

From the Psalms

by J.R. Miller

The blessed man is one who delights in the Law of the LORD and meditates on it day and night, resulting in a life of prosperity and fruitfulness.

Scripture: Psalm 1:1-3, Psalm 2:1-2, Psalm 5:3, Psalm 16:11, Psalm 19:1-2, Psalm 19:12-13, Psalm 23:1-3, Psalm 37:4, Psalm 103:1-2, Psalm 139:23-24

Topics: "Spiritual Growth", "Guidance in Prayer"

Description

J.R. Miller emphasizes the richness of the Psalms in guiding believers toward a deeper spiritual life. He highlights the importance of avoiding the counsel of the wicked, delighting in God's law, and the necessity of prayer that aligns with God's will. Miller illustrates how true blessedness comes from a life rooted in God's Word, leading to spiritual prosperity and joy. He encourages believers to seek God's guidance in their lives, trusting that He will show them the path of life filled with joy and purpose.

Transcript

Devotional Hours with the Bible

J. R. Miller, 1912

Volume 3.

Gleanings from the PSALMS

PREFACE

The Book of Psalms is wonderfully rich in devotional matter. It would be easy to extend the one volume to many. The few readings that are given, are without critical notes of any kind and are altogether of a practical and devotional nature. They are given in the hope that they may help in the enrichment of the spiritual life of those who shall read them.

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The Way of the Righteous

Psalm 1

"Blessed is the man who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked or stand in the way of sinners or sit in the seat of mockers. But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night. He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers. Not so the wicked! They are like chaff that the wind blows away. Therefore the wicked will not stand in the judgment, nor sinners in the assembly of the righteous. For the LORD watches over the way of the righteous, but the way of the wicked will perish."

Marvin Vincent has written a delightful book on certain of the Psalms, which he has happily called "Gates into the Psalm Country." It is pleasant to notice that the gate into the whole Psalm country, the very first word in the Book of Psalms, is the word "Blessed." All who enter this wonderful enclosure are blessed. It is interesting to note also that our Lord's first sermon, the Sermon on the Mount, begins with the same word "Blessed"--the gate into the Gospel country. This country is the kingdom of heaven, the Father's house, and it abounds with blessings for all who come into it.

The "Blesseds" of the Bible shine as thickly on its pages, as stars shine in the sky. A most interesting and profitable Bible study is to go through the Scriptures to find the passages which tell who are the "blessed" ones. It is pleasant to remember that the last glimpse this world had of Jesus--that He was in the attitude of blessing. He had His hands stretched out over His disciples on ascension day, blessing them, when He began to ascend. Ever since that moment, blessings have been raining down from those pierced hands upon a sorrowing earth!

The "Blessed" of the first Psalm belongs to the godly man. In what his blessedness consists, we are told in several particulars.

First, we learn what kind of man he is NOT: "Blessed is the man that walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor stands in the way of sinners, nor sits in the seat of the scornful." It is well for us to know the things we ought not to do. The Decalogue consists chiefly of "You shall nots."

The three clauses of this verse stand like three angels at the entrance of paths that lead to danger, to turn us from them. The Bible "Do nots" and "Shall nots" are all friendly. If they prohibit certain things--it is because those things are not good for us, and would harm us.

Druggists write "Poison!" on bottles and packages which contain substances or mixtures which it would do us injury to use. God takes care to warn us of things that would hurt us. He says, "There is death in that!" "There is sorrow in this!" "This path leads to ruin!" We are wise if we always pay most careful heed to these divine warnings. We are very foolish if we disregard them, saying, "I am not afraid," and then press on in the way of peril.

It is interesting to notice the progression in sin indicated in the three clauses of this verse. First, a man walks in the counsel of the wicked, then soon you see him standing in the way of sinners, and a little later he is sitting among those who scoff--open sinners.

There is another progress in the words "counsel," "way," "seat".

And there is still a third progression in the words "wicked," "sinners," "scornful."

The beginnings of evil-doing are usually small. A man follows some wrong counsel first. He does things he knows to be contrary to God's will. Later he is standing where evil men gather. Still later he is seen taking his seat in the company of the openly profane, and associating with them. First, he listens to bad advice; next, he goes in bad ways; third, he is in bad company--gone clean over to the enemy!

The place to shut the gates of evil--is at the entrance. The only true safety is in avoiding the beginnings. It is hard to stop--when one has started. Every time we repeat some evil thing, it becomes easier to do it again, and still easier with each repetition, until a habit is formed, until the evil has wrought itself into the life and becomes ingrained, a part of it. Good habits are formed in the same way. Do beautiful things, and they will fashion themselves into a beautiful character. Not doing evil things--is one way to be godly.

But negatives are not enough. One may be free from vices--and yet not be godly. Not sowing tares may keep the ground from being infested with weeds--but it will not fill the field with wheat. Not speaking angry words may keep our language free from bitterness, falsehood, impurity--but silences are not enough. We must keep out the weeds--and then plant our garden with flowers. We must cease to do evil--and then learn to do good. We must refrain from angry and all wrong words--and then fill our speech with gentleness, kindness, and cheering words. We must be godly, in an active way.

The second verse gives one strong characteristic of the man who is blessed: "But his delight is in the Law of the LORD, and on His Law he meditates day and night." Psalm 1:2

It is not said merely that he obeys the Law of the Lord--but that his delight is in it. He loves to obey it and to meditate upon it. We get a lesson here on the right study of the Bible. Do we love it? Do we delight in reading it? Do we meditate upon it day and night?

Meditation is well-near a lost art. We do not take time to think, to ponder great thoughts. We would rather read newspapers, than meditate in silence on God's Word. It would be a good thing for us to be alone for a season every day, without a book or newspaper in our hands, quietly pondering some portion of the Word of God. This is the kind of Bible study that blesses the life.

A perfumer bought a common earthen jar, and filled it with attar of roses. Soon every particle of the substance of the jar was filled with the rich perfume, and long afterwards, and even when broken, the fragments retained the fragrance. So it is, that a Christian's life becomes filled, saturated with the Word of God--when he loves it and meditates upon it continually. His thoughts, feelings, affections, dispositions, and his whole character, become colored and imbued with the spirit of the Holy Word.

There is in the third verse, a beautiful picture of the life of the godly man: "And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatever he does shall prosper."

"Like a tree." We think of the beauty of a tree, for one thing, and a Christian life is beautiful. A tree consists of two parts--a root; and then the trunk, branches and foliage. The root is unseen, hidden away in the ground, and is not admired; yet it is essential. It holds the tree firmly in its place, and it nourishes it. There is also a hidden, an unseen part of a Christian life. The world does not see when you bow in prayer, when you meditate in secret. It does not see your inner heart-life of faith and love. Yet as the root is essential to the tree, so is this unseen life, essential to the Christian. The other part of the tree is the trunk, with its branches and foliage. This is what people see. Here is where the beauty is. Every Christian life has also a visible part--the character, the conduct, the acts.

"Like a tree planted." There is a suggestion here of culture and care. The tree is planted by someone . Jesus said, "My Father is the gardener;" God plants each Christian life. We are therefore in the right place, since our Father has put us into it. People sometimes say that if they had circumstances different from those they have, if they had less trial, and more ease--that they could be better Christians. But if God plants us--He has not placed us wrongly, and we can grow just where we are--into beauty and fruitfulness. Some trees are made for warm climates, some for cold, and each must have its own zone. Just so, some Christians need severe experiences, and some need gentle skies. God knows best where to plant His trees--and where to place His children.

"Planted by the streams of water." Trees need water; they cannot live without it. God's people must have grace to nourish them. Some trees grow in bare, dreary places, far from flowing streams, and we wonder how any water gets to them. But wherever a tree grows, water gets to its roots in some way, through some underground rills, and nourishes it.

We sometimes see people who appear to have no joy, no blessing. Their lives seem full of trouble. Yet they are happy and grow beautifully in Christian life. Here is one who lives and works among wicked people, yet lives sweetly and honors God. Here is one who is sick for years, shut away from privileges, suffering continually. Yet his face shines with the light of peace, and he is patient and joyful. God sends streams of grace and love to the roots of these lives, and blesses them. Wherever God plants us He will nourish us, and we can live beautifully.

"That brings forth his fruit in his season." Fruit is the purpose of existence in a tree. If it bear not fruit it is cut down and cast into the fire. Jesus makes it very emphatic that fruit is the test of discipleship. What is fruit? In one of his epistles, Paul shows us a cluster of fruits. "The fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance." These are fruits of character. Christian services are also fruits. The acts of kindness we perform, the words of love and cheer we speak, plant seeds where they will grow into beautiful things.

What is the purpose of fruit? It is not merely to decorate the tree. It is not hung on the branches merely to be ornamental. Fruit is to be eaten, to feed the hunger of men. The test of a Christian life, therefore, is that by its sympathy, love, comfort, helpfulness, cheer, influence, and service in all ways--it is a blessing to others, feeds their heart hunger, makes them happier, stronger, better.

Two little words in the clause are important--"his fruit." Every tree bears its own fruit; every Christian life is designed to be a blessing in its own particular way. Trying to do what somebody else does--is the weakness of many good people. If we could all be content to do good in our own way--we would do the most possible for Christ and for the world.

"In his season." Each season has its own fruits. So it is in life. The forms of usefulness and helpfulness continually vary. Each period of a good life also has its own particular fruit--youth, manhood, old age. Some fruits do not ripen until frost comes. In many lives there are fruits that come to ripeness only in sorrow.

"Whose leaf does not wither." The unwithering leaf is another feature of the tree that here stands as a picture of a godly life. There are some whose activity depends entirely upon their circumstances. When all things go well with them, they are happy--but when trouble comes they are down in the depths. In revival times they are all aglow with fervor--but in hot summer days, or in times of spiritual inactivity they become lethargic and indolent. But the ideal Christian is always trustful and at peace, and abounding in the work of the Lord.

"Whatever he does shall prosper." Success is the outcome. Not always in the earthly sense, for oftentimes the best men fail in their worldly plans and efforts. But there is a prosperity that goes on, even in worldly failure. A man's business may be wrecked--and he himself may come out unharmed, made holier and better by the disaster. If we always live right, our souls shall prosper--whatever may become of our earthly interests.

Another picture, a picture of the WICKED man, is shown in the fourth verse. He is compared to chaff: "The ungodly are not so: but are like the chaff which the wind drives away." The contrast between a fruitful tree and chaff, is very striking. Chaff is worthless. It has no beauty. It feeds no hunger. Its destiny is to be separated from the wheat and driven away before the wind. The wicked are "like the chaff."

In the last verses of the Psalm, we have the end of the wicked. They "shall not stand in the judgment." The righteous are the object of God's watchful, loving care. The way of the wicked leads to eternal destruction!

The King in Zion

Psalm 2

"Why do the nations conspire and the peoples plot in vain? The kings of the earth take their stand and the rulers gather together against the LORD and against his Anointed One. "Let us break their chains," they say, "and throw off their fetters." The One enthroned in heaven laughs; the Lord scoffs at them. Then he rebukes them in his anger and terrifies them in his wrath, saying, "I have installed my King on Zion, my holy hill." I will proclaim the decree of the LORD: He said to me, "You are my Son; today I have become your Father. Ask of me, and I will make the nations your inheritance, the ends of the earth your possession. You will rule them with an iron scepter; you will dash them to pieces like pottery." Therefore, you kings, be wise; be warned, you rulers of the earth. Serve the LORD with fear and rejoice with

trembling. Kiss the Son, lest he be angry and you be destroyed in your way, for his wrath can flare up in a moment. Blessed are all who take refuge in him."

"Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing? The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together, against the LORD, and against his anointed."

Men have always been ready to conspire against God. They think of Him as like themselves, as one they can oppose, one whose authority they can reject. To us, with our thought of God as the glorious King of all the world, opposition to Him is the worst folly. What can puny man do to resist God's power, or to interfere with His sway? Yet evermore does heaven behold the spectacle described in the opening of this Psalm: "Why do the heathen rage, and the people imagine a vain thing?"

There are two possible meanings in this "Why?" It may suggest the folly of such opposition. Or it may indicate the enormity of it. It does seem strange that the world so hates God. What has He ever done to hurt anyone? If He were a cruel despot, like many of earth's own kings--it would not be strange if men hated Him. If He were a Nero, or a Caligula, or a Diocletian, or a Napoleon, it would not be surprising if the nations dreaded Him and if His name aroused rage. But never was there any other king so gentle, so loving.

The prophet foretold the reign of the Messiah as most kindly and gracious. He would not break a bruised reed. He would not lift up His voice in the street. He would not strive nor cry out. He comes not to destroy men's lives--but to save them. His reign is one of love.

A glance over the pages of the Gospels will show us how He fulfilled the Messianic prediction. He went about doing good, healing all manner of sickness, comforting sorrow. The "program of Christianity," the work of Christ in this world, is mapped out in these words of the prophet Isaiah: "He has sent me to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim freedom for the captives and release from darkness for the prisoners, to proclaim the year of the LORD's favor and the day of vengeance of our God, to comfort all who mourn, and provide for those who grieve in Zion-- to bestow on them a crown of beauty instead of ashes, the oil of gladness instead of mourning, and a garment of praise instead of a spirit of despair."

Does it not seem strange, therefore, that the mention of the name of Christ causes such rage among the nations and peoples of the world? Why do the people not love Him? Why does the gentleness of His reign not win men to loyalty and affection? What is there in Him--that makes the world dislike Him? Yet from the day He came into the world unto the present--He has been rejected and despised. When Herod heard of the birth of the King--he trembled with anger and slew all the infants of the town in which He was said to be, in hope of destroying the hated One.

All through His life it was the same. He did nothing but good, and yet the rulers ceased not to plot against Him, until at last they nailed Him to the cross! It is not otherwise today. The gospel breathes only love, and yet it is met by many with hate, scorn, and rage. Why is it? Why do the nations rage? "Let us break their bands asunder, and cast away their cords from us." The words tell of revolt. They will defy His rule and cut themselves off from obedience to Him. They treat Him as if His rule were cruel and inhuman.

"He who sits in the heavens shall laugh! The Lord shall have them in derision." The picture of God sitting on His throne in heaven, laughing at man's puny efforts to frustrate His plans--is a very striking one. It suggests to us the calm quiet of God--in the face of men's opposition. Can a man put up his hand and arrest the lightning bolt as it flies athwart the sky? Can he stand beside the sea and with his puny arm hurl

back the waves that come rolling from the great deep? And can man resist omnipotence or defeat the divine purpose?

Look at the outcome of Herod's plot to kill the infant Jesus. What came of the rage of the Jewish rulers who finally nailed Jesus on the cross? It only carried out God's counsel and exalted Him to be a Prince and a Savior. So always, persecution has but advanced Christianity, not destroying it, not hindering its progress. The rage of infidels has resulted in strengthening what they sought to destroy. We need not be afraid, when the enemies of Christ seem to triumph. God is not disturbed on His throne. His plans go on in unbroken fulfillment. He laughs at men's plots and schemes against Him.

"Ask of me, and I shall give you the heathen for your inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for your possession." It is a suggestive thought that even this Son of God, exalted on His throne, must ask for the inheritance that was promised to Him.

We get the lesson--that no blessing comes to us--but through our own prayer. The clearest, plainest promises must be taken up and claimed. They are checks which must be presented at the bank, before payment will be made. Promises do not mean anything to us--until they are believed and then pleaded before God.

We know that Christ claimed the Father's promise. Before He ascended He said, "All power is given unto me in heaven and in earth." Paul tells us that having humbled Himself to death on the cross, God has also exalted Him and given Him a name which is above every name, that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow and every tongue confess that Christ is Lord.

So all nations are Christ's. He is the rightful King of all lands. This ought to be an encouraging truth for all missionaries, and in all missionary work. India and China and Africa and the islands of the sea belong to Christ. They have been given to Him by His Father. In going into those lands and preaching the gospel, the missionary is but claiming Christ's own for Him. So in offering Christ to any man and asking him to accept Him as Savior and Lord, we are only asking one of Christ's rightful subjects to own his allegiance, to receive his true King.

This word has also its glorious assurance of the success of Christ's kingdom on the earth. God will surely give Him the nations for His inheritance, and the uttermost parts of the earth for His possession, because He has promised to do so. Not a Word of God can ever be broken. Heaven and earth may pass away--but not the smallest of God's Words shall ever pass away.

"Kiss the Son, lest he be angry--and you perish from the way, when his wrath is kindled but a little. Blessed are all those who put their trust in him." The only true and wise thing to do--is to submit in love and reverence to this glorious King. Those who will not yield to Him, shall be broken with a rod of iron. Gentle as He is, He is also just. Defiance of Christ can have only one outcome. It can end only in the utter destruction of those who lift up their hands in rebellion. Easily as a potter's vessel is dashed in pieces when hurled against the rock--shall the proudest human strength be crushed and destroyed by the power of Christ!

Submission, therefore, to this heaven-ordained King--is the only wise course for anyone. Submission brings life and great gladness. "Blessed are all those who put their trust in him." He makes them joint-heirs with Him. They sit with Him on His throne. They enjoy all the privileges of sonship. "All are yours; and you are Christ's; and Christ is God's." We should all therefore submit to Christ, the Son of God, and become

His subjects.

Living up to Our Prayers

Psalm 5:3

"My voice shall you hear in the morning, O Lord; in the morning will I direct my prayer unto you--and will look up."

"In the morning will I direct my prayer unto you--and will look up." That is, he would watch to see the answer coming. One interesting illustration of this watching for the answer to prayer--is in the case of Elijah's prayer for rain. The prophet bowed himself on the ground, and began to pray. Then he sent his servant up to the crest of the mountain to look out toward the sea, to keep watch, and tell him what he saw. The servant came back and said he saw nothing. Seven times did Elijah pray, each time bidding the servant to go to the mountain-top to look. At length the servant reported that he saw a little cloud as small as a man's hand coming up out of the sea. The prayer was answered. The prophet believed that rain would come when he prayed, and he looked up and watched for the rising of the cloud, until it appeared. That is the way we should always pray. "In the morning will I order my prayer unto you--and I will keep watch."

Must we not confess that oftentimes when we pray--we never think again of our requests, and would be greatly surprised if what we asked for, would come to us? But if we really desire the things we ask for, we will expect them and will eagerly watch for their coming. Our prayers should be part of our life. They should rule and influence all our living. Always when we pray--we should look up, expecting to receive what we have asked for.

There are some of our prayers which if answered, will work deep and radical changes in our lives. If we tried seriously to live up to them, we would be rising every day into higher spiritual altitudes. We pray to be made unselfish. Do we mean it! Do we really want to become unselfish? If we put ourselves under discipline, to grow into unselfishness, we would constantly find a restraining hand upon our desires and dispositions, upon our conduct and acts, and would feel in our hearts evermore an impulse toward love and all serving of others. "Love seeks not its own." It lives for others. It forgets self. "As I have loved you, that you also love one another," is the Master's statement of the law of Christian life.

We pray to be made unselfish. Dare we let the prayer be answered? It would change many things in our conduct, in our treatment of others. It would set us in new relations to all about us. It would check in us the crafty desire, so common in dealing with men, to get the better of the other man in all transactions, to have the best place. What would happen in our lives--if these prayers would be answered?

We pray to be made patient. If we are sincere, and then begin to live up to our prayer, what will the effect be? We shall find our tongues checked and restrained again and again, on the very edge of angry outbursts, when about to speak unadvisedly. We shall have our harsh and bitter feelings softened continually, by an irresistible influence toward quietness and gentleness. If our prayer to be made patient were to be answered at once, by one mighty access of grace in our hearts, what a change it would make in us!

There is no prayer that most Christians breathe out to God oftener than that they be made like Christ. But if we really wish to be transformed into Christ's likeness, the desire will burn like a fire in us, cleansing and

purifying us, and the new life will become so overmastering in us--that it will possess us body and soul, until Christ shall indeed live in us! If while we pray to be made like our Master--we live up to our prayer, old things in us will pass away and all things will become new.

The prayer will affect every phase of our behavior and conduct. It will hold before us continually the image of Christ and will keep ever full and clear in our vision--a new standard of thought, of feeling, of desire, of act and word. It will keep us asking all the while such questions as these: "How would Jesus answer this question about duty? How would Jesus treat this man who has been so unkind to me? What would Jesus do if He were here today, just where I am?" When we pray to be made like our Master, are we truly willing to have all in us that is unlike Him, taken out; and all His beauty now lacking in us, wrought in us!

Our Lord has given us some specific and very definite instructions concerning praying and living. For example, He teaches us that if we would have our own sins forgiven, we must forgive those who have sinned against us. The prayer runs, "Forgive us our sins--as we forgive those who sin against us." There is no mistaking the meaning of this petition. Each time we sin and make confession, asking God to forgive us--it commits us to an act toward others, which we ask God to perform toward us. We solemnly pledge ourselves to show the same mercy to our fellow men, which we beseech God to show to us. Yesterday someone wronged us, injured us, treated us unkindly, did something which stung us, hurt us. Last night we looked back over our day and it was blotted and stained. We prayed God to forgive us all these wrong things. He is very merciful and loves to forgive His children. But after our prayer--we still kept in our hearts the bitter feelings toward the man who wronged us yesterday--the resentment, the unforgiveness.

Jesus tells us very plainly what we should do when praying, if we discover a wrong feeling in our heart, or if in the bright light we remember something we have done that was not right. He is exhorting against anger in any form, telling us in words that should startle us if we are indulging in any harsh feelings against any other--that hatred, bitterness, and contempt of others are violations of the commandment, "You shall not kill." Then He illustrates His meaning by an example: "Therefore if you bring your gift to the altar, and there remember that your brother has anything against you; leave there your gift before the altar, and go your way; first be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift."

When we approach God's altar a glorious light shines upon us, the light of the divine Presence. If in this intense brightness we remember that today or yesterday we did something to another that was not right, that we were unjust to him, that we wronged or injured him, we should seek to get right with our brother before we go any farther with our worship. In order to do this--it may sometimes be necessary for us even to interrupt our devotion and go away and confess what we have done and obtain forgiveness, before we can finish our worship.

An old Psalm writer says, "If I regard iniquity in my heart--the Lord will not hear." So we really cannot go on with our prayer if there are bitter feelings in our heart. We must get these out--before we can find an open way to God for ourselves. We must get right with God--before we can be right with men. "First be reconciled to your brother, and then come and offer your gift." This might stop the easy flow of our words sometimes, while we go out to get something right which we see in God's presence to be wrong. But it would save us from some of the mockeries of prayer which now mar our worship.

Take another phase of the subject. "In the morning will I order my prayer unto you, and will keep watch." There are prayers which we cannot finish on our knees. They can be ended only in some field of duty. When the Hebrews were leaving Egypt, they seemed to have been caught in a trap beside the Red Sea.

Moses was lying on his face, crying to God for deliverance. The Lord called to him, "Why are you crying unto me? Speak unto the children of Israel, that they go forward." Clearly, duty, for Moses, that moment, was not to stay on his knees, crying to God for deliverance. He must rise and lead the people forward.

There are many illustrations. Your neighbor is in some trouble. You hear of it, and being a believer in prayer, you go to your place of devotion and plead that God would send him the help he needs. But almost certainly, prayer is not the duty of the hour. Rather, it is to rise from your knees and go to your neighbor and with your own hands do for him what he needs to have done. If a friend of yours is taken suddenly ill, or is injured in an accident, your duty probably is not to go to your closet and spend a season in prayer for him--but to hasten for a physician.

It is our duty to pray always, to take everything to God. But usually prayer is not all our duty. Ofttimes, we must go out to answer our own prayers. There is too much selfish praying--praying only for ourselves. Such prayers are not heard. The Lord's Prayer teaches us that we must include all men in our supplications. Love never ends with ourselves, nor does prayer. We must pray for others, and if we pray for our neighbors, we must go forth to answer their cries for help. While we pray for those in distress, we must open our hand toward those who need.

It is the weakness of many people's prayers--that they end with their utterance. We may think we are keeping watch for the answers--but we are only idly waiting for God to do--what He is waiting for us to do! We ask God to give bread to the hungry and drink to the thirsty, not remembering that the Master will say, "For I was hungry and you gave Me nothing to eat; I was thirsty and you gave Me nothing to drink; I was a stranger and you did not take Me in; I was naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not take care of Me." Prayer for the relief of others in distress--must be followed at once by personal ministries of love. We are to pray and then to hasten out, filled with the Spirit, to do the work that needs to be done.

Take another phase of the lesson. All praying has for its highest reach, its divinest attainment, perfect submission to the will of God. Every true prayer we make must end with "not my will--but Yours, be done." Many prayers therefore never become prayers, because they never become acquiescent in God's will. Before we can look up and see the answers coming, we must learn the great lesson of self-surrender. We know not what to pray for as we ought. We do not know what is best for ourselves. Only when we are ready to commit all things that concern us into the hands of God, and let Him order our ways--are we sure that they will be well-ordered. When we are ready to pray thus, we are ready to look up and watch for the answer which God will give.

Such consecration of the will is the supremest reach of faith and life. When we have come to this point we can always look up and know that the answer will come. Some things we hoped for may not come--but if not, then something better will come instead.

Show Me the Path

Psalm 16:11

"You will show me the path of life. In your presence is fullness of joy; at your right hand there are pleasures for evermore!"

It is a wonderfully sweet song that sings all through this Psalm. It begins with fleeing to God for refuge, and ends with standing at God's right hand in glory at last! One strain of this song is enough for our present meditation. "You will show me the path of life."

The word is singular--"me". Does the great God actually give thought to an individual life! We may believe that He directs the career of certain great men, whose lives are very important in the world; but does He show His common people the way? He feeds the sparrows. He clothes the lilies. He calls the stars by their names. Then the Bible is full of illustrations of God's interest in individuals. The Shepherd Psalm has it: "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want." "He leads me . . ." Then we have it here. "You will show me the path."

The first thing, if we would have divine guidance, is to realize our need of it. Some people do not. They think they can find the way themselves. They never pray, "Show me the way!"

Here is an experience from Switzerland: Two men, one a military officer from Zurich, undertook the ascent of one of the Alps. They started off without guides, ropes, or any other appliances for safety. Their conduct attracted attention, as they were foolhardy, and the progress of the tourists was watched by many at the hotel, through binoculars. Soon they were seen to be in trouble, wandering aimlessly over the ice. In a little while one of the men disappeared, and not long afterwards the other one was lost to sight. A search party went out and it was discovered that the first man had suddenly fallen into a crevice, hundreds of feet deep. A guide was lowered and brought up his dead body. The other had a severe fall--but, more fortunate than his companion, he fell into the snow and was able to crawl out and make his way to the hospice, where he was found in an unconscious state.

It is foolhardy to try to climb the Alps without a guide. It is far more perilous to try to go through this world without a guide. Many people do. Jesus asked His disciples to follow Him--but there was one who would not follow, and he perished, "the son of perdition". He "went to his own place." If we would find the way--we must be conscious of our need of guidance and must walk obediently in the path the Guide marks out for us.

If we would have God show us the path--we must accept His guidance and trust it. Sometimes we grow impatient of God's leading because He seems to take us only along mundane ways and gives us only commonplace things to do. We think we could do more good and make more of our life--if we could get out into a wider sphere and have grander things to do. Some people even chafe and fret, and spoil the lowly work that is given them to do, in their discontent with it, and their desire for some larger place and some more conspicuous work. The youth of Jesus teaches us that the truest and divinest life is the one that in its place, high or low--does best the will of God.

The life of the carpenter's apprentice--is as holy as the ministry of a radiant angel close to God's throne. God's will for us is always sacred. When we say, "You will show me the path of life," we are not to expect that God will show us some other place to live and work--than that in which we are now living and working. Most likely He will leave us just where we are, only calling us to do our work better than ever before, to do it in a new way, with a new spirit, with a new warmth of heart.

The work of the present--is always the duty to which God calls us. The way to be ready for the call to a wider field and to a more important work--is to more than fill the place in which we are now serving, and to do our present duty a little better than we are required to do it. After eighteen years of work in His lowly place as carpenter's apprentice and carpenter, Jesus was led away to the wider field and the greater work.

When we have done all the will of God where we are now--He will show us the path to something higher.

Again, the path which will be shown to us--may not always be an easy one. It is the path of life--but the way of life oftentimes leads through pain. The baby begins its life in a cry, and in some form or other we suffer unto the end. The old belief was that all pain was because of a person's particular sin. If a man suffered greatly, his neighbor thought he must be a wicked man. There is some trouble which is the fruit of sin. We cannot do wrong--and escape suffering. The suffering is the revolt of your soul against the wrongdoing. It is the mercy of God trying to save you. But there is another kind of suffering, which tells of spiritual growth. The best things in Christian character, grow out of pain and affliction.

Sometimes there is inscrutable mystery in the trial through which good people are led. A few years ago a happy young couple came from the marriage altar. They were full of hope and joy. Their home was bright with love. A year later a baby came. It was welcomed by the young parents with great gladness. They gave the little one to God. From the beginning, however, the child was a sufferer. All its short years it has been sick. The young parents have done all that self-sacrificing love could do, all that money could do, in the hope that the little one would recover. The best physicians have been consulted and have exhausted their skill in vain efforts to cure the child. But at three and a half years, when other children are so bright, so beautiful, such centers of gladness and happiness in their homes--this little one is like a baby still in her helplessness, not seeing the faces that bend over her in passionate love, not responding to the caresses and tendernesses which are lavished upon her. The child was taken recently to one of the best physicians in the land. After careful examination, the doctor's decision was that the case was absolutely hopeless. Until that moment, the mother had still hoped that her child might some time be cured. Now she understood that however long the little one may stay with her--she will never be any better.

"What shall I do?" was the mother's question the other evening when her pastor listened to the story of the visit to the great doctor. "What can we do? What ought we to do?" she asked. What comfort can the minister give to such mothers and fathers as these?

Yes, it is hard to look upon the child's condition, so pathetic, so pitiful, and to remember the great doctor's words: "Absolutely hopeless. She never will be any better." Is there any comfort! Can this mother say, "You will show me the path of life"? Is this experience of suffering, part of that path? Does God know about the long struggle? Has He heard the countless prayers that have gone up from this home for the baby's recovery? Does He know what the doctor said the other day? Yes, He knows all. Has He, then, no power to do anything? Yes, He has all power. Why, then, has He not cured this child? Why does He allow the agony to continue in the heart of the mother?

We may not try to answer. We do not know God's reasons. Yet this we know--It is all right! God is love--God is never unkind. What good can possibly come from this child's condition and from its continuation year after year? We do not know. But God knows.

Perhaps it is for the sake of the mother and father, who are being led through these years of anguish, disappointment, and bitter sorrow, and will be cleansed and transfigured. Many people are sufferers--for others' sakes. At least we know that these young parents are receiving a wonderful training in unselfishness, in gentleness, in patience, in trust. Perhaps all this sore experience in their child is to make them holier. The disciples asked the Master whose sin it was--the blind man's or his parents', that he was born blind. Neither! "No one's sin," Jesus replied, "but that the works of God should be made manifest in him." This blindness gave Jesus the opportunity to do a work of mercy. May it not be that this child's

condition finds its justification in the ministry of love it has called out in the mother and the father? It has been a wonderful training and education for them. They are being prepared for a blessed service to other suffering ones. Perhaps in the next life, they will learn that they owe to their feeble, blind child's long and painful suffering much of what they shall then wear of the beauty of the likeness of Christ.

In one of the famous lace shops of Brussels, there are certain rooms devoted to the spinning of the finest and most delicate lace patterns. These rooms are altogether dark, except for the light from one very small window, which falls directly upon the pattern. There is only one spinner in the room, and he sits where the narrow stream of light falls upon the threads that he is weaving. "Thus," we are told by our guide, "do we secure our choicest products. Lace is always more delicately and beautifully woven when the worker himself is in the dark and only his pattern is in the light."

May it not be the same with us in our weaving? Sometimes it is very dark. We cannot understand what we are doing. We are not able to discover any beauty, any possible good in our experience. Yet if only we are faithful, fail not, and faint not--we shall some day know that the most exquisite work of our life was done in those very days. If you are in darkness because of some strange, mysterious providence, let nothing make you afraid. Simply go on in faith and love, never doubting, not even asking why, bearing your pain and learning to sing while you suffer. God is watching--and He will bring good and beauty out of all your pain and tears!

Notice, again, that it is "the path of life" which God will show us. He never shows us any other path. God's paths are all right paths, paths of holiness. If you are prompted to go in some evil way--you may be sure it is not God that is leading. He leads you as far as He can--away from the evil. He leads in the path of life. It may be steep and rough--but the end will be so blessed, so glorious, that in its joy--you will forget the briars and thorns on the way!

"You will show me the path of life." There are days when you do not know what to do. You have perplexities, doubts, uncertainties. You lie awake half the night wondering what you ought to do. Something has gone wrong in your affairs, in your relations with a friend, in your home life. Or one near to you is suffering and you need help--but do not know what to do. Your days are full of questions. Do you know that there is One who is infinitely wise, never makes a mistake, nor misleads anyone, who wants to show you the way, no matter what the experience is? Instead of vexing yourself, just go to Him and say, "Show me the path!" and He will.

There is something else. It is told of Wenceslaus, King of Bohemia, that he was one night going to prayer in a distant church, barefoot, over the snow and ice, and his servant, Podavivus, following him, imitating his master's devotion, waxed numb and faint. "Follow me," said the king, "and set your feet in the prints of mine." The master's words encouraged the servant and he followed on.

That is what our Master says when we grow weary in the hard way, when the thorns pierce our feet, or when the path grows rough or steep. "Follow me. Put your feet into my shoe-prints. It is but a little way home!"

"You will show me the path of life." There is a path on which our Master wants us to walk. He has it all down among His purposes--where He wants us to go, what He wants us to do, the people He wants us to help. The path leads at last to the door of the Father's house! Would it not be a sad thing if you should miss the way? Well, you will surely miss it and get lost in the dreadful tangles unless you ask Christ to show you the path. Like a little child, look up into the face of the Master and say, "Show me the path of

life!" and He will.

God's Works and Word

Psalm 19:1-2, 7-8

"The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands.

Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge."

"The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul.

The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple.

The precepts of the LORD are right, giving joy to the heart.

The commands of the LORD are radiant, giving light to the eyes."

We have two Bibles. One is written on the pages of nature--and the other on the pages of the inspired Word. In this Psalm, we have the summaries of the teaching of both.

In the earlier portion, the poet tells us about the teachings of the heavens: "The heavens declare the glory of God; the skies proclaim the work of his hands. Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge." And if in David's days God's glory was declared in the heavens, how much more now, since the telescope has revealed such marvelous things about the extent of the starry world that were not known then! Only remember that nearly all the stars we see are suns, probably centers of systems of planets; and that those we see, are but the merest fraction of the actual number--only those that our telescopes can bring into view. The truth is, that there are millions of suns in the heavens, some of them so far from us that it takes thousands of years for light to come from them to us.

Anyone who has given even a little attention to the study of astronomy is prepared to appreciate the thought of this verse. The heavens declare the glory of God. Think what glories of the night there are--which the day hides! If our sun never set--we would never see the splendors of the heavens. A poet imagines our first parent watching the sun nearing the horizon the evening of his first day. He was in great terror as he thought of the sun sinking away--and leaving the world in darkness! But when the orb of day disappeared quietly, lo! a new universe had burst upon his vision. Night revealed far more than it hid!

Think of the power that called into being, such a multitude of worlds, and that sustains them age after age. Think of the wisdom that made such a universe of flying suns, planets, and comets, so perfectly adjusting their orbits and their motions--that they never clash in their orbits, that they move age after age, so that perfect harmony prevails among the spheres. Science, instead of being an enemy of religion, is its best friend. The more we learn of the marvelous things of God's world, the more do we see, for which to praise and adore the divine Maker and Sustainer.

This is true of all things in nature. There is more beauty in a single little flower--than in the finest work of art ever fashioned by human hand! From the minutest insects to the vast stars, every department of the universe declares the wisdom, the power, the goodness, the faithfulness of God. We ought to study nature more; it is one of God's books.

"Day after day they pour forth speech; night after night they display knowledge." Evermore, nature speaks of God. DAY has its glories, when in the sunshine we see the beauties of field, garden, mountain, valley, forest, river, flower, and plant. Then NIGHT comes, and instead of making desolation in the darkness, it unveils to us its marvelous splendor of sky and stars. Creation widens then, in man's view, and to a devout mind--everything speaks of God! There are spiritual revealings in all nature's pages--to him who has eyes.

Then the Psalm passes from the teachings in nature--to the revealings of the divine Word. The works of God declare His glory--but not His will. For this--we turn to His Word. We never could learn by study the stars, the flowers, or the rocks--how we ought to live; what is right and what is wrong, what will please God or displease Him. We never could learn what God Himself is, what His attributes are, how He feels toward us. We may learn from His works--that He is great, powerful, wise, unchanging, good; but we could not learn from the stars--that He loves us with a tender, personal affection, that He is merciful and gracious. We never could find a gospel of salvation for lost sinners--in the works of God. How thankful we should be for His Word, which tells us all these things!

"The law of the LORD is perfect, reviving the soul.

The statutes of the LORD are trustworthy, making wise the simple.

The precepts of the LORD are right, giving joy to the heart.

The commands of the LORD are radiant, giving light to the eyes."

Here we have His law, revealed by His own Spirit. It teaches us how to live. It is a perfect law; not only perfect in that it is without flaw--but also in that it is complete as a revelation, containing all we need to know to be saved--and to reach the full stature of Christian men and women. We may turn to the Word of the Lord with every question of duty--and we shall always find the right answer!

Then, it is a beautiful statement also, of the ministry of the Word which we have. It revives the soul. Every human soul needs to be revived. It is ruined by sin; its beauty is tarnished, its grandeur is destroyed. The Word of God is able to build it up, to transform it, to revive the lost splendor, to bring back again the defaced image of God. We know the power the Word of God has over human lives. It first shows men that they are condemned and lost--as it holds up before them the requirements of the divine law. Next, it shows them the cross with its salvation for the guilty. Then it declares to them the will of God by which they are to learn to fashion their lives. As they begin to obey this holy will, it leads them on higher and higher, until they enter heaven's gates and wear the likeness of Christ! Thus The Word revives the soul, transforming it into the likeness of God, which sin had defaced.

"The precepts of the LORD are right, giving joy to the heart." Many people think that a godly life is gloomy. They suppose that Christians have no joy. They have to deny themselves many pleasures. They cannot have the 'good times' worldly people have. They have to live strictly. They have to follow conscience in all things. It must be very hard. Life must be dreary and joyless to them.

So the people talk, who boast of being free from the restraints of God's Word, and who imagine that they themselves have the happiest times possible. But, as a matter of fact, the happiest people in this world--are those who are keeping God's commandments. Who ever heard of sin giving true joy to the heart? Disobedience never made anyone happy; but obedience always gives peace.

There are fresh-water springs in the sea, which always pour out sweet water beneath the brackish tides. So in the obedient heart, under all self-denials, there is a spring of joy ever flowing. The Christian has sorrows--but he has comforts which turn his sorrows into joy. He practices self-denials, and lives under the restraints of holiness--but he has rewards which far more than compensate for the cost of his service to Christ.

"Moreover by them is your servant warned." The Bible flames with 'red lights'. Every point of danger is marked. Every perilous path has its lamp hung up, warning us not to enter it. We are warned against the Devil and his helpers. We are warned against bad companions, against false teachers, against all wrong courses.

"Who can understand his errors? Cleanse me from secret faults." There are different kinds of hidden faults. There are those which we try to hide ourselves, which are done in secret. Then there are those which have not been wrought out in act--sins of thought or imagination, which from lack of opportunity, have never been actually committed.

But the reference here, is to faults or sins which are hidden from ourselves, of which we are not conscious. We all have faults of which we ourselves are not aware. Perhaps other people see them, although we do not. Certainly God sees them. We may be sure at least that there are faults enough in the best of us. Our aim in Christian life should be so high that we shall desire to be cleansed even from all these hidden faults and sins. No fault is so small as to be a trifle, or not to be a blemish in our character. Small faults grow.

We have a beautiful prayer at the close of Psalm 19: "Let the words of my mouth, and the meditation of my heart, be acceptable in Your sight, O Lord, my strength, and my redeemer." There could be no higher standard of life, than is set for us in this prayer.

The conduct may be blameless--while the thoughts are stained with sin. It is easier to keep our acts without fault--than our feelings, our desires, and our affections pure. We may do no outward act of cruelty or unkindness; while our hearts may be full of jealousies, envies, and all selfishness. We are to seek that our thoughts be so white and clean--that they will be acceptable in God's sight.

The prayer covers our words, our thoughts, and our meditations; each a closer test than the one before. It is a great thing to be faultless in speech. But perfect grammar is not enough. Our words may be beautiful and graceful--and yet our thoughts may be full of hypocrisy, of deceit, of all evil! The prayer here is that our thoughts may please God. This is a higher spiritual attainment, than merely faultless words.

Then, a still higher test of life--is our meditation. Meditations are our deepest thoughts, the quiet ponderings of our hearts. Meditation is almost an obsolete word in these times of hustle and bustle. The word belongs rather to the days when men had much time to think--and think deeply. We meditate when we are alone, when we are shut away from others. Our minds then follow the drift of our own desires, dispositions, and imaginations. If our hearts are clean and good--our meditations are pure and holy. But if our hearts are evil and unclean--our meditations are of the same moral quality. Thus, our meditations are an infallible test of our real self. "As a man thinks in his heart--so is he." Proverbs 23:6

This prayer is, therefore, for a life of the highest character--one acceptable to God, not only in words and thoughts--but also in meditations. Such a life everyone who loves God and would be like God--should seek to live!

This prayer is, therefore, for a life of the highest character--one acceptable to God, not only in words and thoughts--but also in meditations. Such a life everyone who loves God and would be like God--should seek to live!

The Way of Safety

Psalm 19:12, 13

"Who can understand his errors? Cleanse me from hidden faults. Keep back your servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not have dominion over me: then shall I be upright, and I shall be innocent from the great transgression."

The first sins mentioned here, are "hidden faults." "Cleanse me from hidden faults." They are secret sins which men commit, and of which they know. They think no one else knows of them. Perhaps their friends do not suspect that they are guilty of any secret sin. They wear the white garment of a fair reputation, while under it are foul spots they would not have anyone see. But such sins are not really secret. No sin can be hidden from God. Hidden sins are open to the eye of God. The worst thing any man can do with his sins--is to try to cover them up, to keep on committing them--but concealing them. The only safe thing to do--is to confess them and put them out of your life. "The one who conceals his sins will not prosper, but whoever confesses and renounces them will find mercy." Proverbs 28:13

There is a Scripture warning which says, "Be sure your sins will find you out." It is not said that your sins will be found out--they may never be in this world--but they will find you out, will plague and torment you, will poison and spoil your life. The only way to deal with sins is to have God cover them, as He does in His forgiveness. Then they never will trouble you again. But no one should ever rest with any secret sin cherished, hidden. Bring it out, repent of it, give it up, and begin a life that is sincere and true. "Cleanse me from secret faults" is a prayer for one who is doing anything secretly--which he would be ashamed to do openly.

But the words in this little prayer do not refer to sins we are committing knowingly, and trying to conceal them from others. They refer to evil things in us of which we ourselves are not aware. "Cleanse me from hidden faults." There are in all of us many hidden evil things. There is in everyone of us a region which our own eyes cannot see, a desert of our life we never have explored, where evil lurks and hides undiscovered. "Who can discern his errors?" We sometimes say, when we hear of one who has done some evil thing, some dark deed of shame, some hideous crime, perhaps, which brands him with dishonor, "I could never do that! There is no possibility of such evil in me."

But we would better not say this. We do not know what hidden possibilities of evil there are in us. You remember what our Lord's disciples replied when the Master said to them, at the last Supper, "One of you shall betray Me." They did not accuse one another. They did not deny vehemently: "It is not me! I could never commit such a crime!" Each of the disciples was repulsed and overwhelmed at the thought of the terrible announcement that one of them should do this vile thing. "Lord, is it I?" Not one of us dares to say, that it is not possible for us to do such wicked things.

We cannot discern the depths of our own hearts--to see what black things are there. Evil lurks in the dark recesses of our nature. It is not enough for us to seek to be cleared of the sins we are aware of, the sins of our habits, the sins of our appetites and passions and lusts, the sins we are conscious of doing. It is necessary for us to have our hearts cleansed of the tendencies to evil that are in us, the evil dispositions of

which we are not conscious. Pride is full of hidden faults. Ambition has its unsuspected perils. Love is the noblest, the divinest of all the qualities of our life. God is love, and to love is Godlike; but love, too, carries in itself possibilities of evil. Think of the envies, the jealousies, the bitterness, the anger, the strife, the hatred, and all the degradation and ruin which may come from love. Home is earth's picture of heaven--but in the sweetest home there are hidden possibilities of peril. We may forget God in the joy and satisfaction of the ideal home. Home's perfections may shut out heaven from our vision.

The hidden, undiscovered evil in our lives, our hearts and in our environments, is most dangerous because it is unsuspected and therefore can not easily be guarded against. There is no prayer that godly people, those who desire to live a pure, clean, white, spotless life, need to pray more continually and more earnestly than this: "Cleanse me from secret faults!"

These hidden faults are our greatest peril. They lie unsuspected in our path. They are enemies that we suppose to be friends, until suddenly they appear with their hurt for our lives. They are tares among the grain, which at first are thought to be wheat, not revealing their true nature until they have done their evil work. We cannot guard ourselves against these hidden evils--we can only ask God to keep us from the harm they may work in us. Every day we should ask God, who sees into our heart's deepest recesses, and knows all the hidden evil in us--to search us and find every flaw and fault, every tendency to wrong, the evil in our motives and desires, the peril lurking in our affections, in our appetites and passions, and to keep guard on us continually.

There is also here a prayer to be kept from presumptuous sins. In the Mosaic law, a difference was made between sins of ignorance, sins not intended; and those committed with knowledge and with a high hand. Atonement was provided for the former--but not for presumptuous sins. The prayer of Jesus on His cross for those who were putting Him to death was, "Father, forgive them; for they know not what they do."

Here the Psalmist prays to be kept from committing presumptuous sins. He knows the danger there is in such sins--and so pleads to be held back from them, that is, from willful, conscious, high-handed sins.

Mark the teaching, too, that these presumptuous sins spring out of the minute hidden faults referred to in the previous words. From hidden, obscure, undiscovered faults--come presumptuous sins. Medical men tell us that some of the gravest ailments, oftentimes come from very slight causes. In the spiritual life the same is true. A slight moral weakness, grows into an evil tendency; and the evil tendency indulged, develops into a loathsome vice; and the loathsome vice, ripens into a presumptuous sin.

Sow a thought--and you will reap an act;

sow an act--and you will reap a habit;

sow a habit--and you will reap a character;

sow character--and you will reap a destiny!

We need to guard against carelessness concerning 'little sins'. We may not suppose that because our life is sweet and pure and innocent, in the joy and gladness of youth, of boyhood or girlhood, there is no danger that ever we can be hurt by sin. We have seen many a beautiful dream of young life spoiled. The hidden fault lurking in the nature--may grow into a presumptuous sin. Young people do not begin to know the peril of little sins, and how soon they may disfigure and destroy all their moral beauty.

There are some people who are always courting danger. Sin seems to have a fascination for them. One of the petitions of the Lord's Prayer is, "Lead us not into temptation." We have to meet temptation oftentimes in our paths of duty. The men cannot go through a day of business without being tempted many times. The women cannot live a day amid their holiest home duties and among their truest friends, without temptation. But we should never dare to meet temptation unless it comes in the path of our divine guidance--unless it must be passed through in duty. To expose ourselves needlessly to temptation, is presumption. Yet there are many who do this. They play with fire--and wonder why they are burned! They dally with "little sins", and end in shameful degradation at the last! They pay the penalty in moral and spiritual ruin.

One of the temptations of Jesus, was to presumption. The tempter suggested that He cast Himself down from a lofty pinnacle into the street, depending upon the divine protection and claiming a divine promise of angel guardianship. But God had never bidden Him do this, and there really was no promise for such uncalled-for risk. "You shall not tempt the Lord your God," answered Jesus. We dare not presume to ask God's help in any venture or risk--unless we have God's command to make the risk. If you needlessly run in the way of contagious disease, if you insist on entering a room where a child is

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