

Finding the Way - Part 2

by J.R. Miller

The sermon emphasizes the importance of keeping ourselves in the love of God and having an abundant spiritual life, which is characterized by patience, gentleness, and transformation.

Scripture: Psalm 18:35, Matthew 5:5, John 10:10, Romans 15:2, 2 Corinthians 12:9, Philippians 4:13, Colossians 3:23-24, James 1:2-4, 1 Peter 2:21, 1 John 4:16

Topics: "Abundant Life", "God's Love"

Description

J.R. Miller emphasizes the importance of remaining in the love of God, which is a source of strength and transformation for believers. He illustrates how God's infinite love can uplift and empower us, enabling us to live abundantly and serve others selflessly. Miller encourages Christians to embrace their unique callings and to respond to life's challenges with faith and obedience, echoing the sentiment that true fulfillment comes from loving and serving others as Christ did. He reminds us that even in suffering, there is a divine purpose that can lead to growth and blessing.

Transcript

Finding the Way

J. R. Miller, 1904

In the Love of God

A scriptural counsel bids us to "keep ourselves in the love of God." This does not mean that we should keep ourselves loving God. Of course, we should always love God. He should ever have the first place in our affection. Not to love God, is to fail in our first and holiest duty, to cut ourselves off from the source of all blessing, and to rob our lives of the best good.

Yet that is not what is meant in the exhortation to keep ourselves in the love of God. We all know something of the experience of discouragement which oftentimes comes, when the duty of loving God is pressed upon us. Our love seems so feeble, so unsatisfactory, and so much less intense than it should be, and so fitful and changeable, that it does not comfort us to think of it. It is well, therefore, that we are not asked to measure our faith, by the degree of our love of God. If this were the index, our heart's joy would be sadly variable. It is well that we have for our comfort something better than our poor, fitful love for God.

"Our love so faint, so cold to You,

And Yours to us so great."

We are taught to keep ourselves in God's love, in its blessed warmth, believing in it, trusting in it, letting it flood our lives.

The love of God is infinite. It is infinite in its tenderness. Human love is easily wearied. The Divine love is inexhaustible in its patience and gentleness. Looking back over his past life, with all its follies, failures, and sins, and remembering the goodness of God which never had given him up--but which had brought him to honor and power, David, in his old age, gave the secret of it all in the words, "your gentleness has made me great." Psalm 18:35. None of us know how much we owe to God's gentleness.

A writer tells the story of a boy who at the age of eight was regarded as being of feeble mind, hopelessly imbecile, the result of some illness in infancy. The boy's father was widely known as an educator. Inspired by his deep love for his child, he took personal charge of his training, devoting himself to it most assiduously. If the boy had been sent to ordinary schools, he would probably never have been anything but an imbecile. As it was, however, he became bright and talented, passed with honor through one of the great universities, and became a man of ability and influence. The father's gentleness made him great. His genius as a teacher, inspired by his strong love for his child, took the poor, stunted life, and by patience developed its latent possibilities into beauty and noble strength.

This is what God's wonderful love does with us. What would we have been--but for the Divine care of us? As the warm sunshine falling upon the bare, dried, briery bush--unsightly and apparently useless, woos out leaves and buds and marvelous roses, so the warm love of God, falling upon our poor, sin-filled lives, with only death before them awakens in them heavenly yearnings and longings and aspiration, and leads them out and glorifies them.

There is wonderful inspiration in the knowledge and consciousness that God loves us. A newsboy was in the habit of running after a gentleman on the ferry boat and brushing his coat with affectionate fondness. One day the gentleman asked him, "Why are you so careful with me every morning?" The boy answered, "Because once, when you bought a paper, you said, 'My child!' No one ever called me his child before. That's the reason. I love you for saying that to me." It was the first love the boy had found in this world, and it was like heaven to him. It is a blessed moment to us when we first realize that God is our Father, and calls us His own children. It fills us with unspeakable joy. It brings the love of God about us in floods. It lifts us up into heaven in our experience.

If we keep ourselves in the love of God, the love of God will enter into us and fill us. We seem to have now but a small measure of this Divine love in us. We are unloving in our own lives. We chafe easily when others irritate us. We are readily vexed and offended and hold grudges and resentments. If God were like us, what would become of us? If He were as unforbearing, unforgiving, and uncharitable as we are--if He had no more mercy on us, than we have on those who unintentionally or intentionally hurt us--what would become of us? But if we keep ourselves in the love of God, all this is changed. The love in us transforms us into its own spirit. If a bar of iron lies in the fire for a time, it becomes red hot--the fire enters into the iron and transfigures it. A lump of clay lying on a rose becomes fragrant--the rose's sweetness enters into it. A grain of musk in a bureau drawer fills all the garments in the drawer with its perfume. If we keep ourselves in the love of God, in the atmosphere of that love, our whole being becomes saturated with it until we live as God lives.

So will it be with all who truly keep themselves in the love of God. Their lives will be transformed into the grace and beauty of Christ, and the weary ones who see them and know them will have new faith in God and new love for men.

The love of God is a wonderful refuge to those who hide away in it. A favorite picture in the Old Testament is the hiding of the troubled or hunted life, under the wings of the Almighty. Paul has a great word about the Christian's life being hid with Christ in God. This is indeed a marvelous hiding--in the heart of Christ, and then in this sacred enfolding, carried back into the infinite depths of deity. Those who flee to the love of God for refuge, are safe eternally. Neither height nor depth, nor angel nor principalities nor powers, nor things present nor things to come--can separate them from the love of God which is in Christ Jesus our Lord.

In this refuge, the world's harm never can reach us. It was in this Divine keeping that Christ Himself was sheltered that night on the sea when He slept on the boat, and the wild storm and the mad sweep of the waves did not disturb Him. He was wrapped in the folds of the same love in all the troubled hours of His trial and crucifixion. He spoke of His peace--nothing ever broke the quiet of the calm of His spirit. Then He promises to give the same peace, His own peace, to all who believe on Him. "My peace I give unto you." "In Me you shall have peace." This is the blessing of those who keep themselves in the love of God.

The Abundant Life

The Divine ideal for life is health, not sickness; enthusiasm, not languor; branches bending with fruit, not covered only with leaves. Christ wants us to have abundant spiritual life. He is infinitely patient with weakness--but He would have us strong. He accepts the smallest service anyone may render--but He desires us to serve Him with our whole heart. The weakest faith has power and gets blessing from Him--but He is best pleased with the faith which triumphs over all difficulties and accomplishes impossibilities. He does not despise the smoking flax, with merely a spark remaining--He will nourish it until it glows in a hot flame; but He wishes us to be burning and shining lights. Even a little measure of love pleases Him--but He longs for love which fills all the being. The spiritual life begins as a tiny spring of water bubbling up in our hearts--but the Master desires it to grow until it becomes rivers of water. He came that His followers might have life--and might have it abundantly.

The abundant life need not be a showy and conspicuous one, nor one which makes much noise in the world. Some people suppose that they are living to a worthy purpose, only when they are filling a prominent and conspicuous place among men, doing work which draws all eyes to it. They think they are of no use--if they are not making a stir in the world. But there are some whose voices are heard widely in the community where they dwell--and yet have little in them which pleases God. They are "rich in external religion--but poor in inward experience." Or one may have an abundant spiritual life, and yet move among men so quietly as almost to be unheard and unknown. It was of our Lord Himself that it was written in an ancient prophecy- "He shall not strive, nor cry aloud; neither shall any one hear His voice in the streets."

No other man ever had such fullness and abundance of life as Christ Himself had, and yet no other ever lived and wrought so quietly. Noise is not power. The real power of life is in its influence, in its force of character, in its personality. Many of those who are fullest of Christ, are least known among men. Humility is one of the divinest of graces. One asked Augustine what he regarded as the first of all Christian virtues. He answered, "Humility." "The second?" He answered, "Humility." And the third?" "Humility." Our Lord put the same quality first in His Beatitudes--"Blessed are the poor in spirit." It is the lowly ones of earth, who

live nearest to the heart of Christ and have most of His Spirit in them.

The abundant life need not be known by its large monetary gifts. The tendency is to measure every man's value to the world, by his charities. No doubt money has its value. Those who give to education, to religion, to philanthropy, if their gifts are wisely bestowed, greatly bless the world. Nothing should be said to chill the ardor of those who devote their money to worthy causes. Yet money never is the best gift which a man may bestow upon his fellows.

There is a story of a famishing pilgrim in the desert who found a sack which he thought contained food. When he had eagerly torn it open it had in it a great treasure of pearls--some man's whole fortune dropped in the sands. But he flung it from him in anguish. It was food that he needed--and the bag of pearls was only a bitter mockery to his hunger. There are great human needs which money has no power to satisfy--but to which a true heart's gentle love will be the very bread of God. There are sorrows which money cannot soothe--but which a word of loving comfort will change into songs.

So far as we know, Jesus never gave money, and yet the world has never known another such a lavish giver as He was. Imagine Him going about with His hands full of coins and dispensing them among the poor, the lame, the blind, the sick--money, and nothing else. What a poor, paltry service His would then have been in comparison with the wonderful and gracious ministry of kindness and love which He wrought!

The abundant life may not have money to give, and yet it may fill a whole community with blessings. It may go out with sympathy, with comfort, with inspirations of cheer and hope, and may make countless hearts braver and stronger. We do not know the value of the ministry, the influence upon others--of a strong, pure, peaceful, victorious face. A Hindu woman met on the street a missionary who could not speak her language and said not a word to her. He only looked into her face and pointed upward. She hastened home and said that she had seen an angel of heaven. The glory of God shone on the missionary's countenance. We do not know when the joy and the love in our faces may put new hope into fainting hearts, and make men able to win the victory over depression or despondency, or over a great temptation.

The secret of abundant helpfulness--is found in the desire to be a help, a blessing, to all we meet. One wrote to a bereft mother of her little one who had gone to heaven: "Gratia was in our home only once when but five years of age, and yet the influence of her brief stay has been filling every day since in all these three years, especially in the memory of one little sentence which was continually on the child's lips wherever she went--Can I help you?" We begin to be like Christ only when we begin to wish to be helpful. Where this desire is ever dominant, the life is an unceasing blessing. Rivers of water are pouring out from it continually to bless the world.

That is what might be the ministry of everyone of us to others, to all who turn to us with their needs, their loneliness, their heart hungers, their sorrows. We should always have bread in our hands to give to those who are hungry, and cheer for those who come to us fainting and disheartened. Life is but another way of spelling love. It is more love we need--when we cry out for the abundant life. Nothing but love will answer the great human needs about us. Nothing else will make people happier and better. The abundant life Christ came to give--is simply fullness of love in the heart, pulsing out in all the veins.

How can we have this abundance of life? Most of us are conscious of the poverty and thinness of our spiritual life. We are not strong--we faint easily under our burdens and in our struggles. We are not living victoriously--we are defeated continually, and overcome by everything which assails us--by the smallest

antagonism and opposition. We are not perennial fountains of love, sending out streams of the water of life for the refreshing and the renewing of the dreary places about us. At the best--the streams of kindness and beneficence flow in our lives only intermittently. We have not much to give to the needy, hungry world which looks to us for cheer and strength. Men ask bread of us, and all we have to give them is a stone. They come expecting fruit, and find nothing but leaves. We are not so full of Christ--that those who touch the hem of our garments feel the thrill of life in them and are healed and are made happier and better. Our spirits are not so charged with the love of God--that our shadow, as we pass along the way, heals those on whom it falls. Our hearts are not so overflowing with a passion for being of use, that we involuntarily, unconsciously, impart to everyone we meet--some helpfulness, some comfort, some inspiration, and some good.

Evidently it is more of the life of Christ in us, that we need to give us richness of character, influence over others, and the power of helpfulness, which our Master desires to find in us. We may have many other things which are desirable and pleasant--we may have money or gifts; or places of honor and power--our hands may be full also of tasks. But lacking this fullness of life, our hearts are really empty. There is but little of God, of Christ, of heaven, in us. We have nothing to give others that would truly enrich them. Our brains may be teeming with plans and projects and dreams of success--but of spiritual life our veins are scant. It is life we need--life, more life.

Our deepest longing, therefore, and our most earnest prayer should be for greater fullness of spiritual life. We need it to measure up to our Master's ideal and purpose for us. We need it, too, to enable us to overcome the world. Our strength is soon exhausted, our lamps soon burn out. The good in us is soon overpowered by the evil about us. We need more of the joy of Christ in us--that we may be able to master the sorrow which flows in upon us from the great world. We need more of the love of Christ--that we may keep our hearts sweet and gracious amid all which makes it hard to be gracious, loving and kind. We need the fullness of the Divine Spirit that we may have something worth while to give to those who turn to us with their emptiness, their hunger, their sorrow.

We Are Able

When Jesus asked His two ambitious disciples if they were able to drink the cup He was about to drink, and to be baptized with the baptism with which He was baptized, they said promptly, "We are able." Their heroic answer furnishes a noble motto for every phase of life. Whatever call comes to us, whether it be to sorrow or to joy, we should say in quiet confidence, "I am able."

This is a good motto for life in general. To many people shrink from anything which is hard. They want only easy tasks. They fear to grapple with difficulties. They run away from hard battles. They attempt nothing which they know they cannot do easily. They never grow into strength, for only in attempting hard things can one gain the ability to do things noble and beautiful. The habit of giving up easily, is a fatal one. It weakens the will, paralyzes the energy, and stunts the growth of the life. What a man thinks he cannot do--he cannot do; but what he thinks he can do--he can do. The true man is he who can do things which are impossible--anybody can do possible things.

Our answer to every call of duty should be, "I am able." Whatever we ought to do--we can do. "I cannot" is a stunting, dwarfing word. Besides, it is a cowardly word. When we say it, we do not know what we are missing. We allow magnificent possibilities to pass by and pass out of our reach, because we think we cannot achieve them.

The poet's picture is true of too many. The days come with great gifts in their hands--kingdoms, stars, sky, and diadems; we take a few herbs and apples, and let the messengers move on and vanish, still holding in their hands the splendid gifts which might have been ours. Many go through life missing countless opportunities for noble deeds and worthy achievements, only answering to their call, "I cannot."

"I am able" is the only fit reply to make to every command and requirement of Christ. James and John did not know what they were saying--but they faltered not. Their answer showed courage, the courage of the soldier. Soldiers never say "I cannot." They know only to obey. The answer of these men also implied love for their Master. They were ready to suffer anything for His sake. What it would cost them to stand close to Him they did not know--but whatever the cost would be, they were ready to pay it. It was also the answer of faith. They knew that Jesus was the Messiah. What Messiahship meant, they did not know. They had indeed most confused ideas upon the subject. Yet they believed in Him. There always are those who have their difficulties with Christian doctrine. They cannot understand the teachings concerning the person and work of Christ. Yet they may cling to Him and follow Him ignorantly, loyal to the uttermost, as James and John did. Some day all will become clear.

"I am able" is always the motto for Christian faith. Faith deals with the unseen and invisible. We never know what we are engaging to do--when we pledge ourselves to follow Christ unto the end. When Abraham was called, he went out, not knowing where he went. In every life there are experiences of darkness. When we come up to the edge of things we dread, the Master asks, "Are you able to drink My cup?" That is, "Are you able to follow Me through this trial, this sorrow, this mystery of pain, this great sacrifice?" We must remember that the richest blessings of grace, lie beyond experiences of pain. The question of the measure of blessing and good we are to receive, is oftentimes another way of putting the question, whether we can pay the price or not. "Can you drink the cup which I am about to drink?" If we cannot, the blessing is beyond our reach. If these two men had said, "No; we are not able to drink the cup with You," what would they have missed? There are many who do miss life's highest and best blessings, because they cannot accept the condition. It should help our faith and courage in time of sore questioning, to remember that it is the Master's cup we are to drink, and that we are to drink it not alone--but with Him. Surely we can drink any cup with Him.

"I am able" is the motto also for service. Christian life is a continual call to heroic deeds. It is not easy to be the kind of Christians which Christ wants us to be. We can make life easy for ourselves if we will--but this will not please Christ. The two disciples wanted first places, and first places are never easy to fill. Jesus showed them that in His kingdom--rank meant service. "He who would be first among you--must be servant of all." That is what it is to be a Christian. The mission of the Church is to bless men, to lift up the fallen, to support the tempted, to relieve the distressed, to be a friend to the weary, the desolate and the lonely. "Are you able?" There is no other way to the high places.

There is no other way to become a true minister of Christ. Four years in a college and three years in a theological seminary, will make no young man a minister. A Presbytery may license and ordain him to preach the Gospel after he has finished his course--but that will not make him a minister. Nothing will make any one a minister but drinking Christ's cup and being baptized with Christ's baptism. Nor will anything else make one a Christian of the kind the Master wants. Uniting with the Church will not do it. "Are you able to drink of my cup? Are you able to put your life into the service of men along side your Master?"

To Each One His Work

Some people do not like to work. Perhaps it is true that the disinclination is natural and universal, and that we all have to learn to like to work. There is an impression prevalent, that work was part of the curse of the fall, that if our first parents had kept their holy estate in Eden, work would not have been necessary. But this impression is incorrect. When man was created--he was put into the Garden of Eden to dress it and keep it. Work, therefore, was part of the blessing of Eden and is part of the blessing of all life. It is a means of grace. No one can be a good Christian and not do anything, unless he is incapacitated in some way. Idleness is sin, and there is always a curse on it.

Work is part of the plan of God for our lives. The affairs of the world go on well, only when everyone is doing his part. To each one his particular work is assigned. Whether our part is great or small, conspicuous or obscure, if it is the Divine allotment for us--it is noble and worthy. If our work is Divinely allotted, nothing is unfit for kingliest hands. That which God assigns--is most worthy. If shining shoes is a man's duty, is the task allotted to him for the time, there is no other work in all the world that would be so noble and worthy for him that particular day or hour.

To each one his work is given. None are omitted or overlooked in the assignment--no one is left without some task. Duties are not given to some--while others are sent out with nothing to do. We are all put into this world to work, until our days of service here are closed.

To each his own particular work is given. Not all have the same task, nor is the distribution of duties a haphazard one. People differ in abilities, and the tasks are suited to the hands. If, then, we do not do our own allotted work--it will not be done, and there will be a blank in God's universe where there ought to have been a piece of work well done. It matters not how small our part is, the doing of it perfectly, is essential to the completeness of the Divine plan, and the failure to do it well will leave a flaw.

What is true of work in general, is true of Christian work as well. In a sense, all work is sacred. Everything is to be done in the name of Christ and for Him, and all duty is part of God's will for us. Every piece of work has a moral value. Either we do it right and please God, or we do it indifferently and imperfectly, and so sin against God. The commonest tasks are as sacred in their way, as are our prayers and songs of praise. Jesus Himself was engaged in His Father's business quite as truly and as acceptably when He was working in the carpenter's shop--as when afterwards He was teaching and healing the people.

Yet we all have duties besides those which belong to our weekday callings. It is not enough for any man to be a carpenter or a builder or a merchant or a physician or a farmer. Everyone must be, first of all, a Christian--Christ's man. We should do our secular work for Christ and do it well--but we should be a great deal larger than the little measure of our weekday occupation, and should do far more every day than our little stint of common task work in the shop or in the field. We represent our Master in this world, and must not slacken our diligence in the things which He would do for people, if He were here.

In our Christian work, then, we should be as enthusiastic and as earnest--as we are in our secular pursuits. If we are conscientious in the world's work--we should certainly be no less conscientious in our work for the Master's kingdom. Few even of the best Christians, do their best for their Master. Paul exhorted his young friend Timothy to stir up the gift which was in him. The fire was banked up and smoldering, when it should have been burning brightly. In not many of us, is the passion for Christian service doing its best.

On all sides the motive of earnestness and diligence presses. The natural world teaches us the lesson. Every flower which blooms, has its inspiration for us--we should put beauty into everything we do. Every

bird which sings, calls us to live more songfully and cheerfully. Every wind which blows, whispers to us of the breath of God and urges us to open all our being to its blessed influence.

It is true also in the realm of spiritual life, that everyone has his own work allotted to him. There is something for everyone. In the building of the wall in Nehemiah's time, each man built by his own house, and thus the entire wall was soon repaired. We will easily find our work for Christ, if we will look for it right by our own door. We never need to journey far away, to come upon it. The trouble with too many, is that they pass by the work which is at their hand, not dreaming that it is the thing given to them to do, and expect to find something unusual in some unusual place. The artist who had looked everywhere for some fit material for his Madonna, found it at last in a common fire log in the wood yard. Our holiest duties are always near at hand, not far off.

Our work is not what some other one is doing--but something which is all our own. Paul illustrates this by comparing the church to a human body. There are many members in a body, and each has its own distinct function. If we had only hands, or if our body were all feet or all hands, we would be only monstrosities. So if all men were fishermen or all were farmers or all were lawyers, there would be no society. In the line of spiritual work, there is also the widest diversity of things to be done, and if we all had the same gift, with ability for doing just one thing, how could the great field of duty be covered? But there are diversities of gifts, so that no place shall be left unfilled, so that for no task there shall be a hand lacking. "To each one his work."

A man may not have the gift of eloquence and may almost envy another whose speech is winning. But the man of slow speech may have power in prayer.

We need never envy anyone the gift he possesses. That is his gift, and we have our own. Ours may not seem as great or as important as his--but that need not concern us. We are responsible only for what God has given us, and all we have to do is to make the fullest possible use of it. If another's gift is more brilliant than ours, the other has a greater responsibility than we have, and we need not envy him. Besides, we do not know what particular gift is most important, what kind of work ranks highest with God or does most for the up-building of Christ's kingdom. Perhaps it means more to be able to pray well, than to speak well. Power with God may be a mightier factor in doing good, than power over men. It may be that the quietest people, who are not often heard of, who work obscurely and without fame, are quite as highly honored in heaven, as those who are in conspicuous positions and receive praise from men.

We please God best, and do the best work in the world--when we cheerfully accept our place, however lowly, and do sweetly and as well as we can--the work which God gives us to do. It ought to impart zest to the humblest calling, to know that it is the will of God for us, and that and not something else is our part in the Divine allotment of duty. There can be nothing greater in this world for anyone, than the doing of God's will. We make the most of our life when we accept our own place and do well our own work. We work then with God, and we shall not fail either of His help or of His reward.

One Thing I Do

There is a great deal of waste in all lines of life--because men scatter their energies over too wide a field. Instead of doing one thing well, they do a dozen things indifferently. No one is great enough to do everything. In the arts and professions, men are more and more becoming specialists. Even ordinary ability would be sure of success, if it found its true place, and then devoted itself wholly to its work. Though a man may fail again and again, if he persists and never becomes discouraged, he will at last succeed.

There is a remarkable direction in our Lord's instruction to the seventy disciples. Among other things, He bade them to greet no one along the way. The salutations of those days were tedious and required much time, and the errands on which His messengers were sent were urgent and required haste. Not a moment must be lost on the way. When a disciple begged to be allowed to bury his father before going on his errand, the Master refused the request. The dead could bury their own dead, and he must hasten to carry the Gospel message.

If we would concentrate all our energies in one purpose, we would do all our work better. We would then always do our best, even in the commonest things of our daily task work. If we are writing only a postal card to a friend, we will do it as carefully as if we were writing a letter of greatest importance. We would gather all the forces of our heart into the simplest kindness we show to anyone. There are authors who have written one or two books of great interest and value and then have grown indifferent, doing nothing more worth while. They were too well satisfied with their early success or a little praise turned their heads, and they never did their best again.

An old painter, after standing long in silent meditation before his canvas, with hands crossed meekly on his breast and his head bent reverently, said, "May God forgive me that I did not do it better." There are many of us who ought to have the same experience of penitence, as we contemplate the things we have done. We should continually implore forgiveness for doing our work so poorly, for we are not doing our best. If only we would learn to put all the energy of our souls into each piece of work we do, we would do do fine work for the Savior.

In our Christian life, we should seek only one thing--the attainment of the highest reaches in character and service. If an absorbing passion for Christ ruled us, it would bring all our life into harmony with itself. When Christ is taken into the chief place in the life, everything which is not in harmony with His peerless beauty must go out, and only the things that are in keeping with the mind and spirit of Christ, can have a place in the life.

When Christ becomes really the one thing of our lives, there is less and less of living for self, and more and more of consecration to the service of love. Some people suppose that holiness separates a man from his fellows, that as he becomes really like Christ--he grows out of touch and sympathy with people, less interested in their human affairs, less gentle, less kindly, less human, less accessible, and less helpful. But it is not the religion of Christ, which produces such results. Never did any other man get so near to people as Christ Himself did. He lived among them; they loved Him and trusted Him, and they told Him everything. When Christ truly enters a man, one of the unmistakable marks of His indwelling, is the new love which begins to appear in the man's life. His religion made Paul a friend of man, eager to help everyone he met. When Christ really gets possession of a heart, the sweet flowers of love begin to grow in the life. If we are not becoming more patient, more glad hearted, more charitable, more kindly, more thoughtful. If there is not in us an increasing desire to help others, to do them good--we need to pray for more of the love of God in our hearts. We may tell people that Christ is still in this world, coming close to them in their needs--but He is here only as He lives in us. He has no other present incarnation but in the lives of His friends. He helps the suffering, the toiling folk, the weary hearted, the weak, the sorrowing--but only through us. We are most like to Christ--when we are nearest to the hearts of men, when our sympathies are widest, when we are the gentlest, when our hands are readiest to minister.

If in our hearts the great master purpose is to live for Christ only, we will grow continually away from all that is worldly and unworthy, toward things which are spiritual and Divine. Paul describes himself as

forgetting the things which are behind and stretching forward to the things which are before.

The life which is under the full dominance and sway of Christ, is ever unfolding new beauty, and growing into holier, sweeter, tenderer, diviner character and into larger, fuller usefulness. For while the beauty of Christ becomes more and more manifest in the personal life, the influence of Christ is manifested more and more distinctly in the impression made on the world. If our citizenship is truly in heaven, we will carry the atmosphere of heaven with us wherever we go, and heavenly flowers and fruits will grow about us which but for us would not have been there. There is no more infallible test of the reality and the power of our spiritual life--than in the measure of heaven we bring down into this world's life.

At Your Word, I Will

The Divine Will settles everything of duty. When we know surely what our Master would have us to do, there is no longer the slightest question as to what we should do. All we have to do then is to obey. We have nothing to do with the expediency or the in expediency of the command, with the determining of its wisdom or unwisdom, with the question of its possibility or impossibility.

When the Master bade Peter push out into the deep and let down his nets for a catch, the old fisherman promptly answered, "At Your word, I will." He had learned the first lesson in discipleship--prompt, cheerful, unquestioning obedience. According to ordinary fishing rules, nothing would come from obeying this command. Yet Peter did not think of that. The word of the Master had supreme authority with him. It could not possibly be mistaken. No appeal from it was to be considered for a moment. So Peter answered unhesitatingly, "At Your word, I will." Peter's example is to be followed in every case, by the Master's friends. The question of human judgment or opinion, is not to be considered when Christ speaks. The best human wisdom is fallible and may easily be mistaken. Men in authority may make mistakes of judgment, by which those who are required to follow their direction shall be compelled to suffer harm or loss. On a battlefield, a general's mistake may result in the sacrifice of many lives. Somebody blundered, and the six hundred rode into the valley of death. Ofttimes bad advice has wrecked destinies. Even those who love us most truly may err in the counsel they give us, and may lead us into paths which are not good.

Many people suffer from the ignorance of those whom they trust as guides. But in Jesus Christ we have a Leader who never errs in wisdom. He never gives wrong advice. He is never mistaken in His decision as to what we ought to do. We are absolutely sure that His commands are both right and wise. Our own opinion and judgment may be against what He bids us to do. It may seem to us from the human and earthly side, that the course on which He's taking us can lead only to disaster. In such cases, it is an immeasurable comfort to us to know that his biddings are always absolutely infallible. When He bids us to cast our nets in any particular place, we may be perfectly sure that we shall draw them up full.

Many of the things our Master calls us to do or to endure--do not seem to our eyes, at the time, to be the best things. Much of our life is disappointment. Sorrow comes oftentimes with its hot tears, its emptying of the heart, its pain and bitterness. We do not know, when we set out on any bright, sunny path--into what experience we shall be led.

About a dozen years ago, a noble young man married a sweet, beautiful girl. They were very happy. Life began for them in a garden of roses. Only three bright years had passed, however, when the young wife broke down in health. She had been an invalid ever since, much of the time unable to leave her room. The burden has been a very heavy one for the husband, requiring continual self denial and sacrifice, besides the grief and anxiety it has brought.

That was not the life these two dreamed of on their wedding morning. They thought only of gladness and prosperity. It never occurred to them that sickness or any trouble could break into their paradise. But the Master has made no mistake. Even already, to those who have watched their lives and noted the fruit of the suffering in them, it is becoming apparent that love and goodness are written in all the painful lines of the long story. The young man has been growing all the years in strength, in gentleness--in purity of spirit, in self control, in the peace of God, and in all manly qualities. It seemed a strange place to bid him cast his nets--into the deep waters of disappointment--but he is now drawing them full of rich blessing and good.

Here is another story of wedded life. A gentle girl was married to a young man of much promise. But soon the bright promise faded. The prosperous circumstances which it was thought were suddenly interrupted, and the accumulation of years, the fruit of hard toil, was gone. Then the husband's health failed, and times of pinching poverty followed. The young wife has had little in these years but trial and sorrow.

There are those who would question the wisdom of the Master in leading her into all this experience of pain and suffering. We cannot understand it. We cannot read the Divine love in the strange writing, yet we know that the words really must spell love as the angels read them. To infinite wisdom, the way of sorrow seemed the best way for the adorning, the enriching, the ennobling and the perfecting of that beautiful life. Sunshine is not all that the fields and gardens need to make them beautiful; they must have clouds and rain as well, or they would be parched and withered. It is so also with human lives. Prosperity and happiness are not the only experiences which bring blessing.

"Is it raining, little flower?

Be glad of rain.

Too much sun would wither you;

'Twill shine again.

The sky is very black, 'tis true;

But just behind it shines the blue.

"Are you weary, tender heart?

Be glad of pain.

In sorrow sweetest things will grow

As flowers in rain.

God watches; and you will have the sun,

When clouds their perfect work have done."

We may always say to Christ--whatever His bidding may be, whatever He asks us to do or to suffer, into whatever mystery or trial or pain He may lead us, "At Your word, I will." There need never be any smallest exception to this obedience. Though to our narrow, limited vision, it seems that only hurt and loss can come to us out of the experience, still we may heed and obey the voice which calls and commands, knowing that in spite of all seeming ill--there must be blessing and good in the end. We need never

question the Divine wisdom. Who are we, that we could know better than God what we need, what will bring to us the truest good? God's will is always perfect--and we may implicitly, unquestioningly accept it, knowing that the outcome will be blessing.

This makes the way of life very plain and simple. We have only one thing to do--to obey Christ. In whatever way His will is made known to us, whether in His word, through our own consciences, or in His providences, we have but to accept it and do it. It may mean the setting aside of cherished plans, the giving up of things that are dearest to us, a life of pain and suffering--but in any case it is ours to obey without question.

We may fix it unalterably in our belief, that there never can be any mistake in our Master's guidance. Obedience always leads to blessing. It cannot be otherwise, since God is God--and His Name is Love. Christ cannot fail to keep His smallest word. The universe would fall to wreck if He did. "Heaven and earth shall pass away--but My word shall not pass away." Some day we shall know that the end of all our Lord's commands, all His leadings, is good.

The Duty of Pleasing Others

"Each one of us must please his neighbor for his good, in order to build him up." Romans 15:2

Some people are not accustomed to think of pleasing others as a duty. We have been trained to think of what is right and just in our relations to others, without reference to the effect our words or conduct may have upon them. But there is no reason why we should not do the things that are right, and at the same time seek to please those with whom we are dealing.

Paul says, "Let each one of us please his neighbor--for his good, unto edifying." We are to please our neighbor for his good. We must not think of gratifying his whims, of feeding his vanity, or of nourishing his self conceit. This would not be to "please him--for his good, unto edifying." A great many people are hurt irreparably by insincere flattery. They may be pleased in a sense--but it is not for their good. They are puffed up by it, encouraged to think more highly of themselves than they ought to think. We can do no greater unkindness to another, than to stimulate his self conceit. Yet one of the temptations of good nature, is to be insincere and even untruthful in commending others. But it is not this kind of pleasing that Paul had in mind. It must be for the person's good, his growth in character, and then it must be genuine and altogether true.

The duty of pleasing others is part of the great lesson of love. If we love our neighbor--we will desire to give him pleasure, to make him truly happy. We get the lesson from our Master, and in His life, love blossomed out in all its perfection. Christ never sacrificed truth, was never insincere--and yet His speaking to men was always marked by kindness. He was never brusque in His speech. He never lost His temper, nor spoke in anger. He reproved men's sins and faults--but when He did this, His tones were quiet and His voice was full of love.

If we love others as Christ loves them, we will seek always to do them good. We will never speak pridefully. We will never reveal vanity or self conceit in our fellowship with those about us. There is a way of criticizing and reproof, which is offensive and brash. Love gives us no right to judge and condemn. It does not authorize us to watch others or to treat them censoriously. If we have love in our hearts--we will seek to save others from sin, to restrain them from wrong doing--but we will do even these services in lowliness and love, so as to win and not to lose those we reprove. Humility will mark our every word and

act. We will always be gentle and kind, speaking in love when we must say anything unpleasant, anything which will give pain.

Another reason we should seek to please others, is that everyone needs encouragement and cheer. It is possible for us so to bear ourselves in our relations to others as to make life harder for them. On the other hand, we have the power of adding immeasurably to the strength, the cheer, and the energy of others about us. Words of encouragement are wondrous inspirations. An artist said that his mother's kiss made him a painter. That is, when she saw his crude work and thought she detected in it indications of genius, instead of laughing at what he had done, she kissed her boy with encouragement and gave him an impulse which sent him on his way with enthusiasm and hope.

But children are not the only people who need encouragement, and are pleased and helped by words of appreciation. We never get too old or too high up in our work, to be cheered and stimulated by sincere commendation. When we read a book which helps us, no matter how distinguished the author may be, we will please him and do him a real kindness--if we will write him a few words of grateful recognition, telling him how his book has helped us. When the preacher has spoke earnestly and his words have given us cheer, or comfort, light on some dark problem, or help in some perplexity, however great he may be, however praised among men--a word of encouragement from the humblest person in his audience will send a glow of warmth and cheer into his heart--pleasing him for his good.

It is the good of the person, which we are to think. Edifying means building up. This is always the motive of love. Envy seeks to harm another, to take away from his honor, to check him in his progress, to tear down what he has built up. But love always thinks of the good of the other person, and of how his best interests may be advanced. We have an errand to everyone whose life we touch. We are sent from God with a blessing to Him. We may not know what our mission is, what the good is that we are to do for Him--but love will find something to do for him which will make him a better and happier man. The true Christian way of relating ourselves to those about us is this--to be ready always to give any help that may be needed.

The idea of help does not have in mind merely material aid. Ofttimes the last thing we should do for one in need, is to help him by relieving him of his load, by doing the hard task for him by giving him money. In the miracle at the Beautiful Gate the apostles had no money to give--but what they gave was better than money. We must not think that none need love's ministries, but those who are in some physical distress or in some great sorrow. Many who reveal no tokens of suffering, are yet sufferers. Grief does not always wear mourning clothes. There are hungry hearted ones, who need love and sympathy. There are those who are misunderstood, to whom a word of confidence would impart strength. There are discouraged people, to whom a glad, welcoming face is a heavenly blessing, full of inspiration for them.

We cannot estimate the value of our influence, as helpers of those who need help. We must seek to please them in ways which will make them stronger, truer, better. There is a great deal of unfit comforting of others by those who think only of pleasing, not of helping. There is a kind of sympathy which only makes one weaker and less able to endure. The word comfort means to strengthen. We have comforted a sorrowing one, only when we have made him stronger. The Holy Spirit is called the Comforter. The name means one who stands by another. Standing by means comradeship. We may not give the person anything. We may not do anything at all which can be regarded as a favor--but the mere fact of our standing by him in strong friendship, is of incalculable value to him. That was what Jesus hoped of His friends in Gethsemane. They could not help Him in any way--He must drink the cup Himself; but if they

were near by Him in love and companionship, this alone would make Him stronger.

Our helping of others must not be too insistent. We must respect the individuality of those to whom we would be friends. There is danger that even love will be officious sometimes, and reveal its eagerness in ways which will take away much of its value. People do not like to be helped in a demeaning or professional way. The help must be the help of love itself--and must be given simply, quietly, gently, unostentatiously. It must never intermeddle. When we stand by one who is in sorrow--the fewer words we speak the better. There is altogether too much talking in many cases, by those who are sincerely eager to help. The best service we can give to those who are in grief--is to lead them into the presence of Christ and leave them there alone with Him.

A strong, quiet face, telling of peace and joy in the heart, is in itself a blessing. On the other hand, a gloomy and discouraged face hurts everyone who looks upon it, leaves a shadow upon other lives, and makes them a little less fit for the struggles, the tasks, and the duties before them.

If we are wise, we will avoid all ostentatious display in efforts to please others. We will simply seek to be our natural selves, with sincere love, with patience, thoughtfulness, and kindness in our spirits. We will not talk about it--talking about it spoils everything. The best good is always done--when we know not that we are doing good. The greatest help is given to others--when they knew not that they are being helped.

The Duchess of Kent was a richly endowed woman, and was universally beloved. Once the Princess Alice, herself simple, sweet and unspoiled, asked her: "What makes everyone love to be with you? I am always so sorry to have to leave you, and so are all the others who come here. What is the secret, grandmamma?"

It was not easy for the noble woman to answer such a personal question. But it was important that it should be answered for the sake of her who had asked it, and who was indeed hungry to know the secret. So the noble lady gave this memorable answer:

"I was early instructed, that the way to please others--was to be sincerely interested in the things which interested them, namely their own affairs; and that this could be accomplished only by burying one's own troubles, interests, or joys completely out of sight. Forgetfulness of one's own concerns, a smiling face, a sincere word of sympathy or unselfish help, where it is possible to give it--will always please others--and the giver equally so."

"I try to please everyone in everything I do. I don't just do what I like or what is best for me, but what is best for them--so they may be saved." 1 Corinthians 10:33

The Privilege of Suffering Wrongfully

One of the most difficult duties of Christian life, is to endure wrong patiently and sweetly. Yet many people have to learn the lesson. There are none who do not, sometime or other, suffer unjustly. Strength ought to be gentle--but there are strong men who use their strength brutally. There are those possessing power, who exercise it tyrannically. Justice is not a universal quality among men. There are many who are misjudged or misunderstood. There are those who for kindness--receive unkindness. There are those who repay self sacrifice and love--with ingratitude and neglect. There are good men who suffer for their goodness.

Much of our Master's teaching has to do with this experience. One of the Beatitudes tells of the blessedness of the meek, those who endure wrong patiently, without complaining. Another tells of the happiness or blessedness of those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake. In another teaching, the Master bids us to turn the other cheek to the one who smites us, to love our enemies, and to pray for those who persecute us. The lesson of the forgiveness of injuries and of all wrongs done to us, is taught over and over again, and to make it still more emphatic and essential, is linked with Divine forgiveness of us, so that we cannot ask God to forgive us without at the same time solemnly pledging ourselves to forgive those who sin against us.

All our Lord's lessons--He lived Himself, illustrating them in His own obedience. We say we want to be like Christ, to live as He lived. When we begin to think what this means we shall find that a large part of Christ's life was the enduring of wrong. He was never welcome in this world. "He came unto His own--and His own received Him not." He was the love of God incarnate, coming to men with mercy and with heavenly gifts--only to be rejected and to have the door shut in His face. The enmity deepened as the days passed, until at the last He was nailed on a cross! Yet we know our Master bore all this wrong and injury. On His trial, under false accusation, He held His peace, answering nothing to the charges made against Him. On the cross His anguish found vent not in imprecations upon His enemies, nor even in outcries of pain--but in a prayer of love, "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do."

There was not a moment in all our Lord's life when there was the slightest bitterness of feeling in His breast. No resentment ever found an instant's lodgment in His heart. His answer to all the unkindness, the enmity, the plotting, the denials, the treason, and to all the cruelty, the brutal accusations, and the terrible wrongs inflicted upon Him--was LOVE. Thus it is, that we should bear all that is unjust, unkind and wrong in the treatment that we receive from others. We are to keep love in our hearts through it all.

A summer tourist writes of a water-spring as sweet as any that ever gushed from the sunny hillsides, which one day he found by the sea, when the tide ebbed away. Then the sea rolled in and poured its bitter floods over the little spring, hiding it out of sight, wrapping it in a shroud of brackish waters. But when the tide ebbed away again, the spring was still pouring up its sweet stream, with no taste of the sea's bitterness in it. Such a spring, should the love in our hearts be. Though floods of unkindness and of wrong pour over us, however cruelly we may be treated by the world, and whatever unkindness or injustice we may have to endure from others--the well of love in our bosom should never retain a trace of the bitterness--but should be always sweet.

The world cannot harm us if we thus live. The things which hurt and scar our lives are resentment, unforgiveness, bitter feeling, and desire for revenge. Men may beat us until all our bones are broken--but if love fails not in our hearts meanwhile, we have come through the experience unharmed, with no marks of injury upon us. One writing of a friend who was dreadfully hurt in a runaway accident, says that the woman will be probably scarred for life, and then goes on to speak of the wondrous patience in her suffering and of the peace of God, that failed not in her heart for a moment. The world may hurt our bodies--but if we suffer as Christ suffered, there will be no trace of scarring or wounding in our inner life.

We may learn from our Master, how to endure wrong so as not to be hurt by it. "When He suffered, He threatened not; but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously." He did not take the righting of His wrongs into His own hands. He had power and could have summoned legions of angels to fight for Him--but He did not lift a finger in His own defense. When Pilate spoke to Jesus of his power to crucify or release Him, Jesus said, "You would have no power against Me--unless it was given you from above."

God could build a wall of granite about us, if He would, so that no enemy can touch us. He could shield us so that no power on earth can do us any hurt. He could deliver us from every enemy. We should remember when we are suffering injury or injustice at the hand of others--that God could have prevented it. He could have held back the hand that it should not touch us. He could have ordered that no harm should be done to us, that we should suffer no injury.

This wrong that you are suffering, whatever it is, is therefore from God, something He permits to come to you. It is not an accident, a lawless occurrence, something which has broken away from the Divine control, something which God could not prevent breaking into your life. In nature, not a drop of water in the wildest waves of the sea ever gets away from the leash of God's control. God reigns everywhere, in things small and great.

The same is as true of events, of men's actions, as it is of matter. God's hand is in all things. Someone oppresses you, deals with you unjustly. God permits it, and this means that a good, a blessing, shall come out of the suffering. It may be a good for you. What you are called to endure may be designed to make you better, holier, richer in life and character, gentler spirited, more patient. It is well for us to think of this when a wrong has been done to us by another. We may leave to God--the matter of the evil committed against us. It is against Him far more than against us--and He will judge in the matter. Our only concern should be to get the lesson or the good there is in it for us.

Or the suffering we have to endure, may be for the sake of others. God permitted the terrible crime against His Son for the good of the world. Human redemption came out of it. When He permits us to suffer for righteousness' sake--we are in a little measure sharing the sufferings of Christ, and out of it all, will come something to make the world better. Paul speaks of being crucified with Christ. When someone has treated us unkindly, wrongfully, it is a comfort to think that in a small way, at least, we are being crucified with Christ and that blessing and enriching will come to the world from our suffering.

We dread suffering in any form. It seems to us something evil which can only work harm. Yet the truth is, that many of God's best blessings and holiest mercies come to us in the garb of pain. We dread especially the suffering which men's wrong or cruelty brings upon us. We resent it. But no other experience brings us so fully into companionship with Christ, for all that He suffered was unjust, and out of His untold sufferings have come all the hopes, joys and blessings of our lives.

When a great building was to be erected, an artist begged to be permitted to make one of the doors. If this could not be granted, he asked that he might make one little panel of one of the doors. Or if this, too, were denied him, he craved that he might, at least, be permitted to hold the brushes for the artist to whom the honor of doing the work should be awarded. If so small a part in a work of earth were esteemed so high a privilege, it is a far higher honor to have even the least share with Christ in His great work of human redemption. Everyone who suffers any wrong patiently and sweetly, in love and trust, is working with Christ in the saving of the world.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/jr-miller/finding-the-way-part-2/>

Grow in Your Walk with Christ

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

www.sermonindex.net