

Prayer of the Month • September 2011

Lord, teach us to understand that your Son died to save us not from suffering but from ourselves, not from injustice, far less from justice, but from being unjust. He died that we might live – but live as he lives, by dying as he died who died to himself.

George MacDonald, 1824–1905



We often seek comfort in religious faith and practice, and there's nothing wrong with that. But it can go too far, and we are particularly prone to think that God should save us from suffering. George MacDonald, in this prayer, sets against such desires for protection and help, the desire to live as Christ lives, and not to be content with the lesser ambition to live for ourselves with God's help. It is a bare and brave prayer that seeks to put us on track with being Christ-like – to be alive to Christ is to be dead to self.

George MacDonald was born on 10 December 1824, and educated at the University of Aberdeen, and Highbury College, London. He became a Congregational minister, but left the ministry to focus on his writing. He is best known for his fairy tales and fantasy novels, which show great imaginative power and Christian optimism, and have inspired other writers such as J. R. R. Tolkien and C. S. Lewis – Lewis regarded him as a 'master'. *Phantastes* (1853) and *Lilith* (1895) are regarded as classics of adult fantasy writing. G. K. Chesterton declared that MacDonald's *The Princess and the Goblin* (1872) had 'made a difference to my whole existence'. MacDonald also wrote several religious works, including *Unspoken Sermons* (1867, 1885, 1889) and *The Miracles of Our Lord* (1886). He died on 18 September 1905 at Ashted in Surrey, and his ashes were buried beside those of his wife, Louisa, at Bordighera, Liguria, Italy (where she had died in 1902).

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