

Finding the Way - Part 1

by J.R. Miller

J.R. Miller emphasizes the importance of seeking God's guidance in every aspect of life, trusting in His plan and providence.

Scripture: Psalm 143:8, Proverbs 3:5

Topics: "Divine Guidance", "Surrendering to God's Will"

Description

J.R. Miller emphasizes God's intimate guidance in our lives, comparing His precision in directing celestial bodies to His care for each individual. He reassures that God is deeply interested in our daily paths, urging us to seek divine direction through prayer, especially in times of uncertainty. Miller highlights that true guidance requires surrendering our will to God, trusting that His way, though sometimes difficult, leads to holiness and growth. He encourages believers to recognize that even in trials, God is present, shaping us for His purpose. Ultimately, Miller calls for a continuous prayerful attitude, reminding us that God's guidance is essential for every aspect of our lives.

Transcript

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J. R. Miller, 1904

Finding the Way

Does God condescend to show people the way through this world? He guides suns and planets in their orbits, so that they never wander from their course. He directs them so carefully, so accurately, that in all the vast universe, with its millions of worlds and systems of worlds, there is absolute precision in all their movements, with not deviation, age after age. No star is ever too fast or too slow. No planet ever leaves its orbit. The sun is never late in rising. God has marked out paths for the worlds, and He causes them to move in these paths.

But does He interest Himself in anything so small, as the individual lives of men? Or, if he does give direction to the careers of great men who carry important destinies in their hands and are sent on missions of far reaching responsibility, does He give thought to the daily paths of each one of the millions of His children? Does He show a little child the road through the tangles? Does He guide a wandering one home? There is no doubt about the teaching of the Bible on this subject. For example, we are told that

God is our Father. What are the qualities of fatherhood? Is there anything in the lives of children so small--that their father is not interested in it? Is God, then, less kind than human parents?

Think, too, of the interest of Christ in us, as proved by what He has done and suffered for us. He came to earth and endured our mortal life, that He might learn the way by experience.

To us the path of each day is always new--we have not passed this way before, and we cannot tell what any hour may bring to us. But He knows all the way--for He went over every inch of it. There is no human experience which Christ does not understand. No suffering can be ours--which He did not feel. No wrong can hurt us--but He was hurt far more sorely. Is the burden heavy? His burden was infinitely heavier, for He took our infirmities and bore our sicknesses, and bowed beneath the load of our sins. There is no phase of struggle, of suffering, of pain, of temptation, or of joy--with which He is unfamiliar. And knowing thus the way, from having experienced it for Himself, He is able to guide us in it.

We have a right, therefore, to make the prayer: "Show me the way I should go." Psalm 143:8. Our prayer will be answered, too. There will be a hand extended to guide us, to open the path for us, and to help us over the hard pinches of the road. God's way is a way of holiness--a pure, clean way. It is the road to heaven.

But do we really need God's guidance? Are we not wise enough to decide what course it is best for us to take? Can we not find our own path in this world? Some people think they can, and they disdain to turn even to God for direction. They think they can get along without Him, so they make no prayer for direction--but follow the light of their own wisdom. No wonder they never find the way home. There is a story of a tourist in the Alps who refused a guide. He said he could find the way himself. So he went out alone in the morning--but he never came back. Life in this world is far more perilous than mountain climbing.

There are particular times, also, when we need to make the prayer for direction, with special earnestness. There are times when every star seems to have gone out, and when clouds and darkness appear to have gathered about us, hiding every way mark, so that we cannot see any way out of the gloom and perplexity. We need then to have God's direction, or we shall perish. In the darkest hour of Christ's life, when He could not see even His Father's face, and cried out like one forsaken, He still kept His faith in God firm and strong. It was still, "My God, my God!" But while there are times when we need guidance in an unusual way, there is no day in all our brightest year, when we do not need it, when we dare to go forward one step without it. The day we do not seek and obtain God's leading, will be a day of disaster for us. The day we go forth without prayer for divine blessing, when we do not lay our hand in Christ's as we go out into the great world--is a day of peril for us. Indeed, we often need the divine guidance the most--when we think we do not need it at all.

On the other hand, it is often true that the experiences we dread, in which we seem to be left without help, when the darkness appears most dense about us and we cannot see the way, even a step, before us--are really fullest of God. We cry out then for deliverance, not knowing that it is God who is leading us into the shadows. It is when the sun goes down--that we see the stars. Ofttimes it is when the light of human love is quenched--that the face of Christ is first really revealed, or revealed as never before. We cry, "Show me the way," thinking that we have lost the way, and crying to be led back into it, when lo! The clouds part and we see Christ close beside us, and know that He has been beside us all the time.

God's way does not always lie in the sunshine; sometimes it runs into deep glooms. We are not always out of His way--when we find ourselves facing obstacles and difficulties. When we cannot see where we are going--we may be in the everlasting way, because God is guiding us. He leads us away many a time, away from the path which we would have taken.

When we pray for guidance, we must surrender our will to God. If we ask Him to guide us--we must yield our own preference, and accept His. For example, we think we should always be active in some kind of service for our Master. Then one day we are called into a sick room and have to stay there for a month. We think the time is lost, because in it we have done no work, helped no one, relieved no distress, spoken no word of cheer or comfort. What is the compensation for this loss of time in doing good, this missing of opportunities for serving others? We cannot tell--but we know at least that God's will does not call us always to activity; sometimes they serve best "who only stand and wait." We are in this world--to grow into the likeness of Christ. If then, we have been growing a little more patient, gentle, thoughtful, humble--if the peace of our hearts has become a little deeper, quieter, sweeter--our "rough" path is God's way for us.

Always when we pray to be guided we must take God's way wherever it may lead us; we must let God decide whether we shall work or rest. One writes: "No time of seeming inactivity is laid upon you by God without a just reason. It is God calling upon you to do His business by ripening in quiet, all your powers for some high sphere of activity which is about to be opened to you." We are doing God's work not only when we are pressing forward in eager haste to accomplish some achievement for Him--but quite as much when we are keeping still and allowing God to work in us, enriching and beautifying our lives.

The way of God which He would make us know--is always the way of His will. The one business of life is to learn to do that will. We say it lightly in our prayers, "Your will be done on earth, as it is in heaven." If our prayer is answered, our whole life will be drawn into the divine way. What effect, for example, will God's way have on our grudges, our unbrotherly feelings, our jealousies, our resentments, our selfishnesses? They must all come into tune with the law of love. So in all life. The way on which God guides us--is a way of holiness. It is an ever ascending way, for its terminal is heaven. It is a prayer, therefore, that we must make continually. We must always keep climbing upward. No matter how good you are today, you should be somewhat better tomorrow.

All of us know the way--better than we follow it. None of us are as good as our ideals. Knowing the way is not enough--we must walk in it. "If you know these things," said the Master, "Happy are you if you do them." We must remember, too, that the Divine guidance is not merely for the spiritual part of our life--for Sundays, for religious exercises--it is for the week-days as well, and for all the common paths. Our prayer is that the will of God may be done on earth as it is in heaven. We are to follow the laws of heaven in our earthly affairs, in our business, in our social life, in our friendships, in all of our conduct.

We need never doubt that God's way leads always to the best things, to the truest and to the most real good. Let no one ever think that the way of the Lord is a mistake, however disappointing to our hopes and schemes it may be. One day we shall know that every divine leading, whatever it may have cost us to follow it--is both wise and good. When we insist on our own way instead of God's, we are always making a mistake, the end of which will be sorrow and hurt.

Learning God's Will

We talk much about being led. If we are not led by one who knows the way--we can never get home, for we can never find the way ourselves. How are we led? How can we know what the divine leading is? We

cannot hear God speaking to us, nor can we see Him going before us to show us the way. How, then, can we learn what His will is for us? How can we have Him show us the way?

For one thing, we are quite sure that God desires to lead us. His guidance includes not only our daily steps--but also the shaping of our circumstances and affairs. We cannot be thankful enough that our lives are in God's hands, for we never could care for them ourselves.

There is no such thing as chance in this world. Every drop of water in the wild waves, in the most terrific storm, is controlled by God. In these days, with their wonderful advance in science, some good people are asking if there is any use in praying, for example, for the sick, for favorable weather, for safety of the ship that bears loved ones of theirs on the sea, or for the staying of the epidemic. It seems to them that all things are under fixed laws with which no prayer can interfere. How, then, can God lead each one of his children in any ways, except according to the fixed and unalterable laws of the universe? We need not try to answer this question--but we may say that God would not be God if He were in such bondage to the laws of His own world that He could not hear the cry of a child for help, and answer it, or if He could not open a way for you out of the greatest difficulties.

So we need not vex ourselves with the question, how God can lead us and direct our paths. We may leave that to Him, for He is infinitely greater than all things He has made. He is able to ward off dangers, that none of them can touch us. This is God's world, and God is our Father. His name is Love, which means that love is the essential quality of His character. Do you think since God's power is so great, and His law so unalterable, that His love has no liberty of action? Believe it not. God can do what His heart longs to do for us. He can lead us in the way in which He would have us go.

God's leading, however, does not remove the necessity for thought and effort on our part. He does not lead us by compulsion, without choice or exertion of our own. We have something to do with the working out of the will of God for ourselves. God is never to be left out of anything; He is always to be consulted. We pray, "Your will be done on earth as it is in heaven," but it is we who must do this will--God will not coerce us into doing it, nor will He do it for us. We are to take God's way instead of our own--but His will must work through our wills. Our wills are not to be crushed, broken, as sometimes we are told--they are to be merged in Christ's, voluntarily brought into accord with His will, so that we shall do gladly and heartily what He wills for us to do. "Our wills are ours--to make them Yours." God never does anything for us, that we can do for ourselves. He has given us brains, and He does not mean to think for us. He has given us judgment, and we are to decide matters for ourselves. He does not carry us along--He leads us through our own willingness, our obedience, our aspirations, our choices, our ventures of faith.

God's leading includes divine providence. There are many examples of this in the Bible--but the story of Joseph is one of the plainest and most remarkable. In his youth, Joseph was cruelly sinned against. The envy of his brothers tore him away from his home, and we see him carried off as a slave to a strange land. Why did not God interfere and prevent this crime? He could have done it, since he is God. Did He not love Joseph? Yes. Why, then, did he permit such terrible wrong to be done to this gentle boy? Just because He loved him.

But the writer of the story shows us what would have been the consequences of Joseph's escaping that night. A number of years later, when the famine came on, there would have been no storehouses filled with food, and Egypt would have been destroyed. The Hebrews in Canaan would have perished, there would have been no chosen family, the history of the ancient world would have been changed, and

civilization would have been set back centuries. So we see it was in wise, far-seeing love--that God did not interfere to save this Hebrew lad from the wickedness of his brothers. He used the evil of men to lead Joseph through all his hard training and discipline, to prepare him for the great work he was to do when he became a man.

If we would be led by God, we must submit to His providences, when they clearly interpret His will. Not always, however, are hindrances meant to hinder; often they are meant to be overcome, in order that in the overcoming we may grow strong. But when there are obstacles which cannot be removed, they are to be accepted as the waymarks of divine guidance. Whatever in our lot is inevitable, we must regard as indicative of God's will for us, showing us gates closed against us, and other gates opening out upon ways in which we must walk.

How we may interpret Providence and decide in all cases what the will of God for us is, are questions which many find it hard to answer. Some people have a habit of opening the Bible at random when they are trying to decide some important question of duty, and then taking the first word they come upon as the answer to their question. But this is not a sane or Scriptural way of getting divine guidance. Bible texts are not meant to be used as dice in playing games of chance.

If we would learn what God's will for us in life's common affairs is, we should always keep near to Christ, so near that we can speak to Him any moment, ask Him any question, and let our hand rest in His. He always finds some way of making His will known to those who thus trust Him and look to Him for direction.

Then if we would have divine guidance, we must be willing to accept it when it comes to us. We must be willing to be led, and must be ready to go wherever our Lord would have us go. Ofttimes the reason we do not get guidance, is because we are not willing to take God's way when we know it. Elizabeth Fry, at the age of sixty five, said that from the time her heart was touched by the divine Spirit, when she was seventeen, she had never awakened from sleep, in sickness or in health--but that her first waking thought was, how best she might serve her Lord. She sought always to be led by Him in paths of service of His own choosing. The outcome of such devotion to the divine will was a life full of beautiful ministry. The prisons of all the civilized world felt the impress of her noble life. A young girl who will thus seek the divine guidance, and promptly and unquestioningly accept it, cannot know to what beauty of character and what splendor of usefulness she will be led in the end.

We are to pray to be divinely led not only in large matters--but in the smallest--every hour, every moment. "Order my steps," is a prayer in one of the Psalms. How it would change all life for us if we would continually pray thus! You will have some hard thing to do tomorrow, some uncongenial and distasteful task. You will not want to do it. But it is God's will, and that makes it a radiant deed, like the holiest service of angels before God's throne. You will have to endure something hard or humiliating thing tomorrow--some unjust treatment, some unkindness. Your nature will revolt. "I cannot do that," you will say. But it is God's will that you should endure it, and endure it sweetly, patiently, songfully, and that changes it for you--it is a glorious thing to do God's will.

We will always find God's will for us--by always doing the next thing. No matter how small it is, it will take us a step forward in God's way. Doing His will in little things--will show us other steps to take, and thus will lead us on until all the way has been passed over. The Word of God is said to be a lamp unto our feet--not a great sun shining high in the heavens, illumining a hemisphere--but a little lantern that we may carry in our hand and hold so that its light shall fall on the bit of road on which we are walking. It will not light a

whole mile for us at a time--but it will always make the next step clear, and as we take that, the next one, and so on, until all the miles of our journey have been shown to us.

If only we will do the will of God, as it is made known to us, little by little, moment by moment, we shall be led step by step, and at last shall reach home.

One of the most remarkable incidents in the Gospels is that in which, to a poor woman's cries for help, Jesus answered not a word. He kept his face turned away, and seemed to treat the suppliant with cold indifference. Yet he was not indifferent. In His heart was warm compassion for her, and in the end He gave her far more than she had asked.

There are times when God seems to be silent to us. To our earnest supplications he answers not a word. We are told to ask and we shall receive, to seek and we shall find, to knock and it shall be opened unto us. Yet there comes times when, though we ask most imploringly, we seem not to receive; when, though we seek with intensest earnestness, we seem not to find; when, though we knock until our hands are bruised and bleeding, there seems to be no opening of the door. Sometimes the heavens appear to be brass above us as we cry. Is there anywhere an ear to hear, or a heart to feel sympathy with us in our need?

Nothing else is as solemn as the silence of God. It is a pathetic prayer in which a psalm writer pleads, "Be not silent to me; lest I become like those who go down into the pit." Anything from God--is better than that He is silent to us. It would be a sad, dreary, lonely world if the atheist's creed were true--that there is no God, that there is no ear to hear prayer, that no voice of answering love or comfort or help ever comes out of the heavens to us.

Do prayers of faith ever remain really unanswered? There are prayers which are answered, although we do not know it, thinking them still unanswered. The answer is not recognized when it comes; the blessing comes and is not perceived. This is true especially of many spiritual blessings which we seek. We ask for holiness, yet as the days pass it does not seem to us that we are growing in holiness. Yet, perhaps, all the while our spirit is imperceptibly, unconsciously imbibing more and more of the mind of Christ, and we are being changed into His image. We expect the answer in a certain way--in a manifestation which we cannot mistake, while it comes to us silently, as the dew comes upon the drooping flowers and the withering leaves. But, like the flowers and the leaves, our souls are refreshed and our life is renewed.

We put our cares into God's hands, with a prayer that He will free us from the load. But the cares do not seem to become any less. We think there has been no answer to our prayer. Yet all the while an unseen hand has been shaping, adjusting, disentangling the complex affairs of our life, and preparing a blessing for us out of them all. We are not conscious of it--but our prayer has been receiving continual answer. Like the tapestry weavers, we have not seen the unfolding of the pattern as we have wrought away in the darkness, and yet on the other side, where God's eye sees, it has been coming out in beauty. Some day we shall know that many prayers we now think unanswered, have really been most graciously answered.

There are prayers, however, which are not answered. For example, we ask God to lift away our burden. He hears our pleading and His heart is warm with love; yet, to do this would be to rob us of blessings which can come to us only through the bearing of the burden. There are mistaken notions current among good people about the way God helps. Some think that whenever they have a little trouble, a bit of hard path to walk over, a load to carry, a sorrow to meet, a trial of any kind--all they have to do is to call upon God and He will take away that which is hard, or prevent that which impedes, freeing them altogether from the trial. But this is not God's usual way. His purpose concerning us is not to make things easy for us--but

rather to make something of us. So when we ask Him to save us from our care, to take the struggle out of our life, to make the path mossy for our feet, to lift off the heavy load--He simply does not do it. It really would be most unkind and unloving in Him to do so. It would be giving us an easier path today--instead of a mountain vision tomorrow. Therefore, prayers of this kind go unanswered. We must carry the burden ourselves. We must climb the steep path to stand on the radiant peak. God want us to learn life's lessons, and to do this we must be left to work out the problems for ourselves.

There are rich blessings that we can get only through sorrow. It would be a short sighted love, therefore, which would heed our cries for deliverance and spare us from sorrow because we desired it, thus depriving us of blessings which God intends to send to us in the sorrow, and which can come to us in no other way.

A child may indolently shrink from the study, the regular hours, the routine, the tasks and drudgery and discipline of the school, and beg the parent to let him stay at home and have an easy time. But what would you think of the father who would weakly grant the child's request, releasing him from the tasks which irk him so? And is God less wise and kind than our human fathers? He will not answer prayers which ask that we may be freed from duty, from work, from struggle, since it is by these very things alone that we can grow. The only true answer to such prayers is the withholding of what we ask.

A man and his wife were talking together, and this scrap of their conversation was overheard: "I could make a good living," said the man, "yes, more than a good living, by continuing to paint the sort of trash I've been painting all summer."

"Yes," said the woman, looking at him proudly, "but I want my husband to live up to his best. I would live in a garret, on a crust, cheerfully, to help him do it."

That is the way God would have us live, so as to make the best of our life. When we pray for help to live easily and not up to our loftiest reaches of attainment and achievement, God will be silent to our request. He would not be our wise and loving Father if He treated such request differently.

There are selfish prayers, too, which go unanswered. "There are others." Human lives are tied up together in relations. It is not enough that any of us shall think only of himself and his own things. Thoughts of others must intertwine with thoughts for ourselves. Something which might be good for us, if we were the only person, it may not be wise to grant because it might not be for the comfort and good of others. It might work them hurt, or at least add to their burdens. It is possible to overlook this in our prayers, and to press our interests and desires to the harming of our neighbor. God's eye takes in all His children, and He plans for the truest and best good of each one of them, even the least. Our selfish prayers, which if granted, would work to the injury of others--He will not answer.

There is yet another class of prayer which appears to be unanswered, but whose answers are only delayed for wise reasons. Perhaps we are not able at the time to receive the things we ask for. A child in one of the lower grades in the school may go to a teacher of higher studies and ask to be taught this or that branch. The teacher may be willing to impart to the pupil this knowledge of higher things--but the pupil cannot receive it until he has gone through certain other studies to prepare himself for it. The higher music cannot be taught until the rudiments have been mastered. There are qualities for which we may pray--but which can be received only after certain discipline. A ripened character cannot be attained by a young Christian merely in answer to prayer--it can be reached only through long experience.

These are suggestions of what appear to be unanswered prayers. They may have been answered--but we did not recognize the things we sought when they came. Or they may be, indeed, unanswered, because to answer them would not have been kindness to us. Or the answers may have been delayed until our hearts were ready to receive them. We may always trust God with our prayers, even when the need seems to us most urgent. He is wiser than we, and His love for us never makes a mistake. He will do for us whatever is best, at the best time, and in the best way. Unanswered prayers are not unheard prayers. Every whisper of a child, every sigh of a sufferer in this world, goes up to God, and His heart is compassionate and loving, and what is best for us He will do.

Letting God In

The teaching of Christianity, is that God lives in us. On the day of Pentecost we are told that the Disciples of Christ were filled with the Holy Spirit. Every Christian may be, should be, a Spirit filled Christian. We say we are only dust--but we may receive the breath of God into our dust, and then our lives are glorified.

We speak of someone coming into another's life, bringing new impulse, new inspiration, new visions of beauty, and new ideals of character. Many a life is transformed by a rich human friendship. It means far more, however, to have God come into one's life, touching the springs of being with divinity. Yes that is what it is to be a Christian of the New Testament type--that is the privilege of everyone who believes in Christ. A Christian is not merely a man who belongs to a church, who accepts the doctrines of Christianity, and who lives a good life. He is a man in whom God lives.

The result of the Divine indwelling, is the renewal of the nature. "That which is born of the Spirit is spirit." A life that has been only earthly hitherto, grows into blessed sainthood when God enters into it. Someone writes of a man who left flowers blooming about his home which but for him would never have bloomed. The Spirit leaves heavenly flowers blooming which but for His abiding in us would never have bloomed. Paul tells us about these in a well known passage: "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, self control."

True religion is not a mere matter of emotion or devout feeling--it is a matter of life. The influence of the indwelling Spirit is not shown merely in holy raptures, in ecstatic experiences--but in most practical ways in every-day living. Jesus said very emphatically that not everyone who says, "Lord, Lord," is in the kingdom of heaven. Obedience, He said, is the test. He alone is in the heavenly kingdom who does the will of the Father. Nothing pleases our Master but obedience. He says very little about emotion--but a great deal about obeying. His friends are known not by their loud professions of love and ardor--but by their doing whatever He commands them to do.

A very little love for our neighbor wrought out in a bit of everyday kindness, is worth a great deal of talk about love which finds no expression in act. To be kind and charitable, to give bread to the hungry, to deny one's self a pleasure in order to help another over a hard place, to go far out of one's way to be of use to another who is in need, are better evidence of the indwelling of the Spirit than any amount of effervescent talk about consecration in a prayer meeting. To be honest in business on Monday, to be a good, tidy and hospitable housekeeper on Tuesday, to pay one's debts on Wednesday, to be patient in enduring wrong on Thursday, is better proof of the Spirit's indwelling than a whole hour's rapturous experience on Sunday, which bears no fruit in the life. If God is in us, the world will know it without being told of it--it will see it in character, in disposition, in act, in service of love, in the diffusion of grace and goodness.

It is not easy to let God into our lives. It is easier to yield to the spirit of the world than to the Divine Spirit. Yet if we knew what Christ could do with our poor lives, what beauty He could awaken in them, what blessings they would become if filled with His Spirit, what heavenly music they would give out if His hands struck their chords, we would welcome Him and surrender ourselves altogether to Him.

"We are but organs mute, until the Master touches the keys;

Harpers are we, silent harps that have hung on willow trees

Dumb until our heartstrings swell and break with a pulse divine."

It is not easy in this unspiritual world--to keep the heavenly Guest in our heart day after day, year after year, to the end of life. Too many open to Him on the Lord's Day, and then on Monday let in again the old worldly guests who drive out the Divine Spirit. We all know how easy it is to lose out of our hearts the gentle thoughts and holy desires and spiritual feelings which come to us in life's quiet, sacred moments. You sit down with your Bible in the pure, sweet morning, and as you read the Master's words it seems to you as if angels had come into your heart. You hear words of love spoken out of heaven in your ear. Desires kindled by the Spirit of God, desires for holy things, fill you. As you read and pray and meditate, it is as if you were sitting in the gate of heaven and hearing the songs of the holy beings gathered round God's throne.

But half an hour later, you must go out into the world, where a thousand other voices will break upon your ears--voices of temptation, voices pleasure, voices of care and fret, the calls of business of friendship, of emotion--not all holy voices, many of them calling you away from God. How will you carry with you all the day, through all these distractions and all these allurements, the holy thoughts, feelings, and desires of the moments of devotion in the morning?

It is not easy to maintain the Sabbath peace in the midst of the strifes and competitions of the weekday life. It is not easy to take the blissful raptures of the Holy Communion out into the chill air of the streets, or to keep the glowing emotions of the hour of sacred prayer amid the influences of the shop or the factory. The messengers of heaven are shy and easily driven away, and we need to take most sedulous care lest they fly away and leave us.

There are urgent warnings in the Scriptures against the danger of losing the Divine abiding. We are exhorted not to grieve the Holy Spirit. There are many ways of grieving a friend. We may do it by unkindness, by indifference, by lack of hospitality. Jesus was a frequent Guest in a home in Bethany, and found rest, comfort, and the refreshment of love there. It must have been a home of gentleness and peace, or He would not have entered its doors so often, nor found such gladness there. We cannot think of it as being such a refuge and place of rest to Him if its atmosphere had been one of bitterness and strife.

A little Welsh girl went into a worldly home as a servant. All her life she had been used to, in her own home, of godly ways--family prayers, grace at meals, reverence for God, love, kindness. In this home where she was employed all this was lacking. There was no prayer, no reverence, no love--instead there was profanity, bitterness, strife, heaven-daring sin. After one night the little maid told her mistress that she could not stay--she was afraid to stay where God was not a Guest. If we would keep the heavenly Guest in our heart, we must make a home of love there for Him, with an atmosphere kindly and congenial. In a prayerless, loveless heart the heavenly Guest will not stay.

We are exhorted also not to quench the Spirit. The figure is of a fire burning within us, which we are in danger of putting out. There are many things which tend to quench the flame of Divine love in a heart. Sin always does it. Anger, sensuality, pride, quench the holy flame. Worldliness in feeling and desire produce an atmosphere in which the Spirit of holiness cannot dwell. Fire must have air in which to burn, and only an atmosphere of love and humility will nourish this sacred flame.

It will be a sad thing if the fire of heaven burning in our hearts should be allowed to go out. A writer tells of a conservatory which he saw one morning: "One bitter night the gardener neglected the fire, and what havoc was wrought! The leaves were black, everything drooped, and the rare blossoms would bloom no more. For a few hours the fire was neglected, and the floral treasures were frostbitten beyond recovery." So will it be in any human life, when the heavenly fire is quenched or allowed to go out. All the beauty will be left in ruin.

We cannot guard our spiritual life too carefully. God is infinitely patient. He is not easily driven away. He loves unto the uttermost. But we can keep the Divine joy in our hearts--only by maintaining there always an atmosphere of joy. The angel of peace will abide only where he is welcomed by a son of peace within.

The Sympathy of Christ

"For we do not have a high priest who is unable to sympathize with our weaknesses." Hebrews 4:15

The gospel story of Christ, closes with the account of His ascension. He was received up into heaven and sat down at the right hand of God. Was that the end of His interest in this world? Does He think of us, up there in His glory? Does He know anything of us down here in our struggles, our toils, our cares, and our sorrows? Is He interested in our lives in this world--in our joys and griefs, in our hopes and fears?

The answer to these questions is that in heaven He is "touched with the feeling of our infirmities." He sympathizes with us in all the experiences of our lives. The word sympathy means suffering with. If two musical instruments, standing near each other, are tuned to the same key, and a performer plays on one of them, the chords of the other respond too, as if invisible fingers were playing the same music on the strings. When two friends are side by side, and one of them is passing through an experience of either joy or pain, the other shares the experience. So Christ in heaven sympathizes with his friends on the earth in their experiences, and is instantly touched with the feeling of their gladness and their grief.

We believe all this as a doctrine--but what meaning has it for us in our own lives? What is Christ in heaven to us in a personal, practical way? If the truth of the sympathy of Christ becomes real in our experience, it will bring great strength and inspiration to us. We are helped in times of weakness or suffering by the consciousness that human friends are thinking of us and sharing our trouble. Immeasurably greater is the help which it gives us to know that Christ in heaven is touched by our pain and feels with us.

If we were really conscious that Christ cares, fees with us, is actually interested in our large and small affairs, it would change the meaning of all life for us.

We have hints of the same truth in the Old Testament. For example, we read with reference to God's people: "In all their afflictions He was afflicted." But the New Testament teaching means far more than this, for Christ lived all the story of human life through to its close, for Himself, and, therefore, knows it by experience. When we are weary--it comforts us to remember that many times He was weary, too. When we are treated unfairly, unkindly, or even with bitter wrong--it strengthens us to know that He understands,

because He suffered in the same way. In our temptations--it helps us to endure to remember that He was "tempted in all points like as we are." In any path in which we have to walk--we can always find His footprints--He went over the same way before us, and, therefore, understands and sympathizes with us.

There are many experiences in which the sympathy of Christ, if it were realized, would give great comfort. There are people who are misunderstood. Indeed, there is no one whom others always fully understand. Even our truest friends oftentimes put wrong constructions upon what we do what we say. Little things separate lives--which ought to be kept close together. Very much sadness is caused by misunderstandings.

But Christ understands us perfectly. He knows all the truth about us. He knows our faults, and is patient with them, and does not chide us, nor cast us off because of them--but helps us to overcome them. When we are blamed unjustly, He understands and sympathizes with us and strengthens us to go on in patience. When we have done wrong, He knows--but is pitiful toward our weakness, and merciful toward our sin, if only we are striving ever to grow better. In every mood of our experience, He sympathizes with us.

There are sorrows in every life--many of which are inexplicable. There are those whose quietest days are full of struggles of which their closest friends can know nothing. It is very hard for some people to be godly, to resist temptation, to keep sweet under irritation and insult, to maintain purity of heart amid all the enticements of temptation. Nothing else gives such strength and help in hard experiences, as knowing of the unfailing sympathy of Christ.

The superintendent of an inebriate asylum said that he always had hope of even the worst alcoholic, if he knows that the man had someone at home who loved him and was praying for him; but that he had little hope of the permanent reform of any one for whom there was no wrestling love at home. If there is such help in human love and interest and prayer, how much more must there be in the confidence that Christ is sympathizing and interceding?

The story is told of a distinguished woman, that when she was a girl she was so homely that even her mother said to her one day: "My poor child, you are so ugly that no one will ever love you." The cruel words fell into the child's heart--but instead of making her bitter--they had just the opposite effect. She determined that if her face was homely--that she would make her life so beautiful that people would love her. She began to be kind to everybody, to be loving, thoughtful, gentle, and helpful. She never became handsome in features--but she did become the good angel of the community in which she lived. It was love in her which that transformed her life, and saved her from utter disheartenment.

There are those whose lives have been hurt in some way, and who seem doomed to carry their marring or wounding through all their days--but whom the love of Christ can yet restore to beauty and strength. There is no ruin which He cannot build up again into fair loveliness. There is no defeat which He cannot turn into victory. To know that He is touched, the Christ on His throne of glory, with the feeling of our infirmities, puts into the heart a new secret of joy which will transform the dreariest life into heavenly gladness.

The Only Bond

Every life has its secret, that which accounts for its trend, its choices, its toils, its achievements. When we see a mother with her sick child, forgetting herself, losing her rest, bending day and near over the bed where the little life is flickering, we know the secret of her devoted watching. It is love, which is at the heart of it all.

There is a story of a ship captain who sails away over the sea on long voyages. He is deeply interested in all his duties, and performs them with utmost faithfulness. He spends long nights on deck, studying the problems of the sea and guiding his ship through the perils. At last he reaches his destination, and in due time sails back again with his cargo from foreign lands, arriving through all the dangers of the long voyage. And then--what then? He goes on shore and hurries to a quiet cottage where a little child is living in a nurse's care, and gives into the child's hands all that he has earned. That child is the secret of all his toil and care, the inspiration of all his voyages. He has not talked of her, nor seemed to be thinking of her--but in reality she has been at the center of his heart all the while. If he had come back and found the cottage empty and only a little grave to lavish his love upon, he would have cared nothing for all the fruits of his success. Love is the secret.

It is worth our while to ask what the secret of our own life is. Of course, there are human loves and there are secondary motives--but what is the great central motive? Is there anything stronger than home and loved ones and earthly ambitions, which impel us to toil, to struggle, to sacrifice? Paul tells us the secret of his wonderful life in one little word--"The love of Christ constrains us!"

"Under an eastern sky,

Amid a rabble cry,

A Man went forth to die-

For me!

"Thorn crowned His blessed head,

Blood-stained His every tread,

Cross laden, on He sped-

For me!"

"The love of Christ constrains us." Commentators discuss the question whether this means Christ's love for us--or ours for Him. It must mean both. Christ's love for us comes first. What the sun is to the trees and grasses and flowers in the springtime, the love of Christ is to our love. If he did not love us, we never would love Him. Our love would sleep on and never awake--but for His kiss. When we begin to know that Christ loves us--we begin to love Him. "We love Him--because He first loved us."

Christ's love transforms. It repeats itself in our lives. A chaplain on a battlefield came to a man who was wounded, lying on the ground. "Would you like me to read you something from this book--the Bible?" he asked the soldier. "I'm so thirsty," replied the man; "I would rather have a drink of water." Quickly as he could the chaplain brought the water and held it to the parched lips. Then the soldier asked, "Could you put something under my head?" The chaplain took off his own light overcoat, rolled it, and put it gently under the soldier's head for a pillow. "Now," said the soldier, "if I had something over me! I am very cold." There was only one thing the chaplain could do. He took off his own coat and spread it over the soldier. The wounded man looked up into the face and said gratefully, "Thank you." Then after a moment's pause he said: "If there is anything in that book in your hand which makes a man do for another what you have done for me, please read it to me." Men are ready to hear us read the book which tells of the love of Christ for them--only when our lives interpret what the book says.

Recently a story appeared in one of the papers, entitled, "How a Man Coined His Heart." It was a poor artist. There had been in his life a sad story of love, true and deep on his part, yet seemingly unrequited, and even false, on the part of the other. The world had not known anything of it--he had kept his secret very close. But there came a call for a piece of work--a calendar--and the artist put his life's whole story into it--the springtime, with its beauty; the summer, with its bloom; the autumn, with its decaying hope; the winter, with its dreary desolation. He coined his heart into his picture and sold it to get bread for his hunger. Christ coined His heart into a great sacrifice of love, and purchased redemption for the world. The cross is the love of Christ, pouring out its gold. So we are to coin our hearts into lives of love and service, into deeds of kindness and helpfulness.

Nothing but the love of Christ in us will enable us to do this. A soldier may be without love for the commander or for the cause he serves, and may march and fight merely for the paltry money he receives. But the Christian must love his Master--or his life will count for nothing. There is a legend of an artist who had a marvelous red tint in his pictures. No other had learned the secret, and it died with him. After his death a red wound was discovered near his heart and the secret of the wonderful color in his paintings was revealed. It was his heart's blood that gave his work its inimitable tint. The old legend tells a deep spiritual truth. Only heart's blood will give value to what we do, will put the heavenly color into our work. What we do without love fades out. When it is the love of Christ that constrains us, our simplest, commonest acts have Divine beauty and blessing in them.

The love of Christ is the only bond which can bind lives together inseparably and forever. People talk of reunions in the other world. "I cannot bring her back again," said one beside his dead, "but I can go to her." Yet we need to remember that only those who are bound together here by a common love for Christ--shall find each other and know each other and be together in the other world.

Only those who have the love of Christ--have between them a bond of union which death cannot sever. The only tie which never shall be broken--is love for Christ. Those whom this sacred bond unites, never shall be separated. If this love is not in us, there is nothing in our lives which will endure; all else will perish.

The Master at Prayer

When General Gordon was with his army in Khartoum, it is said that there was an hour every day when a white handkerchief lay over his tent door. While that signal was there--no one, however high his rank, ever approached the tent. The most urgent business waited outside. Everyone knew that Gordon was at prayer that hour within the tent, and neither a man nor an officer came near until the handkerchief was lifted away.

There is always sacredness about prayer. We instantly withdraw if unawares we suddenly come upon one engaged in prayer. We are awed into reverence when we see anyone, however humble, bowing in prayer. But the sight of Christ at prayer touches us with still deeper awe. We uncover our heads, and take off our shoes, and stand afar off in reverent hush--while He bows before His Father and communes with Him. Yet no figure is more familiar in the Gospels than the Master at prayer.

It brings Christ very near to us--to see Him in this holy posture. We think of Him as the Son of God, as having in Himself all power, all blessing, all comfort, and all Divine fullness, and as not needing to ask His Father for anything. But when He became Man, He accepted all of our life. He lived as we must live. He was dependent on God, as we are, for help, for strength, for deliverance in temptation, for all blessing and

good. He prayed as we do, pleading earnestly as He taught us to do. When we think how completely and fully Jesus entered into all our life of trust and dependence, we get a vivid impression of His closeness to us. And if He, the Son of man, who knew no sin, who was also Son of God, needed to pray so continually; how can any of us, weak, sinful, needy, with imperiled lives, with empty lives, get along without prayer?

In a sense, Jesus was always at prayer. His communion with God was never interrupted for a moment. One of Paul's exhortations is, "Pray without ceasing." Our Lord fulfilled this ideal. He was not always on His knees. He passed most of His days in exhausting service. But in all His ministry of love, He never ceased to pray.

He was not always asking favors of His Father. That is the only kind of praying some people seem to know anything about. They pray only when they are in trouble, and want to be helped out of it. But that is a very small part of true prayer. We want to be with our friends as much as we can. Though we have no request to make of them, we like to talk with them of things in which they and we are mutually interested, or even to sit in silence without speech.

Some friends wanted to know how the holy Bengel prayed, and watched him at his devotions one night. He opened his New Testament and read slowly and silently, often pausing in meditation, or as if listening to the voice of gentle stillness. There was a glow in his features, and frequently he would look up as if he saw a face which his watcher could not see. Thus an hour passed. He had not once been on his knees, nor had he been heard to utter a word. Then as the clock struck the hour for his retiring he closed the book, saying only, "Dear Lord Jesus, we are on the same old terms." And went to his bed. That was truest prayer. That is what it is to pray without ceasing--to be always near enough to God to talk with Him, always to be drinking in His love even in our busiest hours.

But while Jesus prayed thus without ceasing, there were many occasions of special prayer in His life. Again and again He went apart from men--to be alone with God. He spent whole nights in communion beneath the silent stars.

"Cold mountains and the midnight air

Witnessed the fervor of Your prayer."

It will be interesting to notice some of the occasions on which Jesus prayed. The first of these was the time of His baptism. Whatever else His baptism meant; it was His consecration to the work of His Messiahship. He knew what it involved. He saw the cross yonder--but He voluntarily entered on His course of love and sacrifice. As He was being baptized He prayed, and then heaven was opened, and the Holy Spirit descended in a bodily form, as a dove, upon Him. His praying that hour showed His deep longing and desire for the Divine anointing to prepare Him for His great work.

This example of Jesus teaches us to seek Divine blessing as we begin our life work, also as we enter any new calling, as we accept any new responsibility. People sometimes forget that they need Divine anointing, for what they call secular work. They want God's Spirit to help them in their religious duties--but they do not suppose that they need heavenly anointing for a business life, or a professional life, or for the task work of their common days. Yet there is nothing we have to do, however unspiritual it may seem, in the doing of which we do not need the help of the Holy Spirit.

Another of the occasions on which Jesus prayed was before He chose His disciples. This choice was most important. These men were to be with Him as His close, constant companions, His personal friends. He would need their companionship, their sympathy, their love. Upon them would rest a grave responsibility after He was gone. He was to train them, so that they would be ready to carry on His work. They must be men capable of absolute devotion to His will, men who could endure persecution, men whom the Holy Spirit could use. It was of the greatest importance that no mistake should be made. So, before choosing them, Jesus spent the whole night in prayer.

A great deal of folly is committed in the world, by ignorance and foolish choices. It is so in choosing friends. We do not know what any such choice may mean to us, whether it may bring us joy or sorrow, whether it may put upon our life, touches of beauty--or of marring. If Jesus prayed all night before choosing His friends, young people setting out in life should very earnestly seek God's guidance before taking into their lives any new companionship.

But the lesson applies to all choices and decisions. We do not know what path to take in all the tangled network of ways. We do not know to what any new road may lead us. We chafe and fret when we are not allowed to have our own way. But really we have no wisdom to choose what is best for us. We are safe only when we are Divinely led.

We behold the Master at prayer again, and this time something very wonderful happens. One evening He climbed a high mountain to get away from earth's noises and confusions. He was setting out on His last journey to His cross, and sought strength for it. While He was praying, He was transfigured. The inference for us is that earnest prayer always transfigures.

And there are so many people who need transfiguring! Their faces are not bright. They lack joy. The peace of God is not revealed in them. They bear the marks of care, of fret, of anxiety, of discontent. They tell of defeat and disheartenment. Yet the love of Christ is meant to transfigure our lives. Paul gives us the secret, when he tells us to be anxious for nothing--but instead to take every troubling thing to God in prayer; and then adds that if we do this, the peace of God shall guard our hearts and our thoughts in Christ Jesus. The peace of God, then, makes shining faces. There is no reason why our dull faces should not shine. "As He was praying, the fashion of His countenance was altered, and His clothing became white and dazzling."

We see the Master at prayer again, this time in Gethsemane. It was here that He prepared for His cross. We should notice that His refuge in His exceeding sorrow was prayer, and that, as the sorrow deepened, the refuge still was prayer. "Being in an agony He prayed more earnestly." Prayer is the only refuge in sorrow. The lesson from the garden prayer, is that we should take all the hard things, the anguishes, the insufferable pains, the bitter griefs of our lives--to God in prayer. We may be sure, too, that God will answer. If He does not relieve us of the suffering, He will strengthen us so that we can keep it, and still go on trusting and singing.

No doubt, much of our Lord's Prayer was intercession. We have one or two glimpses of this interceding. He said to Peter in great sadness: "Simon, Simon, behold, Satan asked to have you--that he might sift you as wheat; but I made supplication for you, that your faith fail not." There is a wondrous revealing of our comfort in this for us, when we remember that as our Great High Priest He ever lives to make intercession for us. Another instance of intercession was on the cross, when He prayed, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do." Not His murderers only--but all men, were included in that prayer of redemption,

as the sacrificial blood began to flow.

That last prayer of Jesus was, "Father, into Your hands I commend My spirit." Thus His spirit went forth on the wings of prayer into His Father's bosom. So it shall be with us, His friends, when we come to the edge of the great mystery, and cannot see the way. Dying, for a Christian, is but a flying away from earth's passing things--to be with God forever.

The Master on the Beach

One of the most interesting of our Lord's appearances after His resurrection, was the one which took place beside the sea. The scene shows a fire burning on the beach, with fish broiling on the coals, and bread; then beside the fire, the Master.

The scene meant a great deal to the disciples. First of all, it had its cheer for them. We have lost much in our modern homes in giving up the old fashioned fireplace with its blazing logs, and even in losing the open grate. The fire on the hearth was a brightener of the home. It is only in a poetical way, that we can talk now about our hearthstones.

The fire burning on the sand that spring morning made the shore appear more attractive and hospitable to the tired fishermen. Then there was more than a fire; there were provisions--fish broiling, and bread. Had the Master Himself kindled the fire? At least it was His thought and love which provided the breakfast. Indeed, it was the presence of the Master Himself that gave to the scene its deepest meaning. Always it is the human element, which is the charm in any scene. There is a story of a picture that seemed to be almost perfect, and yet people did not stop to look at it long, and were not moved to enthusiastic admiration as they stood before it. It lacked something. The artist discovered what the lack was and taking his brush he painted a bit of human life on the canvas--a woman and a child--and now the picture had a resistless charm for everyone who saw it.

That lonely beach would have had a certain attraction for those discouraged fishermen that morning, even if they had seen nothing but the fire burning on it. But it was the human form standing beside the fire that gave the scene its chief attraction. Then when we remember who the man was, who stood in the dim gray of the morning and called to the fishermen, we need seek no further for the reasons why that morning hour was ever after so sacred in the memory of those men. They had found their Lord again.

The presence of Christ changes everything, wherever it is recognized. It changed everything for those men. The seas had never been so beautiful to their eyes before. The hills had never looked so glorious in their spring verdure. No morning had ever appeared in such radiant splendor as that morning. Their sorrow was changed into joy--and their loneliness into the blessedness of holiest companionship.

So always, when Christ comes into our lives, all things are made new. A letter received the other day illustrates this. The writer has been a Christian many years--faithful, trusting, helpful, and full of good works. But during the past three months there has been serious illness in her home--a beloved daughter has been lying in fever. In this experience the mother has learned as never before how real is the love of Christ in the lives of His friends. "No story could be told which would be more wonderful than the story of the goodness shown to me these months, nothing more nearly reaching the miraculous than the way Christ has sent comfort and blessing to me and to my sick child." Then she goes over the story, and it is wonderful indeed. At the moment of need the right comfort always came. A nurse was necessary--but could not be afforded. Then a message came from an old friend, not seen for years, and the nurse was

provided. Letters came every day with their sympathy and cheer, just when the mother's burden seemed too heavy for her to bear. Every memory of the suffering of these months is made bright with some thought of Christ's love which came at the right moment. Everything has been transfigured for this mother. She found the fire burning on the beach, with fish thereon and bread, and the Master standing by.

This scene on the beach had also its comfort for the disciples. For three years they had been with their Master in closest companionship. He had received them into most intimate fellowship. They had heard His teachings and experienced His friendship in its most sacred revealing. Some of us know what even a rich hearted, noble, strong, gentle, true human friend may be to us in the way of comfort and strength.

If a noble human friendship can mean so much to one who enjoys its blessings--what must the friendship of Christ have meant to the men who had enjoyed all that was tender and precious in it! But now this precious companionship was ended. In their bewilderment without His presence, the disciples had gone back to their old work. "I am going fishing," said Simon. "We also come with you," the others said. But how weary it must have seemed, this tiresome handling of boats and oars and ropes and nets, after those three years of exalted friendship with Christ! They had supposed that this sort of commonplace work would never be theirs again. But now it seemed all that was left for them to do. They were heroic in returning to the old tasks, dreary though they were. They took up the work that was at hand, dull though it was, and lo! There stood the Master by the fire, with comfort and blessing for them!

The time of the appearance of Jesus was most opportune. It was when the men were at their work. A little while before He had appeared to them in the upper room, when they were at prayer. We expect Christ to meet us when we assemble to worship Him. But here the appearance was when they were at their old occupation. Christ will meet us, not only at the Communion or at the mercy seat--He is quite as likely to manifest Himself to us in the dullest task work of the common days.

"So still, dear Lord, in every place

You stand by the toiling folk

With love and pity in Your face,

And give of Your help and grace

To those who meekly bear the yoke."

In every life there are tasks which are irksome. Young people sometimes think school work dull. There are faithful mothers who grow weary in the endless tasks of the household life. There are men who sometimes tire of the routine of the office, the store, the shop. There comes to all of us at times, the feeling that our work is not quite worthy of us. We have had a glimpse of life in some exalted experience. It may have been a companionship for a time with one above us in circumstances or in attainments, and now it irks us to come back again to the old plodding round, or to the old, plain, commonplace associations. After three years with Jesus, we can easily understand how distasteful to the disciples it was to return to the fisherman's life, among the crude, coarse and ungentle Galilean fishermen with whom they must associate.

A young woman spent ten months in a home of rare refinement and grace, with the best books and music and art and culture in the daily home life. Then she returned to her own lowly home, with its plain circumstances, its lack of art and music and books, and it's much uncongeniality--a home, too, that was

not always sweet in its fellowships. We can understand how hard it was for her to do this.

Sometimes this happens. There comes a reverse in fortune which changes all one's circumstances. The income is cut off perhaps by the death of the bread winner--and leisure, ease and elegance have to be exchanged for plain conditions, poverty, toil and bare rooms. It is not easy to leave the beautiful home and go to live in a tenement or in a narrow court. The experience tests character, and some people lose their courage and hope in the testing. Some, however, meet it nobly, because they have Christ. A man thinks he is settled for life in a condition of comfort and elegance; that is his prosperity is sure and cannot be broken. Then suddenly all his dreams vanish. He loses all he has. His first thought is, "How can I go back to the bare circumstances, the hard tasks, the dull drudgery, the long hours, the grinding routine under an exacting master?"

Some such feelings were in the minds of the disciples that morning when they saw the fire burning on the beach. They had taken up their old occupation as a duty, and there was the Master waiting to greet them. So it will always be with those who bravely accept changed conditions and nobly take up the work which lies nearest, though it be hard and distasteful.

Another suggestion from this scene, is that Christ helps His friends in their common task work. The disciples were sorely discouraged. They had been dragging their nets all night and had nothing to show for their toil. Morning began to dawn, and lifting up their eyes, they saw a fire burning on the beach, and their Master standing beside it. At once He showed His sympathy with them. Knowing their disheartenment, he called to the, "Children, have you anything to eat?" He is always trying to cheer us and make us brave and strong. Then a moment later he told them where to cast their net, and they drew it full.

We must notice that it was their secular work, in which Jesus helped these men. We expect Him to help us in our praying, our religious duties, our church work--but here we have Him helping at a piece of common task work. Christ has a deep interest in our worldly affairs and occupations, in our toil and burden bearing. Somehow, many good people expect no Divine interest and help in their week-day work. But here we see the Master helping his friends at their fishing. This suggests to us how earthly success depends on the Master's direction. We may ask Him to show us where to drop our nets. Many of us get disheartened when things do not seem to go well. Our business is not as profitable as we could wish. Bur

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