

Finding the Way - Part 3

by J.R. Miller

The sermon encourages believers to transform their spiritual experiences into active service for others while cultivating a continuous spirit of gratitude.

Scripture: Matthew 17:1

Topics: "Gratitude", "Service"

Description

J.R. Miller emphasizes the importance of moving from spiritual experiences to active service in 'Finding the Way - Part 3.' He reflects on the Transfiguration, where Peter wished to remain in a state of bliss, but Jesus and the disciples were called to return to the world to serve those in need. Miller argues that true devotion is not merely for personal enjoyment but is meant to prepare us for service to others, urging believers to carry the blessings received in worship into the world. He also discusses the necessity of cultivating a habit of gratitude and maintaining a strong character, warning against the tendency to let our spiritual lives run down.

Transcript

Finding the Way

J. R. Miller, 1904

The Duty Waiting Without

It was a glorious privilege for the disciples to be with their Master on the Holy Mount. They carried the impression of the Transfiguration in their hearts, as long as they lived. Peter would have stayed there, and wanted to build tabernacles for the Master and for the visitants from heaven. He tells us in his own narrative in Mark's Gospel, that he did not know what to say. When we do not know what to say--we had better keep quiet. But Peter had not learned to do this--he thought he must always be saying something, and of necessity he said some things he had better not have said.

Peter could not have kept the heavenly messengers in the little booths made of branches which he wanted to set up. They were no longer of the earth, and could not now dwell in houses made with hands. Besides, Moses and Elijah had not come to earth to stay. They had been sent only on an errand of love to the Master, as He was setting out for His cross. They had come to cheer and encourage Him. Their errand need but a brief time, and when it was finished they hastened back into heaven. A little later the disciples

"lifted up their eyes, and saw no one--but Jesus alone." No tabernacles, though built of earth's finest materials, could have kept those holy ones on the earth an hour after their sacred mission was accomplished. Peter's wish was vain.

Nor would it have been possible to keep Jesus on the mount. Work was waiting for Him that very hour, at the foot of the mountain. A father was there with his demoniac boy. For Jesus to have stayed in the tabernacle which Peter wished to build for Him there amid the glory, would have been to neglect the call of the human need, in order to enjoy spiritual pleasure Himself--and this was never Christ's way. Then He was just setting out on His last journey--at the end of which stood the cross. Not even the bliss of heavenly communion could keep Him from the work and the suffering before Him. To keep the Master on the Mount of Transfiguration would have been to hold Him back from His mission. This no constraint could have done, for He had come only to do His Father's will, and to redeem the world.

For the disciples, too, there was work waiting. They had duties to perform. They need further preparation for their great work, and then they were to be sent out to win the world for their Lord.

Devotion is not all of a holy life. It would be very sweet to stay on holy mountains with Christ and not return again to the world of toil and struggle--but that is not the purpose of our redemption. We are to pray and commune with our Master. We are to sit down at His table and enjoy the rapture of His love and the joy of His presence. But we are not to build tabernacles and stay there. We are to go quickly from the closet of devotion--out into the wide world, where a sinning, suffering, sorrowing world needs us--that we may carry to men the blessings which we have received.

Indeed, the purpose of devotion and communion is not personal enjoyment, not even purest, spiritual ecstasy as a final end; it is preparation for service. The Transfiguration experience was not meant merely to warm hearts and kindle the fires of worship--it was to help the Master to go on along His steep, rough way to the Cross; it was to strengthen the disciples' faith in their Lord and in His Divine mission. No spiritual rapture is ever intended to end with itself--it is to send us out to do something for the world!

No vision of Christ granted to us, is meant to exhaust itself in the bliss it brings--it fulfills its purpose only when its fervor makes us love Christ more intensely, and enter into His service with new enthusiasm and energy. A philosopher when he had kindled a fire on a cold day and had been warmed by it, would call himself before the bar of conscience and ask, "What did you do when you were warm?" He felt that the comfort he had received demanded some service to others in return. Every earthly comfort we enjoy, should put into us a new impulse of helpfulness, if we are living rightly. Especially is this true of every spiritual comfort, every ecstasy which thrills our hearts while we worship, every feeling of warmth produced by the Divine love shed abroad in us by the Holy Spirit.

We love our church services. We enjoy the fellowship. We are glad to sing together, to pray together, and to worship together. That is well. But what do we do when we are warmed? What is the fruit, the outcome of our enjoyment? While we are at our worship, singing our hymns of love, looking at the glory of the face of Christ, our hearts aglow with adoration--there are lost ones in homes all along our streets; there are sorrowing ones, needing our sympathy, our comfort, the touch of our hand; there are tempted ones almost yielding, almost falling away into eternal death, whom we may hearten and rescue. Let us not forget, that the purpose of the blessing which comes to us in our devotions, does not end with itself, is not meant merely to warm and gladden us--but to send us out to become a greater blessing to others. What are we doing with the heavenly gifts God is sending to us? If we are doing nothing with them, if we do not go out

from our enjoyment to be a blessing to others--we are missing the blessing it was meant that we should receive.

The closet is where we meet God. It is the Holy of holies. But it is not the only place to worship God--no true worship ever ends there. Besides, we worship--that we may be prepared to serve. There is a time for waiting, for meditation, for fellowship, for prayer. But that is not all of true religion. We have the vision that we may take up the task. We are saved--that we may serve. We are left in this world--that we may make the world better. We enjoy transfiguration visions--that we may be transfigured ourselves and shine in the darkness about us. We have our hearts warmed with the love of Christ--that we may go out to be the love of Christ to others.

In a cottage in Scotland, framed in glass, is a withered rose which money could not buy. A boy died far away in the south of France, where he had gone to seek health. Henry Drummond heard of the boy's death, and, when in that region, went to his grave and picked a rose blooming on it and sent it to the boy's mother. Drummond was always doing such kindly things. In his diary he wrote: "Holiness is infinite compassion for others. Happiness is a great love and much serving."

There is not one of us, who may not go out from any religious service, any hour of devotion, ready to make others stronger. People are looking to us for strength, for comfort, for food for their hunger. We do not know what we are to others--to weak ones, to timid souls, to tempted ones, to sorrowing ones, to lonely ones--how much they need us, how they depend on us, how we may help them.

We do not know how other lives may be hurt--if we show any lack of the spirit of Christ. The world needs our best life, our bravest words, our noblest heroisms, our tenderest love, our most self forgetful help. Let us rest in the tenderness of the love of Christ, until our lives glow with its blessed warmth--and then go out to be Christ to others.

We need communing with Christ, to get our visions of duty, our ideals for life. But we must be ready then--to go down into the deepest valleys, among the sorest human needs, even where sin is doing its worst--to do the lowest tasks and the most distasteful duties.

The Thanksgiving Habit

The annual Thanksgiving Day in America, has grown to be a national festival. It is a day of rejoicing. It summons all the people to gratitude. It is fitting that a people who have received untold blessings, should set apart one day on which all should recall their mercies, think of God as the Giver of all and express their grateful feelings in words of praise.

But it is not intended that the other three hundred and sixty four days shall be empty of thanksgiving, because one is named as an especial day of rejoicing. We cannot crowd into any one day--all the thanks of a year. Indeed, on no one day can we be grateful for another day. No one person can give thanks for a whole company of people. So no one day can give thanks for any but itself. All the days should be thanksgiving days. Any that is not, lacks something, and stands as imperfect days in the calendar. We are told that we may count that day lost in which we do no kindness to anyone. In like manner may be set down as a lost day that one in which no songs of gratitude rises from our hearts and lips to God.

Anybody can be thankful on one day of the year. At least it ought to be possible for even the most gloomy and pessimistic person to rouse up to grateful feeling, on the high tide of an annual Thanksgiving day. No

doubt it is something to pipe even one little song in a whole year of discontent and complaining--the kind of living with which some people fill their years. God must be pleased to have some people grateful even for a few moments in a long period of time, and to hear them sing even once in a year. But that is not the way He would have us live. The ideal life is one that is always thankful, not only for a little moment on a particularly fine day. "Praise is lovely," that is, beautiful--beautiful to God. The life which pleases Him is the one which always rejoices.

Nowhere in the Bible can we find either ingratitude or joylessness commanded or commended. All ungrateful feelings and dispositions are condemned. A great deal is said in disapproval of murmuring, discontent, worrying, and all forms of ingratitude. Again and again we are taught that joy is the keynote of a true life. It is not enough to rejoice when the sun shines, when all things are going well with us, when we are in the midst of prosperity; we are to rejoice as well when clouds hide the blue sky, when our circumstances seem to be adverse, or when we are passing through sufferings.

In one of the Psalms, the writer says: "I will bless the Lord at all times; His praise shall continually be in my mouth." He had learned to sing in the hours of pain--as well as in the times of gladness. That is the way the Christian should live--nothing should hush his song or choke the voice of thanksgiving and praise.

The only way to get thanksgiving into its true place in our lives--is to have it grow into a habit. A habit is a well worn path. There was a first step over the course, breaking the way. Then a second person, finding the prints of feet, walked in them. A third followed, then a fourth, until at length there was a beaten path, and now thousands go upon it.

Likewise, one who has been full of miserable discontents, utterly lacking in gratitude, gets a new Divine impulse, and one day is really grateful for a few moments. The impulse comes again, and again he let his life flow toward gratitude. Persisting in the disposition, his heart returns again and again to its gladness, until by and by it has been lured altogether away from the old beaten paths of discontent, discouragement, and unhappiness, and runs always in the ways of thanksgiving.

If we find that we have been leaving thanksgiving out of our lives, if we have been allowing ourselves to grumble instead of praise, if we have indulged in unhappiness instead of in gladness--we should instantly set about the breaking of a new path, a thanksgiving path. It will not be easy at first, for gloomy dispositions when long indulged persist in staying in our lives. But they can be conquered, and we should not pause in our effort until we have trained ourselves entirely away from everything that is cheerless and ungrateful, into the ways of joy and song.

There are many encouragements to a life of thanksgiving. For one thing, it makes life much happier. The person who indulges in fretting and complaining--is missing much that is loveliest, both in character and in experience. The tendency of such a life is toward gloom and depression, and these qualities in the heart soon show themselves on the face and in the manner. Light is the emblem of a beautiful life--but ingratitude is darkness rather than light. If we would be happy--we must train ourselves to be grateful. Ingratitude makes life dreary for us.

Another reason for cultivating the thanksgiving spirit, is because of its influence on others. Nobody loves a sullen person. We are exhorted to think of "whatever things are lovely," and cheerlessness is not lovely. If we would have people like us, if we would attract them to us and have good influence over them--we must cultivate happiness in all our expressions. There are many people who have formed the habit of unhappiness. They may be good and honest--but they have not learned the lesson of gladness. And they

are not helpful people. They are not diffusers of joy.

We are as responsible for our faces--as we are for our dispositions. If we go about with gloom on our countenances, we will cast shadows over others and make life harder for them. No one can be a real blessing to others, until he has mastered his gloom and has attained the thanksgiving face. No one can be of very much help to others, if he carries discontent and anxiety on his countenance. We owe it to our friends, therefore, as well as to ourselves, to form the habit of thanksgiving.

There are those who have learned this lesson so well, that wherever they go they make happiness. Their lives are blessings.

It ought not to be hard to train one's self to be grateful. There would seem to be reason enough in every life, for continual thanksgiving. True, there are days when things may seem to go wrong--but it is only in the seeming. There is not doubt that all our circumstances bring blessings, which we may have if we will. The hardest experience of any day, enfolds in it, a gift from God--if only we receive it in faith and love. We think of the sunny days as being good days, and we call unpleasant weather bad. But if we understood it, we would know that God sends to the earth just as rich blessings in His clouds--as He does in His sunshine. The clouds bring rain, and after the rain all nature appears clothed in fresh beauty. A simple, childlike faith sees God in everything, and is ready always to give cheerful thanks, even when the reason for the thanksgiving may not be apparent.

Indeed, we shall some day see that many of the richest and best blessings of our lives, have come to us through experiences and circumstances which to us seemed adverse, and from which we shrank. There is an old promise which says that to those who love God--all things work together for their good. All we have to make sure of--is that we keep ourselves in the love of God. If we do this, everything which comes to us will bring its enriching in some way, and out of the painful things--our lives we will gather the best blessings and the deepest joys.

We shall not have many miles at the most--of the rough, steep road. In a few years we shall have gone over it all, and shall have come out into a place where there shall be nothing to vex or disturb us. And such gladness waits for us, such blessing, that one hour there--will make us forget all the sorrow and pain and toil of the way!

Because You Are Strong

It used to be a custom for travelers in Switzerland, to bring home clusters of the edelweiss. The flower is not sought because of its beauty or for its fragrance--but in recognition of its bravery and victoriousness in living and blooming under hard conditions. It grows on the Alps and Pyrenees, at lofty altitudes, where almost nothing else lives, and on crags difficult access, and is among the hardiest of all plants. Thus the edelweiss becomes the symbol of noble life which endures hardness, which is victorious amid antagonisms, which rises superior to obstacles.

The man who has never known a hardship, who never has had to practice self-denial or make a personal sacrifice, may be the envy of other men whose lives have been one continued struggle. They may think that if they could have had his easy circumstances they could have made a great deal more of their life. But really their chance in life thus far has been far better than his. Manhood is made in the field of struggle and hardship, not in ways of ease and luxury. Hindrances are opportunities. Difficulty is a school for manhood.

Strength is the glory of manhood. Yet it is not easy to be strong--it is easier to be weak and to drift. It is easier for the boy in school not to work hard to get his lessons--but to let them go, and then at the last depend on some other boy to help him through. It is easier, when something happens to make you irritable, just to fly into a temper and say bitter words, than it is to keep quiet and self controlled. It is easier, when you are with other young people and they are about to do something that you know to be unworthy, just to go with them, than it is to say, "I cannot do this wickedness against God." It is easier to be weak--than to be strong. But we know where weakness leads in the end.

Nothing is impossible to young men. General Armstrong said, "Doing what can't be done, is the glory of living." Anybody can do the easy things, the things which can be done. A young man who has no higher goal than the things he knows he can do--will never rise to any sublime height. "What are Christians put into the world for--but to do the impossible in the strength of God?" said General Armstrong again. Jesus said the same--that if we have faith we can move mountains--that is, do things which are impossible to human strength, because faith unites us to God--and His omnipotence works them in us and with us. God expects a great deal of those who are strong. He does not expect much of babies, of invalids, of paralytics, or of feeble minded people; but young men have in them vast possibilities of power. Is it manly not to use this power for God--for truth, for service? One of the most pitiful things the stars look down upon, is a young man with fine gifts, with strength, with love, with genius, able to do some noble work--yet wasting all his possibilities in some form of debased living. Strength is God's gift, and should be used only in worthy ways; to use it in any unworthy way, is sacrilege.

Young men have superb strength--God's wonderful gift to them. Let them not waste it in sin, nor squander it in uselessness of any kind. Let it not wither and shrivel away, wrapped up in any napkins of non use. It is sacred, this marvelous strength which hides in our hands, in our brain, in our heart; it is part of God's own life given to us. It is Divine. It should be used only in ways which will honor God. We should not answer every call to pour out our strength, nor draw our sword in every cause. We should keep our life sacred for our Master and for the cause that is dear to Him.

We are exhorted continually in the Scriptures to be strong. Christ is strong, and we are to be like Him. We need to be strong in order to stand firm and true in the midst of the fray of life, and to do our duty faithfully and worthily. But how can we be strong? We need the strength of God in our arm, to make us equal to the stress of duty and responsibility that we must meet. How can we get this strength?

One way is by prayer. Prayer is linking our little life to God, when His grace will flow into our weakness, and make it God's strength. If we would be strong--we must pray!

Another secret of strength is found in fellowship, companionship, with Christ. Moses knew this secret, for it is said of him that "he endured, as seeing Him who is invisible." We grievously wrong ourselves, when we do not accept the help of Christ in our tasks and struggles. Even in a strong human friend, we may find inspiration and help which will make our lives mean more, stimulating us to bravery and fidelity and enabling us to be victorious. The other day a friend traveled ten miles to be helped through a terrible temptation. "If I can only sit here a few minutes and have you pray for me and say a strong word of cheer, I shall not fall." Even a human presence often carries one through danger and makes one strong to overcome. Infinitely more is the presence of Christ to us when we are weak.

It is told of the widow of Schumann, the musical composer, that whenever she was going to play any of her husband's music in public, she would read over some of his old letters to her, written in the lover days.

Thus, she said, his very life seemed to fill and possess her, and she was better able then to interpret his work. If we will read over Christ's words of love to us until His life enters into us, and His spirit breathes itself into our lives--then we can be brave and strong in resisting evil and doing His will.

The Glasses You Wear

It is very important if we are to see well, if our eyes are to do honest work for us--that we wear the right kind of glasses. Some people do not and therefore fail to see things clearly. They think the trouble is with the objects they look at, that they are warped or out of proportion, whereas the fault is in the lenses through which they look. There is a story of a man to whom everything appeared crooked or distorted. He was not aware of it himself--but thought things really were not as they appeared to him to be. He did not imagine that he was missing so much beauty through the fault of his glasses, and kept on wearing them without seeking for anything better. One day he was visiting at a neighbor's house and idly picked up a pair of glasses that lie on a table and put them on. To his amazement, everything seemed different. He looked at people, and their faces were bright and clear. He looked at the furniture of the room, and it was graceful and regular--it had appeared almost grotesque before, as his glasses showed it to him. He looked at the pictures on the wall, and for the first time saw their beauty. He walked out of doors, and the trees, which heretofore he had seen only in vague, gnarled form, appeared beautiful. He learned now that by using his defective glasses, he had been missing a large part of the pleasure of seeing. He quickly bought a pair of glasses which suited his eyes, and all the world became new to him.

There are many people who are wearing a wrong kind of glasses. There are some, for instance, who never see beauty in any other person. All characters are distorted to them. They see only the faults, the imperfections, the blemishes of people's lives. Even the noblest and best people, coming under their eyes, fail to reveal any features which are winsome and attractive. They never have a word of commendation for any piece of work any one else does, or for any act. Only yesterday, one tried for half an hour to get a visitor to say a pleasant word about something or somebody--but tried in vain. A number of people were referred to in the attempt to elicit at least a word of commendation or approval--but in every case the response was harsh, critical, unkindly, censorious, sometimes almost venomous. Many generous and worthy acts were mentioned, to see if some beautiful deed would not win a cordial and kindly word--but in every instance, something was suggested that took away from the apparent beauty or worthiness of the acts. This person sadly needed a pair of new glasses.

Far more than we know, does this matter of eyes or no eyes, make our world for us. We are in the midst of most glorious things all the while--but some of us see nothing and miss all the inspiration that would mean so much to us--if only our eyes were opened. We talk of a lost Paradise--but there is still a Paradise for those who can see it. George Macdonald says: "I suspect we shall find some day that the loss of the human paradise consists chiefly in the closing of the human eyes; that at least far more of it than people think remains about us still, only we are so filled with foolish desires and evil cares that we cannot see or hear, cannot even smell or taste--the pleasant things around us."

There is a little book called *Eyes and No Eyes*, which tells of two boys who one day went out for a walk together. When they came back, a friend asked one of them what he had seen. He said he had seen nothing. He had been traveling through dust and along rough paths--but he had not seen anything beautiful or interesting in all the two hours' walk. When the other boy was asked the same question, he replied with much enthusiasm, telling of a hundred beautiful things he had seen in his walk--in the fields and in the woods--flowers and plants and bits of beautiful landscape, birds and squirrels and rippling

streams. The two boys had walked together over the same path, and while one had seen nothing to give him pleasure--the other came back with his mind full of lovely images and bright recollections. Both had looked on the same objects--but they had looked through different lenses!

There always are two classes of people among those who journey together--those with eyes which see and those who, having eyes, see nothing. There are many people who never see the stars, or the hills, or the blue sky, or the flowers, nor any beauty in plant or tree or living creature.

Many of us who see nothing lovely in the objects about us--wish we could see what others see. There is a way of learning to do it. We should train ourselves to make use of our eyes. Every child should be taught from its earliest youth to observe, to see beauty wherever beauty exists. This should be part of the education of young children. They are encouraged to look intently at all things about them, so that they can give an intelligent account of whatever they have seen. This training should be carried into all the life, so that we shall miss nothing of the profuse and wondrous loveliness, which is everywhere in our Father's world. The result of not using our eyes, is that by and by we have no eyes--the faculty which is not exercised, becomes atrophied.

Still more to be pitied than those who have eyes and see not, are those who see things distorted, through warped lenses, through untrue glasses. We should train ourselves to see only what is lovely. An old legend of Jesus tells that while the disciples one day turned away with loathing from the carcass of a dead dog by the wayside, the Master looked at it and said to the disciples, "What beautiful teeth the creature has!" Too many of us see only the things that are loathsome, and have no vision for anything that is winsome.

A lady took her visitor to a window to show her a view which to her, was very inspiring. The guest manifested almost disgust as she exclaimed that all she saw was an unusually fine lot of black chimneys and smoky back buildings. The genial hostess said, cheerfully, "Why, I never saw the chimneys and back building before. I saw only the hills yonder and that fringe of noble trees on the horizon!" This woman got far more out of life than her friend did, for she had eyes for the beauty and grandeur of the world about her--while the other saw only the things that were dreary and without beauty.

The same is true of the men and women about us, as well as of the scenes and conditions. It would add immeasurably to our pleasure in life--if we would train ourselves to look for whatever things are true, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely, in the people about us--instead of for the blemishes and faults. If we wore the glasses of love and charity, it would be in this way that we would see everyone and everyone's work. What a change it would make for us--if we would some day put on these new glasses, and look at others through them!

The aspect of all life's events and experiences would also be changed, if we wore the right kind of glasses. To many people, life has nothing bright. It is made up chiefly of things which produce discontent, complaining and fault finding. We all know people who never have a really bright word to say about their own life and its circumstances. To them, everything seems wrong. They exaggerate their trials and see a calamity in every smallest mishap. They see nothing bright in any outlook. They enumerate their troubles and sorrows with glib tongue, and even when their joys and happiness are referred to, find flecks in them. If they could in some way change their glasses, so that they would see things in the light of Christian faith and trust--all things would be transformed for them.

What we all need, in order that we may see people and things as they are--is a heart of love. If we could see through Christ's eyes, everything would be attractive to our vision. We can get the new glasses, with their magical power, only by getting into our hearts, the mind which is in Christ Jesus--the mind of love, of patience, of trust, of joy, of peace.

It is true, that some people seem never to learn this part of the lesson of thoughtfulness. They have a genius for hurting others. They are continually saying things which give sting and pain, referring to unwelcome subjects and bringing up matters which tend to exasperate or irritate. They seem to walk with heavy boots among the most delicate flowers of feeling, as if they were treading on rocks. It is to be expected that we shall learn love's lessons better than this.

Thoughtfulness is one of the finest qualities in a well disciplined life. It regards the comfort and happiness of others before its own. In conversation it is always careful not to refer to things which would cause pain. It never alludes to a man's physical defects. It respects your sorrow and refrains from rudely touching your wound. Someone defined a gentleman as one who never by word or act gives pain to another. This is Christian love's ideal.

But the sensitive person also has a duty in the case--a duty of not showing hurt feeling too readily, of bearing his pain quietly, even if others are thoughtless. For, as gentle as we may be--it is practically impossible to avoid everything which may cause pain to a tender heart. The most thoughtful person will some time unintentionally speak a word which will hurt.

A noble spirit will learn to suffer from the thoughtlessness, even from the rudeness of others--and yet be still. No doubt extreme sensitiveness is a fault. The nerves lie so near the surface, that they are exposed to every touch. Sensitive people suffer greatly. One who is less delicately organized, gets more happiness out of life, for unpleasant, disagreeable things do not affect him so painfully.

The cause of sensitiveness is not always physical. Some people allow themselves to be hurt by every kind of expression which is not quite to their mind. They have refined tastes--and rudeness offends them. They are educated people--and they are pained by violations of the rules of grammar. They are accustomed to the conventional ways of polite society--and bitterly resent whatever to them seems to be vulgar. They have no patience with those whose manner or whose personality in any way offends them. Such people will never get much comfort from others--until they are cured in some way of their extreme sensitiveness.

There are two ways of meeting qualities and habits which pain us or would naturally irritate or vex us. We may be mastered by them--or we may get the mastery over them. No one can live long in this world and find all things precisely to his taste. We cannot bring all people to our way of thinking, or to our idea of the proprieties of life. If we would get along sweetly and happily with all whom we meet in our daily rounds--we shall have to do at least our share of the yielding and self denying. Instead of getting everybody to become agreeable and pleasing to us--we shall have to get over our fastidiousness, and our love will have to learn to be blind to many things which are not beautiful in others, and deaf to many things which naturally grate upon our ears and are offensive to our taste. We must be agreeable and sweet to others--whether others are exactly pleasing to us or not.

The law of love teaches us to look upon all men as our brothers, and to treat them with consideration. Love is the best cure for the sensitiveness which is offended by lack of culture or refinement in others. Some of the best people in the world have crude manners and are ignorant of the conventionalities of society. Love must be large enough to overlook all such things, and to see the man in back of the plain

garb.

There is another kind of sensitiveness that is still more unreasonable. Men call it touchiness. It is like an exposed sore which is always being hurt. There are people who seem to be ever on the watch for slights, and they are always finding them, too, or imagining them. The utmost thoughtfulness cannot avoid saying things which wound them, for they exaggerate everything unpleasant and imagine unkindly intention, when none was dreamed of. They flush and show grieved feeling at the slightest questioning of their infallibility. If anyone expresses a different opinion from theirs on the subject--they at once resent it, become abrasive and hurt, making it a personal matter. They can never calmly discuss the pros and cons of a matter with another, for they will not tolerate any objection to their views, or any opinion which differs from theirs.

Such sensitiveness makes life hard, not less for one's friends--than for one's self. It indicates a most unwholesome spirit, anything but beautiful, far from being sweet and winning. Those who become aware of their weakness in this regard, should set to work at once to get rid of their unseemly burden and burdensomeness.

There are several considerations which may help in the cure of this weakness. One is the fact that exhibitions of hurt feeling are most inappropriate. When we see them in others--we know how they appear also in us. They are childish and unworthy of any one who is much past the years of infancy. We may excuse and tolerate touchiness in a very young child--but in a full grown person, it is altogether unpardonable. Proper self respect should make it impossible for anyone to permit such childish behavior. We should be ashamed of anything so unworthy, so unbeautiful in our disposition and behavior.

Another motive for the avoidance of such displays--is that they give pain to others. This is one of the infirmities which make friendship hard. One of the comforts of true friendship, is that we do not need to be always on our guard lest we give offence. A generous, confiding nature should not be pained by any treatment. Perfect love--loves unto the uttermost. It overlooks, and forgives, and never fails. One who is touch and ready to be hurt by the slightest allusion, or by any seeming neglect, makes entire freedom and confidence in friendship impossible.

Another help in getting rid of over sensitiveness is to remember that such a spirit is not Christian. It is in violation of the whole catalogue of qualities which are lovely. We cannot witness worthily for Christ--unless we master it. We cannot conceive of our Master as being touchy and sensitive.

In trying to overcome this infirmity, a good habit is to cultivate indifference to unpleasant things in others about us, to ignore their existence. When certain worthless fellows failed to show King Saul proper honor after his choice as king, we are told that "he held his peace." The meaning is that he was deaf to their insults. This is a good way to bear ourselves toward all unkindness--to ignore it, to pay no attention to it, to act as if it had not happened. A deaf man said he had compensation for his deafness, in the fact that there were so many silly and foolish things said which he did not have to hear. We shall save ourselves from much hurt feeling--if we will respond as if we were deaf!

As If We Did Not

"There's so much bad in the best of us,

And so much good in the worst of us;

That is scarcely behooves any of us,

To complain about the rest of us."

--Robert Louis Stevenson

There are some things which it would be better for us not to know. Or, if we do know them, it would better be for us to treat them as though we did not know them. We should never pry into other people's matters. We should respect every other man's privacy. Some people are always seeking to know others' private affairs. It is the worst kind of impudence to try to do this. But sometimes there are things told to us voluntarily in confidence, and of these we may not speak. To some people, however, a secret is a heavy burden. They go about "dying to tell," and yet they dare not tell. In some cases, however, keeping the secret proves impossible, and the thing is told--told, of course, as a secret, only to certain trusted people. But confidence has been violated, and the bearer of the burden has failed of entire loyalty and honor.

It would have been a great deal better, if this betrayer of another's confidence had regarded himself as not knowing the thing which by the voice of his friend, he had come to know. It would have been better still, of course, if he really never had learned it. He had no right to hear it. He heard it only through the weakness of another. It is unkindness to many people, to ask them to be the custodians of secrets which they are not allowed to divulge. It is placing them in a position in which they cannot but suffer. It is subjecting them to a temptation which it is very hard for them to resist. We have no right to lay such a burden on any friend. Beside, if what we tell is something which ought not to be told--we have no right to tell it even to one person!

But when another has been weak and has told us something which we are charged to repeat to no other being in the world, what is our duty? We may say, "Well, if my friend can trust me with this matter, there can be no harm in my trusting another friend with it." But the failure of another, to be true to himself and perfectly honorable, will never excuse us for failing in the same way. Our duty can be nothing less than the most sacred keeping of the secret confided to us. It is not ours to divulge to anyone. We should consider ourselves as not having heard it at all.

Of course, we cannot work any sort of magic on ourselves by which the bit of knowledge communicated to us, shall be literally taken out of our memory and be a lost communication to us thenceforward. Some people seem to have memories out of which knowledge once possessed, does vanish so completely, that it cannot be found again. But usually it is not great secrets which have been whispered into the ear with solemn adjurations, which get lost out of memory. The things people forget most easily--are likely to be things of value, important facts, useful information, things they ought to remember. It should be possible, however, to forget in the same way, matters which we do not need to remember, which it is better that we do not remember.

We should train ourselves to forget people's faults. We are told that God does not remember the sins of His people. His forgiveness obliterates even the memory of the evil things we have done. Of course there is a sense in which God cannot forget--but the meaning is that He remembers--as if He remembered not. We do not usually forget our brother's faults and follies. Nor are they before our minds--as if they were not. On the other hand, they are likely to be kept very much in evidence. One of the Beatitudes is, "Blessed are the merciful, for they shall obtain mercy." If we remember the wrong things we see in others, how can we expect God not to remember the greater wrong things, which His pure eyes see in us?

There are matters of knowledge of others, which come to us in an accidental way--which also should be to us as if we do not know them. Sometimes we are compelled to overhear words which were not meant for our ears, which no one supposes we have heard. The other day a friend wrote of being witness unintentionally of something which, if spoke of to others, would have led to very serious censure of the people concerned. Advice was asked. What should this friend do with the unwelcome knowledge? There can be only one answer to such a question. Things learned in any accidental way, when it was not intended that we should know of them--we are to consider ourselves as not knowing at all. There is no other honorable course. It is bad enough to divulge something which has been told us by another in great confidence, under charge of secrecy; but it is far worse to speak to anyone of things we have learned in a purely accidental way, which we have no right to know.

There are things told us sometimes of others, evil stories perhaps, things which affect the good name of the person. These stories may be the result of miserable gossip. They may be altogether false, and gross misrepresentations. In this case, we certainly make ourselves sharers in the sin of the original maligners--if we repeat the stories to anyone. He who helps give wings to a scandal is himself a miserable scandalmonger.

But supposing that the stories are true, what is our duty concerning them? Have we not a right to tell others, of evil things about a person when we have verified the stories? What gives us the right to do this? What makes it our duty to spread an evil report--even when we know it to be true? Clearly, whatever the case may be, the Christian way to deal with such matters, in whatever manner they may have come to our ears--is to be as if we did not know them.

There is still another class of things we cannot help knowing, which it was well, if we would consider ourselves as not knowing. Sometimes we have unpleasant experiences with people. They speak of us injuriously or treat us unkindly. Sometimes the hurt they do to us, is from lack of thought, not from lack of heart. There is no intention to injure us or to cause us trouble or pain--it is the result of thoughtlessness.

Sometimes, indeed, it may be an unkind spirit in those about us, which leads them to seek to vex us. In either case, it is not easy to endure the irritation, which we cannot but suffer.

Here again there is a secret worth knowing, which, understood, takes away much of the suffering, and enables us to go through the experience quietly and patiently. There is a way of forgetting such hurts, which takes from them in a great measure their power to do us real injury. A boat ploughs its way through the water of the silver lake--but in a little while the water is as smooth as ever again, retaining no trace of the crude cleaving. One would not know the glassy waters had ever been ruffled. If we can learn the lake's lesson, it will add greatly not only to the quiet and beauty of our lives--but also to our own comfort. Whatever we may suffer from the unkindness or thoughtlessness of others, or from the uncongeniality of our environment, we shall not be disturbed or distressed. This is one of the blessings of Christian peace. We hide away in Christ, in the shelter of His love, in the secret of His presence, and there find refuge from the plotting of men and from the strife of tongues. The things which otherwise would cause us great suffering, do not touch us. We meet them as though they were not. In the shelter of the love of Christ--nothing harms us. We are so sustained that it is as though the trials had no existence.

Making a Good Name

The name includes the character. All that a man is, his name stands for and represents. A baby has no character, and at first its name means nothing. It has done nothing to give it individuality in anyone's mind.

But as the child grows toward manhood, the name every year grows to mean more and more. All the story of the childhood, the youth and the early years goes into it. In school and college, the boy's name to all who know him--stands for whatever he is. If he is well behaved, bright, interesting, with good disposition and a good record, a good student, gentlemanly, refined--his name will suggest all this wherever it is heard. If he is negligent in his habits, careless in his life, if he is crude, ungentlemanly, if he is untrue, resentful, quick tempered, the mention of his name will bring up all these qualities to those who know him intimately.

The making of a name is, therefore, a matter of the highest importance. We are told that reputation is what people think about a man, what they suppose he is; and that character is what the man really is; but ultimately reputation and character are one. For a while, a man may hide his true self and may pass for something better than he really is--but in the end character will assert itself through all disguise and all illusions, and the man's name will represent precisely what the man is.

Holy Scripture tells us that a good name is better than precious ointment. It is the perfume of the ointment which is suggested, and the thought is very beautiful. In a parable of spiritual life, in one of the Minor Prophets, one feature is expressed thus, "His smell is as Lebanon." One of Paul's "whatsoevers," in a wonderful epitome of Christly character is, "Whatever things are of good report." There is an aroma which belongs to every life, which is the composite product of the things which are said about the person along the years. If all that is said is good, favorable, commendatory of the person's name--the report is like sweet perfume.

Some men live beautifully, sweetly, patiently, unselfishly, helpfully, sympathetically, speaking only good words, never rash, intemperate, unloving words, walking among men carefully, humbly, reverently; and the odor of their lives is like that of Mary's ointment, which filled all the house. Other men are ruled by self, or by the world, or by greed, or by desire for pleasure; they are of the earth, earthly; or they are untrue, resentful, unloving, of hasty speech--we all know what the effluence of such lives is, not like gentle fragrance--but unsavory, of an evil odor.

There is something very mysterious about perfume. No one can describe it. You cannot take a photograph of it. You cannot weigh it. Yet it is a very essential quality of the flower. The same is true of that strange thing we call influence. Influence is the aroma of a life. The most important thing about your life is this subtle, imponderable, indefinable, mysterious quality of your personality which is known as influence. This is really all of you that counts in its final impression upon other lives. No matter how a man may pose, how much he may profess, how he may assert himself--what kind of man he may claim to be--that which he really is, is what breathes out from his life wherever he is known, that which his name suggests to people whenever it is spoken.

Lebanon's gardens and trees and fruits filled all the region round about with delicious fragrance. Every Christian life ought to be fragrant, with a smell like that of Lebanon. But there is only one way to make it so. Men gather the perfume from acres of roses, and it fills only a little vial. Our influence, the perfume of our lives, is gathered from all the acres of our years--all that has grown upon those acres during all those years. If it is to be like the essence of the thousand roses--sweet, pure, undefiled--our life must be all well watched, clean, pure, holy, loving, and true. The evil, as well as the good, are gathered, and help to make the total of the influence of our lives.

We all know how easily one's influence is hurt, how little follies and indiscretions in one's conduct or behavior, take away from the sweetness of one's reputation. The author of Ecclesiastes says, "Dead flies cause the oil of the perfumer to send forth an evil odor; so does a little folly outweigh wisdom and honor." We need to think seriously of this matter of dead flies. We are not always careful enough about keeping them out. There are many men, good in the general tenor of their lives, godly, prayerful; consistent in larger ways--but the perfume of whose names is rendered unsavory by little dead flies in the ointment of their common life. They are not careful to keep their word, they are not prompt in paying their debts, they are not watchful of their speech, they are not loyal in their friendships, they are indiscreet in their relations with others, they are lacking in refinement or courtesy, they are rash in their speech, they are resentful--we know how many of these dead flies there are, which cause the ointment of some good people's names to send forth an unsavory odor.

We need to watch our lives in the smallest matters, if we would keep our names sweet wherever we are known. Influence is most important. It is our mightiest force for good or for evil. Let us keep it pure and good for Christ, and in order to do this, let us keep Christ always in it.

The end is not in this world. Our name at the close of earthly life, enshrines the essence of all that men know about us. But there is much that is beautiful and good in a true and worthy life, which men do not know. It is interesting to think of the name, as at last including all that the person has done--all the influences that have ever gone forth from the life. We are told that in nature nothing is ever wasted. Matter changes its form--but not a particle of it is lost. Wood is consumed in the fire, and the element of which it was composed are separated--some of them escaping into the air in gases and some of them remaining in the residuum of ashes--but not the smallest particle that was in the tree has really perished. We live our life in this world, our few years or many--and then cease to be. The places which have known us, will know us no more. But not the smallest element of our life is lost. The things we have done, the words we have spoken, the influences we have sent out--all have taken their place in other lives, and have been built into them like blocks of stone on the wall of a building.

We may believe that as in nature, so in human life--not the smallest particle is ever wasted. Many things we try to do, seem to fail. At least, they do not realize our desire and intention. We grieve as if the efforts had accomplished nothing. But some day we shall see that no true purpose ever has failed, that though our efforts may not all have realized what we hoped from them, yet in the unseen realm, where the true results of life are all gathered and treasured--we shall find all our hopes and dreams, all our good intentions that could not be fulfilled here, all our plans and purposes that we had not the strength to carry out in this world. Ofttimes we are defeated in our efforts to do good. We begin many things which we cannot complete. There is not a day when we live as well as we wanted to live, or meant to live. We do no piece of work as beautifully as we wished and intended to do it.

But the man whom Christ will present some day with exceeding joy before God, will be the man with all the fruits and harvests of his life garnered, nothing lost by the way. This truth should give us measureless comfort as we think of our failures here, and the dropping off of so many blossoms without any earthly fruiting.

Not all of anyone's life, is gathered in this world in even the most fragrant name. A thousand good things which the man has done have been forgotten. Countless gentle deeds were wrought so quietly that no one ever heard of them. Then only God could know the things which took no form in either word or deed--the love, the sympathy, the gentle thoughtfulness, the self denials, the prayers for others and for the kingdom

of Christ, the aspirations, the desires to do good. It is only a little of any noble life, which the world ever knows. But God knows all and remembers all, and the names of His saints will at last represent all the story of their lives, with nothing good or beautiful omitted.

Letting Things Run Down

It is easy to let things run down. We begin carefully--but presently lapse into carelessness. A child's copy book is apt to show reasonably fair following of the copy in the top lines, and then the farther down the page, the worse. An old adage has it that a new broom sweeps clean; implying that as it gets older it does not do its work so well. This tendency from good to less good--from watchfulness to neglect--is not confined, however, to such inanimate instruments as brooms. The disposition is human and very common, if not almost universal.

Eternal vigilance is the price of other things besides liberty. Nothing but intense watchfulness will save us from the tendency to let things run down, whether in our personal habits, in our work, or in our character. We begin with enthusiasm, and succeed well because we do our work with zest and earnestness. For a time we keep up to our high standards, and then we begin to flag in our interest and also in our energy, and at once our work shows it.

This is one of the perils of business. A merchant opens a new store. He will run it in a new way, with improved methods. Everything about the place is bright. The goods are the best the market affords. The methods of business adopted, are modern and obliging. The salespeople are attentive and accommodating. Everything is done promptly and in a way to give the fullest satisfaction. Evidently the aim of the proprietor is to make his store as nearly perfect as possible. For a time the new broom sweeps clean. Everything is kept in perfect order. The store is attractive and beautiful. The improved methods are faithfully followed. There is no occasion for complaint, and if mistakes occur, they are cheerfully rectified.

But after a while, there is an evident lowering of the standard. The place is losing somewhat of its bright look. The newness is wearing off. There is not the same effort to please. The salespeople have not the old enthusiastic way of waiting upon their customers. The goods are not always satisfactory. Complaints are frequent and do not receive attention. People begin to say that the store is running down.

The same tendency is seen sometimes in a home. At the beginning everything is neat and tidy. Evidently the mistress looks after the smallest details of her housekeeping herself. Not a speck of dust is seen anywhere. Everything is kept in the best order. All who come admire the excellent taste displayed, and are charmed by the beautiful way in which the affairs of the household are administered. After a while, however, visitors begin to notice a change. The old tidiness is giving way to a condition of disorder and untidiness. Things are not kept in their place. The pictures are crooked on the walls. The furniture is not dusted as it used to be. The children are not so carefully dressed as they used to be. All about the house, the lessening interest shows, too, without and within. The grounds are not kept neat and attractive as they used to be. Gates, fences, and outbuildings have a tumble down appearance. Inside, walls, carpets, curtains, and furniture begin to have a neglected look. The whole air of the place has changed. The home is running down.

We find the same tendency also oftentimes in people. It manifests itself in many ways. It may be in personal habits. There are those who used to be almost fastidious in their appearance. Even though unable to wear the finest clothes, they always dressed in the best taste. But now signs of slovenliness show that there has been a relaxing of the carefulness. There is not the same attention to personal appearance. In little ways,

the change is noted at first--but it gradually becomes more marked.

In people's personal lives, too, the same tendency often becomes apparent. We are apt to allow ourselves to slacken our diligence in our work. Especially is this true when our tasks are the same over and over, the old routine every day. It is hard to keep up the zest and interest with this everlasting repletion--in the home, in the office, or in the shop. It is very easy after doing the same things a thousand times, to do them a little less painstakingly.

In the care of the body, too, great watchfulness is required to avoid becoming neglectful. An old man of ninety said it had not taken half the energy for him to do the great tasks and to meet the large responsibilities of his long life, than it had for him to brush his teeth three times a day, year after year, and never once neglect it nor do it carelessly. It requires an unusual energy and persistence for a mechanic to do his work as conscientiously year after year, as he did at the beginning.

In the moralities it is not less difficult to keep up to tone. We set out determined to make the most of our life. We fix our standard high. We intend to live in all ways worthily, pleasing God. We begin well, and for a time are conscientious and faithful. We resist temptation and are loyal to our Master in the smallest things. We are diligent in the performance of all our duties. We cultivate the spirit of love in our relations with others, and strive to be patient, thoughtful, kind, helpful to all about us. We endeavor to live for the higher things, putting character above pleasure or self indulgence, and keeping ourselves unspotted from the world.

But too often we grow weary in well-doing and slacken our diligence. We are not so conscientious as we were about our daily prayer and Bible reading. We are more easily interrupted or hindered in our devotional habits. We keep a less vigilant watch over our tongues, and sometimes speak words which are not true, or which are unkind and uncharitable. We let the reins slip from our hands, allowing our temper to run wild, hurting gentle lives and bringing shame upon ourselves. We grow remiss in our religious activities, dropping tasks and withdrawing from responsibilities. It is easy thus to allow our lives to run down in their moralities.

The only way to prevent this unhappy tendency in any department of life, is to watch against the smallest beginnings of neglect or inattention. Our lives must be kept up to tone at every point. The musician has his piano tuned frequently, that its strings may not fall below concert pitch. An artist kept some highly colored stones in his studio, and said it was to keep his eye up to tone. We need continually to keep before us high ideals, lofty standards, for if our ideals and standards are lowered, our attainments will be lowered too.

One of the effects of mingling with people, is that we allow ourselves to be influenced by their example and to become tolerant of imperfection, of failure, of neglect in ourselves. The Christian needs always to keep Christ before his eye--that by His perfect life he may be inspired to do his best. One of the reasons for daily Bible reading, is that by its heavenly teachings, we may be kept continually in mind of what we ought to be and what we ought to do.

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/jr-miller/finding-the-way-part-3/>

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