

Frances Ridley Havergal: The Overflowing Life

Adapted and paraphrased from *They Found The Secret*, by V. Raymond Edman

Advent Sunday, December 2, 1873, marked the crisis of the exchanged life for Frances Ridley Havergal. Miss Havergal is best known... by the continuing ministry of her devotional books, such as, *Kept for the Master's Use*, and by her poems which have been set to music: "Take My Life and Let It Be", "Who Is on the Lord's Side?"; "Lord, Speak to Me"; "True-Hearted, Whole-Hearted"; and "I Am Trusting Thee, Lord Jesus." This radiant servant of the Lord Jesus was not only a gifted poetess but was also a writer of music, and has left us a heritage of hymn tunes such as *Hermas* and *Onesimus*.

"Fannie," as she was called affectionately by her family and friends, was the youngest of six children of a Church of England clergyman. Both father and mother were earnest and devoted servants of the Lord Jesus, and brought up their children in the nurture and admonition of the Lord. Even as a child, Fannie was gifted in music and in the writing of excellent little rhymes. Reared in a godly home, **Miss Havergal was never under the illusion that the Christian heritage she enjoyed would suffice.** She knew, rather, that **she needed her own personal experience with the Savior.** Even as a child she was aware of the sinfulness of her own heart. She wrote in her autobiography, "I almost *enjoyed my naughtiness* in a savage kind of way. I utterly despaired of getting any better, except by being made a Christian."

At the age of thirteen she was "made a Christian." Deeply moved by the conversion experience of a fellow student at boarding school, and being carefully instructed by one of the teachers there, she committed her soul to the Savior. "... and earth and heaven seemed bright from that moment," she said.

As Miss Havergal came to maturity, and the beginning of her life's work in literature and music, ***there came a growing sense of her own inadequacy and of her need of the spiritual life that is "more abundant."*** In her autobiography she noted: "I had hoped that a kind of tableland had been reached in my journey, where I might walk consistently in the light, ...without the weary up-and-down succession of rock and hollow, crag and morass, stumbling and striving. I seemed, however, to be repeatedly drawn back into all the *old difficulties* of the pathway, with *many sin-made aggravations*. **I think the great root of all my trouble with sin and alienation from God is that I do not now make an unreserved surrender of myself to the Lord. Until this is done, I shall know no peace.** I am sure of it."

Later, **she lamented: "I wish I rejoiced more,** not only for my own sake, but if I may say so, for *His* sake. Surely I should praise Him more, by *both* lip and life. Mine has been such a shady Christian life! The Bible text, 'He led them forth by the right way' (Psa. 107:7) must somehow be true here, though I don't see how. I ought to make one exception that I *do* recognize: *I have learned a real sympathy with others walking in darkness*, ...and sometimes it has seemed to help *me* to help *them*."

Still later she wrote: "I love Him distinctly, ...positively. I even think I have loved Him *more* and *longer* than I thought, ...only I dared not admit it to myself. **Oh, that I loved Him more and more! How I abhor myself for having loved, ...for loving..., so little.**"

In dealing with His dear children, the Lord will often send a challenge to the needy, longing heart through some piece of writing, ...as John McCarthy's letter had been used by Him to open Hudson Taylor's eyes to discover the way of faith into the "exchanged life." **Just so, a small book with the title *All for Jesus* was instrumental in leading Miss Havergal to the crisis of the deeper life.**

All for Jesus came to her in the autumn of 1873. She carefully read it, and its contents fixed her attention on the Lord Jesus. **The little book clearly set forth the fullness of Christian experience and blessing,** ...the very thing Fannie had longed for so earnestly. She was indeed grateful for having loved the Lord Jesus for many years, ...and of having been delighted in His service..., but *her experience had not been up to the measure of full consecration*, ...nor had there been a *uniform brightness and continuous enjoyment* of His life.

After she had read and reread that little volume, she wrote to its author: "I do so long for deeper and fuller teaching in my own heart. *All for Jesus* has touched me very much... I know I love Jesus, and there are times when I feel such intensity of love toward Him that I do not have words to describe it. ...**So I want Jesus to speak to me, ...to say 'many things' to me..., so that I may speak for Him to others with real power.** It is not *knowing doctrine*, but *being with Him*, which will give this."

The Almighty does satisfy the longing soul, and He *does* fill it with goodness. Miss Havergal quickly found this to be true. In reply to a question by her sister, Maria, she testified quietly:

"Yes, it was on Advent Sunday, December 2nd, 1873, I first saw clearly the blessedness of *true consecration*. **I saw it as a flash of electric light, ...and what you see you can never un-see. There must be full surrender before there can be full blessedness. God admits you by the one into the other.** He Himself showed me all this most clearly. You know how singularly I have been withheld from attending all conventions and conferences. Human teaching, consequently, has had but little to do with this insight. First, **I was shown that 'the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin'** (1 Jn. 1:7). Then it was made plain to me that **He who had thus cleansed me also had the power to keep me clean.** Therefore **I just completely yielded myself to Him, and utterly trusted Him to keep me.'**

And what was the outflow of that appropriation of the life of the Lord Jesus brought about by her complete surrender to Him?

There was the constant experiencing of the fruit of the Spirit (Gal. 5:22,23).

There was *undiminished and unchanging love* for her Savior and for others.

There was the *joy that "lifted her whole life into sunshine."* She said that the joy she had previously experienced was "as pale as passing April gleams, compared with the fullness of summer glory."

There was *the peace of God that passes understanding* (Phil. 4:7), flowing onward, ever deepening and widening under the teaching of God the Holy Spirit.

Within a few weeks came a real test of the reality of that joy when she learned that her publisher in America had gone bankrupt in the panic of 1873. To a friend she could write: "I have just had such a blessing in the shape of what would have been *only two months ago* a really bitter blow to me; and *now* it is actual accession of joy, because I find that it does not even *touch* me! ...Two months ago this would have been a real trial for me, for I had built a good deal on my American prospects. Now, however, 'Thy will be done' is not a *sigh*, but a *song*! I think if it had been all my publishers *in England* that had been lost, present and prospective, ...*as well as* those in America that were suddenly gone..., *it would have been worth it*, for the joy it has been to *see* how my Lord is so faithful and true to *all* His promises to *keep my soul* at peace and in His joy."

Hers was now the faith that was unfailing and unfaltering. Frances Havergal witnessed to others by her *radiant life*, as well as by her word. "I never find that He fails to respond to trust," she said. "When He said, 'whatsoever', ...whether it is 'whatsoever' I truly need, or 'whatsoever He promised...', His answer is indeed 'whatsoever' in its fullness! And now I see that 'able' means *able*, and 'all' means *all*. ...I keep wondering every day what new lovingkindness is coming next! It is such a *glorious* life! And the really leaving EVERYTHING to Him is so inexpressibly sweet, ...and surely He *does* arrange our lives so much better than we could for ourselves, when we leave it all to Him."

Even in physical weakness and in pain she could say gladly: "How infinitely blessed it is to be entirely Christ's. To think that you and I are *never* to have another care or another fear, but that Jesus has undertaken simply *everything* for us! And isn't it *grand* to have the privilege of being His instruments? It does seem such loving condescension that He should use US."

With others she could share the confidence that "pain is no mystery when looked at in the light of God's holiness, and in the light of Calvary.... Pain, as to God's own children, is, truly and really, only blessing in disguise. It is but His chiseling, one of His graving tools, producing the likeness to Jesus for which we long. I never yet came across a suffering (*real*) Christian who could not *thank* Him for pain!"

Miss Havergal held a sound scriptural basis for the victorious life into which she had entered. To a friend she wrote: "I have long wanted to explain to you and others in writing (which is easier to me to be *clear* in, than in conversation, with its natural interruptions) what I see as to the subject which to me was undoubtedly the portal into a happy life. As to 'perfectionism' or 'sinlessness,' I have all along, and over and over again, said I never did, and do not, hold either. '**Sinlessness' belongs only to Christ now, and to our glorified state in heaven.** I believe it to be not merely an impossibility on earth, but an actual contradiction of our very being, which cannot be 'sinless' till the resurrection change has passed upon us. **But being kept from falling, ...kept from sins..., is quite another thing, and the Bible seems to teem with commands and promises about it.**"

The letter continues: "First, however, I would distinctly state, that **it is only as, and while, kept by the power of God Himself that we are not sinning against Him;** one instant of standing *alone* is certain fall! But (premising that) have we not been limiting the *cleansing power of the precious blood* when applied by the Holy

Spirit, and also the *keeping power of our God*? Have we not been limiting 1 John 1:7, by practically making it refer *only* to 'the remission of sins that are past,' instead of taking the grand simplicity of what it actually says, 'cleanses us from all sin?'

"'All' is *all*: and **just as we may trust Him to cleanse from the stain of *past sins*, so we may trust Him to cleanse from all *present defilement*, ...yes, *all*!** If not, *we take away from* this most precious promise. And, *by refusing to take it* in its fullness, *we lose the fullness* of its application and power. **Then, we *limit* God's power to 'keep'.** We look at *our frailty more than at His omnipotence*. Where is the line to be drawn, beyond which He is *not 'able'*? The very *keeping* implies total helplessness without it, and the very *cleansing* most distinctly implies defilement without it. **That one word 'cleanses' opened the door of a very *glory of hope and joy* to me.**

"I had never seen the force of the verb tense before," Miss Havergal joyfully explained, "a continual present, ...*always* a present tense, not a present which the next moment becomes a past. It *goes on* cleansing, ...and I have no words to tell how my heart rejoices in that truth. Not a *coming to be cleansed in the fountain only*, but a *remaining in the fountain*, so that it *may and can* go on cleansing continually.'

Because of such reality of the living Lord Jesus in her life, Frances Ridley Havergal continued to be a radiant, overflowing Christian. The glow of her testimony continues to reach Christian hearts everywhere. The glory and peace of the exchanged life is beautifully stated in her triumphant hymn:

Like a River Glorious

Like a river, glorious ...is God's perfect peace,
Over all victorious ...in its bright increase;
Perfect, yet it floweth ...fuller every day,
Perfect, yet it groweth ...deeper all the way.

Hidden in the hollow ...of His blessed hand,
Never foe can follow, ...never traitor stand;
Not a surge of worry, ...not a shade of care,
Not a blast of hurry ...touch the spirit there.

Every joy or trial ...falleth from above,
Traced upon our dial ...by the Sun of Love.
We may trust Him fully ...all for us to do;
They who trust Him wholly, ...find Him wholly true.

Observations from Frances Havergal's life:

Raised in a Christian home.

Became a Christian, herself, at age 13.

Several years later, she began to feel inadequacy, and a need for more abundance in her spiritual life.

She felt like she should have consistency in her spiritual life, but instead was experiencing ups and downs, ...striving and failure.

Saw that she needed to love the Lord more fully, to surrender herself unreservedly, ...but she did not know how.

God used a piece of writing, a book, to help prepare the groundwork for her crisis of faith.

A couple of months more of her longing, ...and *seeking*..., went by until God gave her a revelation of the truth.

She described her experience like seeing "a flash of electric light",

...and what she saw in that experience, she thought it would be impossible to "unsee".

What insights did she apparently receive?

Were these insights radically different truths than what she had heard before? ...or just "made alive" to her through her experience?

What changes happened in her life as a result of this new insight and new surrender?

God Hunt 4: God *Waits For Us* To Stop Trying To Live By Our Own Terms

"This is what the Lord God, the Holy One of Israel has said, 'In repentance and rest you shall be saved, in quietness and trust is your strength', but you would have none of it. ...Yet the Lord longs (waits) to be gracious to you; He rises to show you compassion. For the Lord is a God of justice. Blessed are those who wait for Him."

Isaiah 30:15,18

More verses on seeking God:

Isaiah 9:13 (read vss. 8-21 for context)

30:1-26

51:1 (read entire chapter)

54:11-17

55:1-9

58:1-3 (vss. 1-14)