

## The Everlasting Arms

**J.R. Miller:**

**"The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms!" Deuteronomy 33:27**

**"For everything that was written in the past was written to teach us, so that through endurance and the encouragement of the Scriptures we might have hope." Romans 15:4**

Scripture promises are for all ages. What God said to Moses was for him--but it is for us as well. The promises are like the stars--they shone down on Abraham, on David, on Jesus; but they shine down on us with the same light. Wherever we find a promise which God gave to any of His children, even thousands of years ago, we have a right to appropriate it to ourselves, just as if it were now spoken directly out of the heavens to us.

This is the true way to read the Bible--to let it speak always directly to us. Its words are like bubbling springs by life's wayside. For ages, Christian pilgrims have been drinking from them as they passed by. Today, you and I come weary and thirsty--and we stoop and scoop up the sweet water, as sweet to us as it was to those who first drank of it when the spring was opened. If we are God's children--every precious word in the Bible is for us.

For example, there is a word that was first spoken among the blessings with which Moses, the man of God, blessed the children of Israel. But it is present tense, "The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms!" This is true always for every believer.

The Bible is a book of love. The heart of God beats in all its chapters. So long as sorrow, suffering, weakness, and need are in the world--so long will the Bible have a welcome among men. In a thousand gentle ways, does it reveal to us the affectionateness and tenderness of God. What could be more sweet and winning--than the thought of the everlasting arms underneath God's child?

We live in a large and unfriendly world. It is full of dangers and trials. Circumstances not under our control would crush us--if we had to contend with them in our own strength; we cannot take care of ourselves. How comforting it is, then, to have such a promise as this--that we are held in the embrace of everlasting arms!

We are not fighting our own battles unaided. We are not alone, unsheltered, unprotected, in this great world of danger. We are kept kept by the power of God. God's omnipotence encircles us and enfolds us. The things that are too strong for us we need not fear--for almighty arms are encircling us! "Underneath are the everlasting arms." Our part, then, is simple trust. The picture suggested is that of a little child, held in the strong arms of a father who is able to withstand all dangers and to shelter his child from the same.

There is a special thought here for the young or weak believer. A sweet Messianic promise in Isaiah reads, "He shall gather the lambs with His arm, and carry them in His bosom." The lambs cannot walk all the long, rough way, when the flock is led out to find water or pasture. They sink down in the heat or on the steep hills. Does the shepherd then go on with his flock, and leave the fainting lambs to perish? No! he gathers them with his arms and carries them in his bosom!

Just so, with the Good Shepherd. One of the most beautiful things in all the Bible is the gentleness of God everywhere shown toward His children. In the old Jewish church they were early given to God, and the wings of the divine shelter were spread over them. The most minute rules were given for their instruction, that their minds might be filled with holy thoughts. In the New Testament, no picture is more beautiful than that of Jesus taking children in His arms and blessing them.

There is a special thought here also for the old. At life's two extremes we find weakness, defenselessness. Childhood, with its innocence and inexperience, cannot care for itself. Then old age, with its infirmities, its dimness of eye, its trembling limbs, cannot stand before the roughness and under the burdens of life. But there is a promise which says: "Even to your old age and gray hairs I am He, I am He who will sustain you. I have made you and I will carry you; I will sustain you and I will rescue you!" Isaiah 46:4. Aged Christians need not be afraid as their infirmities multiply, and as dangers thicken, for "Underneath are the everlasting arms!"

God comes to us first in our infancy, in our mothers, who bear us in their arms. All love is of God; mother-love is most like God's love, of all human loves. The old Jewish rabbis used to say, "God cannot be everywhere, and therefore He made mothers." A mother's arms are underneath her child in its infancy. Most of us know what mother-love is. Perhaps those who have lost it know best what it is, for while we have it we cannot see all its beauty; only when it is gone is all its preciousness revealed. Our mothers leave us after they have taught us in

their own life--a little of God's own tenderness--but God Himself remains, and His arms never unclasp.

After Horace Bushnell's death, they found, dimly pencilled on a sheet of paper, these words: "My mother's loving instinct was from God, and God was in her in love to me first, therefore; which love was deeper than hers and more protracted. Long years ago she vanished--but God stays by me still, embracing me in my grey hairs as tenderly and carefully as she did in my infancy, and giving to me, as my joy and the principal glory of my life, that He lets me know Him, and helps me, with real confidence, to call Him my Father."

This thought is very beautiful. Mother-love is God's love revealing itself first to the child in tender human ways which it can understand. It could not then be made to know God's love in any other way. If God should appear, His glory would terrify the child. By-and-by the mother vanishes--but the lesson has been learned; the love remains, revealed no longer in the human voice and touch and help--yet no less real, no less tender, and infinitely deeper and stronger and more lasting. The mother does her work for her child--when she has taught it the love of God. Then she goes away. What mother-love is to the infant heart--filling, satisfying; God's love is to the motherless old man who rests in the clasp of the everlasting arms.

In this world of peril, the place of the Christian is in the clasp of God's infinite love!

In one of the great floods of the West, when the wild waters spread over the valley, bearing trees and fences and crops and buildings in their floods, some men in a boat saw a baby's cradle floating amid the wreckage. Rowing to it, they found the baby dry and safe, and sleeping sweetly in its warm blankets. So, amid earth's perils and wrecks, the feeblest of God's little ones are kept, secure and unharmed, in the everlasting arms. "You will keep him in perfect peace whose mind is stayed on you."

There are some definite suggestions in the figure of God's embracing arm. What does an arm represent? One thought is protection. A father puts his arm about his child when it is in danger. God protects his children. Temptations beset us on every hand. Many people think of dying with dread, fearing to meet it. But life has far more perils than death! It is easy to die when one has truly lived for Christ; it is only entering into joy and blessedness. But it is hard to live. At every point there are perils. We need protection. Here we have it. "The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms."

There is an invisible protection. One morning the servant of the prophet arose and looked out of the window and saw Syrian soldiers encircling the town. "Alas, my master! how shall we do?" he cried in alarm. But the prophet answered calmly, "Fear not; for those who are with us--are more than those who are with them." The servant looked out again, and lo! the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire, round about Elisha. Inside the circle of soldiers--was a circle of heavenly protection. Whatever dangers beset the Christian, there is an unseen defense. "Underneath are the everlasting arms."

Another suggestion is affection. The father's arm about the child means love. The child is held in the bosom, near the heart. John lay on Christ's bosom. The shepherd gathers the lambs with his arms and carries them in his bosom. This picture of God embracing His children with His arm, tells of His love for them. It tells also of intimacy, closeness of relation. The bosom is the children's place.

There is yet a tenderer phase of the thought here, for it is especially in the time of danger or suffering, that the mother carries the child in her arms. She takes it up when it has fallen and hurt itself, and comforts it by holding it in her arms. When it is sick she bears it thus and presses it to her bosom.

This is a special privilege of love, therefore, for times of pain or suffering to be held in the arms--and tells of special sympathy and tenderness in our heavenly Father for His children when they are in pain or in trouble. This is one of the blessings of suffering--it gets us to the inner place of divine affection, nearest to the Father's heart. God draws us nearest--when we are in trouble or in pain!

The arm is also the symbol of strength. A mother's arm may be physically frail--but love makes it strong. The arm of God is strong. It is omnipotent. It supports the worlds! When that divine arm encircles one of His feeble children--all the power of the universe cannot tear it away!

We know what it is even in human friendship to have one on whose arm we can lean with confidence. There are some people whose mere presence gives us a sense of security. We trust them, in their quiet peace--there is strength which imparts something of itself to all who come near them. Every true human friend is more or less a strength to us. Yet the finest, securest human strength is only a little fragment of the divine strength. This is omnipotence. "Trust in the Lord always, for in the Lord Jehovah is everlasting strength!" Isaiah 26:4. Here is an

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arm that never can be broken, and out of its clasp we never can be torn!

Another thought concerning the everlasting arm is endurance. There might be protection, affection, and strength--and yet the blessings might not last. We have all these in human love--but human arms grow weary--even in love's embrace. They cannot long press the child to the bosom. Here is a man whose arm is paralyzed and hangs powerless by his side. No more can that arm wind itself about the feebleness which it has so long and with such gentleness embraced. But the arms of God are everlasting. They shall never grow weary. It is everlastingness, which is the highest blessedness of divine affection and care.

A young man stood by the coffin of his beloved wife, after only one short year of wedded happiness. The clasp of that love was very, very sweet; but, oh, how brief a time it lasted, and how desolate now was the life that had lost the precious companionship! A little baby, two weeks old, was left motherless. The mother clasped her baby to her bosom and drew her feeble arms about it in one long, loving embrace; but the child will nevermore have a mother's arms about it, for even God cannot twice give a mother. So pathetic is human life, with its broken affections, its little moments of loving, followed by separation, its winding of arms around the life--only to be torn away in an hour. But here is something that lasts, which knows no separation, which never unclasps. The arms of God are everlasting. Neither death nor life can separate. The mountains shall depart, crumble, vanish--but God's kindness shall never depart from His beloved child!

There is a very sacred thought in the word "underneath." A father tried to save his child in the waves, clasping his arms around the beloved form. But his arms were too weak, and the child slipped from them, sank away in the dark waters, and perished. But the arms of God are underneath His children, and none can sink out of His embrace! His arms are always 'underneath'.

The waves of sorrow are very deep--but still and forever underneath the deepest floods--are the everlasting arms. We cannot sink below them. If we lie down in sickness, the everlasting arms are underneath us. If human friendships are stripped off, and we stand alone in our bereavement, still we are not alone. He who changes not abides with us. Underneath are the everlasting arms. God remains, and God suffices.

Then, when death comes, and every earthly thing is gone from beneath us, and every hand unclasps from ours, and every face of love fades from our eyes, and we sink away into what seems darkness and the shadow of death--it will be only into the everlasting arms!

When Jesus was dying, He said, "Father, into your hands I commend my spirit." He found no darkness, no loneliness, no deep river--only the everlasting arms. That is what dying is to every true Christian: departing from earth's weariness and pain--to forever nest in the bosom of Christ!

We need to train ourselves to trust God unwaveringly. Yet it is here that so many are weak. They are not sure of their trust in Christ, and therefore they are easily alarmed. Trouble dismays them. Danger fills them with dread. Their peace is broken with small cares and trials. They have little zeal in Christian work. They are easily discouraged by difficulties and obstacles. Their religion is a matter of temperature, rising and falling like the mercury. They begin things--and drop them. Their praying is fitful and spasmodic. Their good resolves are like summer blossoms, which fall off and come to nothing when the first frost comes.

If our minds were stayed on Christ, we would have perfect peace. If we realized that the eternal God is our refuge, and that the everlasting arms are truly underneath us, our joy would not fluctuate as it does, nor our zeal be so fitful. The revival we need is a closer relation with Christ, a deeper repose in Him, a more trustful settling down upon Him and upon His atoning work. Then nothing could disturb our confidence, nothing could chill our ardor, nothing could hinder our consecration. Then in sorrow we would rejoice, in temptation we would be victorious, in all life we would be Christ-like and strong.