature of this resemblance. Is it the parental relation? God is a *Father*. Is it the filial? Christ is a *Son*. Is it the conjugal? Our Maker is the *Husband* of his church, and the church is the Lamb's wife. And is not Christ described as a *Friend* and a *Brother*, and his church called by him his *sister*? Thus, then, would it appear that the different relations in which we stand each to the other, and the affections which these relations foster, have their counterpart in God;—copies and impressions of a Divine original.

But there is yet another relation still more tender and holy, which would seem to be equally a reflection of the Divine character; we allude to the *maternal*. God represents himself as clothed with the attributes of a *mother*! “As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you.” In all the similitudes which we have employed in the preceding pages, illustrative of the Christian’s consolation and support, is there any one that transcends, or that equals, this? Would it not seem that in adopting this impressive figure, in appropriating to himself this endearing relation, with which he would express the great depth of his love and the exquisite character of his comforts, God had surpassed himself? Has he before reached a point of tenderness like this? Could he have exceeded it? “As one whom his MOTHER comforteth, so will I comfort you.” Let us not obscure the beauty, or weaken the force of these words, by an extended exposition. A few thoughts will suffice.

God’s family is a sorrowing family. “I have chosen thee,” he says, “in the furnace of affliction.” “I will leave in the midst of thee a poor and an afflicted people.” The history of the church finds its fittest emblem in the burning yet unconsumed bush which Moses saw. Man is “born to sorrow;” but the believer is “*appointed* thereunto.” It would seem to be a condition inseparable from his high calling. If he is a “chosen vessel,” it is, as we have just seen, in the “furnace of affliction.” If he is an adopted child, “chastening” is the mark. If he is journeying to the heavenly kingdom, his path lies through “much tribulation.” If he is a follower of Jesus, it is to “go unto him without the camp, bearing his reproach.” But, if his sufferings abound, much more so do his consolations. To be comforted by God, and to be comforted as a mother comforts her child, may well reconcile us to any sorrow with which it may please our heavenly Father to invest us.

God comforts his sorrowful ones with the characteristic *love of a mother*. That love is proverbial. No line can fathom it, no eloquence can depict it, no poetry can paint it. Attempt, if you will, to impart brilliance to the diamond, or perfume to the rose, but attempt not to describe a mother’s love. Who created the relation, and who inspired its affection? That God who comforts his people with a love like hers. And what is a mother’s affection—fathomless and indescribable as it is—but

as a drop from the infinite ocean of God's love! Did ever a mother love her offspring as God loves his? Never! Did she ever peril her life for her child? She may. But God *sacrificed* his life for us. See the tenderness with which that mother alleviates the suffering, soothes the sorrow of her mourning one. So does God comfort his mourners. O there is a tenderness and a delicacy of feeling in God's comforts which distances all expression. There is no harsh reproof—no unkind upbraiding—no unveiling of the circumstances of our calamity to the curious and unfeeling eye—no heartless exposure of our case to an ungodly and censorious world; but with all the tender, delicate, and refined feeling of a mother, God, even our Father, comforts the sorrowful ones of his people. He comforts in all the varied and solitary griefs of their hearts. Ah! there may be secrets which we cannot confide even to a mother's love, sorrows which we cannot lay even upon a mother's heart, grief which cannot be reached even by a mother's tenderness; but God meets our case. To him, in prayer, we may uncover our entire hearts; to his confidence we may entrust our profoundest secrets; upon his love repose our most delicate sorrows; to his ear confess our deepest departures; before his eye spread out our greatest sins. "As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you."

God comforts the penitential sorrows of his backsliding children with a mother's *changeless* love. With our hearts 'bent upon backsliding,' how many, how aggravated, and how mournful are our departures from God! But does he disown and disinherit us for this? Nay, he still calls and receives us, and welcomes our return as children. "Turn, O backsliding *children*, saith the Lord." "Return, ye backsliding *children*, and I will heal your backslidings." "As one whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you." Inextinguishable, undecaying, and deathless is a mother's love. "It may be autumn, yea, winter, with the woman; but with the *mother*, as a mother, it is always spring." When has the door of her heart or her dwelling been closed and fastened against her wayward one? He may have quitted the roof that sheltered his early years, and, tearing himself from the influences and the attractions of home, have become a wanderer upon life's troubled sea; he may have made shipwreck of character, of fortune, and of happiness, and become an outcast

of society, with the stamp of infamy and outlaw branded upon his brow,—yet, should he in his far-wandering come to himself, and his soul be humbled within him, and his heart burst with penitential grief, and, thinking of his sin, his baseness and ingratitude, resolve to arise and go to his mother, and sue for forgiveness at her feet, think you that that mother could close her heart against her repentant child? Impossible! She would be the first, and, perhaps, the only one, who would extend to him a welcome, and proffer him a shelter. In the depth of her quenchless love, she would hail his return with gladness, forgetting all the bitterness of the past in the sweet joy of the present; and whilst other eyes might look coldly, and other hearts might be suspicious, and other doors might be closed and barred, the bosom which nursed him in infancy, and the home which protected his earlier years, would expand to receive back the poor, downcast, penitent wanderer. And see how she comforts! With what words of love she greets him! with what accents of tenderness she soothes him! with what gentleness she chases the tear from his eye, and smooths his rugged brow, and hastens to pour into his trembling heart the assurance of her free and full forgiveness. This is the figure to which God likens his love to his people. “As a man<sup>1</sup> whom his mother comforteth, so will I comfort you.” Acute is the penitential grief of that child which has strayed from its heavenly Father. Deep and bitter the sorrow when he comes to himself, resolves, and exclaims, “I will arise and go to my Father.” Many the tremblings and doubts as to his reception. “Will he receive back such a wanderer as I have been? Will he take me once more to his love, speak kindly to me again, restore to me the joys of his salvation, give me the blessed assurance of his forgiveness, and once more admit me with his children to his table?” He will, indeed, weeping penitent! Yet again, O listen yet again to his words, “As one whom *his mother* comforteth, so will I comfort you.” Is not this declaration well calculated to create the sweetest midnight harmony in the gloomy season of your contrition and grief? Surely it is. In the valley of your humiliation there is open to you a “door of hope,” and you may enter and “sing there as in the day of your youth, and as in the day when you came up out of the land of Egypt,” and in the first love of your espousals, gave your heart to Christ. God

will comfort your present sorrow by the tokens of his forgiving love. He invites, he calls, he beseeches you to return to him. He is on the watch for you, he advances to meet you, he stretches out his hand to welcome you, he waits to be gracious, he yearns to clasp his penitential, weeping Ephraim to his heart. "When he was yet a great way off, his father saw him, and had compassion, and ran, and fell on his neck, and kissed him." Will a mother's love live on, warm and changeless, amid all the long years of her child's rebellion, forgetfulness and ingratitude? Will she, when he returns, and gently knocks at her door, and trembling lifts the latch, and falls, weeping and confessing, upon the bosom he had pierced with so many keen sorrows, press him to a heart that never ceased to throb with an affection which no baseness could lessen, and which no dishonor could quench? And will God our Father, who inspired that mother's love, who gave to it all its tenderness and intensity, and who made it not to change, turn his back upon a poor, returning child, who in penitence and confession sought restoring, pardoning mercy at his feet? Impossible! utterly impossible! The love of God to his people is a changeless, quenchless, undying love. No backslidings can lessen it, no ingratitude can impair it, no forgetfulness can extinguish it. A mother *may* forget, yea, has often forgotten, her child; but God, *never!* "Can a woman forget her sucking child, that she should not have compassion on the son of her womb? Yea, she *may* forget, yet will I not forget thee." How touching, how impressive the figure! It is a woman,—that woman is a *mother*,—that mother is a *nursing* mother,—and still she *may* forget and abandon her little one: "yet will I not forget thee," says your God and Father. Touching, heart-melting, heart-winning truth! "Lord! we come unto thee in Jesus' name! We have sinned, we have gone astray like lost sheep, we have followed the devices of our own hearts, we have wandered after other lovers, we have wounded our peace, and have grieved thy Spirit: but, behold, we come unto thee, we fall down at thy feet, we dare not so much as look unto thee, we blush to lift up our faces,—receive us graciously, pardon us freely, so will we loathe ourselves, hate the sin thou dost pardon, and love and adore and serve the God that forgives and remembers it no more forever! As one whom his mother comforteth, *so* do thou comfort us!"

Who can supply a *mother's* place? There is one, and only one, who can, and who promises that he *will*; it is the God who removed that mother. "As one whom his *mother* comforteth, *SO WILL* I comfort you." "*Acquaint* now yourself with him, and be at peace." The fond, affectionate, confiding mother sleeps in the dust. The most beautiful light of thy home is extinguished. The sweetest voice that echoed through thy dwelling is silent. The kindest and brightest eye that beamed upon thee is closed in death. The author of thy being, the guide of thy youth, the confidant of thy bosom, the joy of thy heart is no more. *Now* let God enter and take her place.

All that that mother was—a refuge in every sorrow, an arbiter in every difficulty, a counsellor in every perplexity, a soother in every grief, the centre that seemed to unite and endear all the other sweet relations and associations of the domestic circle—God made her. She was but a dim reflection, an imperfect picture, a faint image of himself. All the loveliness, and all the grace, and all the wisdom, and all the sweet affection which she possessed and exemplified, was but an emanation of God. Make *him* your mother now. Take your secrets to his confidence, take your embarrassment to his wisdom, take your sorrows to his sympathy, take your temptation to his power, take your wants to his supply. O! acquaint yourself with him as invested with the holy character, and clothed with the endearing attributes of a *mother*. He will guide you, shield you, soothe you, provide for you, and comfort you, as that mother, upon whose picture—as it smiles mutely upon you from the wall—you gaze with swimming eyes, never could. In vain you breathe before it your complaints, exclaiming, "as one that mourneth for his mother" once so touchingly did,—

"O that those lips had language! Life has pass'd  
With me but roughly since I heard thee last.  
These lips are thine,—thy own sweet smile I see,  
The same that oft in childhood solaced me;  
Voice only fails, else how distinct they say,—  
'Grieve not, my child, chase all thy fears away!'"

Go and breathe your sorrows into God's heart, and he will comfort you, oh! with more than a mother's love. Blessed sorrow, if in the time of your bereavement, your grief, and your solitude, you are led to Jesus, making him your Saviour, your Friend, your Counsellor, and your Shield. Blessed loss, if it be compensated by a knowledge of God, if you find in him a Father now, to whom you will transfer your ardent affections, upon whom you will repose your bleeding heart and in whom you will trust, as you have been wont to trust in that mother,—

“Who has reached the shore,  
Where tempests never beat, nor billows roar.”

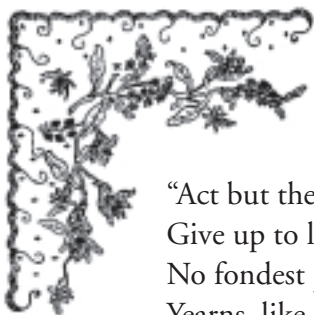
How sweet is the thought that Jesus once felt the throbbings of a mother's bosom. And with what filial affection did he commit that mother to the care of the beloved disciple in the darkest hour of his woe. Acquainted with your loss, sympathizing with your sorrow, compassionating your loneliness, in all respects capable of entering into the circumstances of your case, he invites you to repair to him for comfort, the tender sanctifying comfort, which not even a mother could pour into your heart. He can guide your youth, he can solace the cares of your riper years, he can strengthen and soothe the weakness and sorrow of declining age. But let your heart be true with him. Let faith be simple, childlike, unwavering. Cling to him as the infant clings to its mother. Look up to him as a child looks up to its parent. Love him, obey him, confide in him, serve him, live for him; and in all the unknown, untrod, unveiled future of your history, a voice shall gently whisper in your ear:—

“AS ONE WHOM HIS MOTHER COMFORTETH, SO WILL I COMFORT YOU.”

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<sup>1</sup> Thus it may be rendered from the original.





“Act but the infant’s part,  
 Give up to love thy willing heart;  
 No fondest parent’s melting breast  
 Yearns, like thy God’s, to make thee blest:  
 Taught its dear mother soon to know,  
 The tenderest babe its love can show;  
 Bid thy base servile fear retire,  
 This task no labor will require.

“The sovereign Father, good and kind,  
 Wants to behold his child resign’d;  
 Wants but thy yielded heart—no more—  
 With his large gifts of grace to store:  
 He to thy soul no anguish brings,  
 From thy own stubborn will it springs.  
 But crucify that cruel foe,  
 Nor pain, nor care, thy heart shall know.

“Shake from thy soul, o’erwhelmed, opprest,  
 Th’ encumbering load that galls thy rest,  
 That wastes thy strength in bondage vain;  
 With courage break the enthralling chain.  
 Let prayer exert its conquering power,  
 Cry in the tempted, trembling hour—  
 ‘My God, my Father, save thy son!’  
 ’Tis heard, and all thy fears are gone.”

—From the German of Martin Luther

