

# Humility and Responsibility

by J.R. Miller

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*The sermon highlights the vital role of humility in recognizing and fulfilling our responsibilities in Christian service.*

**Scripture:** Matthew 25:14

**Topics:** "Humility", "Responsibility"

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## Description

J.R. Miller emphasizes the beauty of humility as a Christian virtue, yet warns against its potential misuse when it leads to neglecting responsibilities. He highlights that many individuals, believing they are being humble, often bury their talents and fail to engage in meaningful service, thus missing opportunities to bless others. Miller argues that true humility should not prevent us from recognizing our abilities and fulfilling our duties in the church and community. He calls for a reevaluation of humility, asserting that it should inspire action rather than inaction, and that every gift, no matter how small, is essential for the work of God. Ultimately, he encourages believers to embrace their responsibilities with confidence, as God equips them for the tasks He sets before them.

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## Transcript

There are some rare and beautiful virtues--in whose shadow, evils lurk. Thus humility is one of the loveliest of the Christian graces. It is an ornament which in the sight of God, is of great price. It is an element of character, which wins the admiration of all the world. It is the highest proof of inner beauty of soul. It is like the fragrance of the lovely violet hidden amid the more conspicuous forms of life, unseen--but filling all the air with its sweet perfume. No grace is more highly commended in the Scriptures.

And yet in its shade, there hide very specious counterfeits of itself. Many a man, while seriously believing that he was exercising an acceptable humility, has buried his talents in the earth, hidden his light under a bushel, and lived a useless life--when he might have been a blessing to many--and passed in the end--to a darkened and crownless future. The virtue and the vice lie so close together and look so much alike--that we are quite apt to be deceived.

We all admire humility. We are pleased to find a man who does not place a high estimate on his own powers, and who modestly shrinks from great responsibilities, even when they are pressed upon him. Amid the almost universal strife for the highest places, it is refreshing to find a man who is not scheming for advancement, and who even declines offered trusts and honors. The exceeding rarity of modesty and humility in men's self-estimates makes these traits shine in very charming beauty when they do appear.

We grow so sick of men's pretensions, their bold pressing of their own virtues and excellences upon our attention, and their eagerness to assume responsibilities for which they have no adequate fitness--that we very easily glide into the other extreme.

It is especially in the sphere of moral and spiritual work, that we are most apt to excuse ourselves from duty, on the plea of humility. Even those who quite eagerly accept important positions in secular life, and perform their duties with confidence and effectiveness, shrink from the simplest exercise of their powers in Christian work. Men who at the bar, or on the judge's bench, can utter most eloquent words in behalf of justice and right--cannot be induced to open their lips in exhortation or prayer in a religious meeting. Ladies who in the parlor and social circle, exercise their conversational powers with wondrous grace and earnestness, cannot sit down beside an anxious inquirer to try to guide a soul to Christ, or read and pray in a sick-room, where their tender voice and gentle sympathy would impart such marvelous help.

Over all the Church, the prevalent tendency upon the part of lay-members is to shrink from the exercise of their gifts in the Master's work. And the plea is unfitness, is lack of ability. Classes go untaught in many a Sunday-school, and there are thousands of children that ought to be gathered in and trained. Meanwhile, there are large numbers of Christian men and women in the churches, with abundant ability for such service--but who shrink from it and try to satisfy their own uneasy consciences by humbly pleading unfitness for the delicate duties. There are urgent necessities for work in every line of Christian enterprise. There are fields that need only reasonable culture to render them fruitful. There are voices calling to duty that break upon our ears every moment, amid the noises of the street. There are cries of human distress and need, that are forever coming to our hearts with their urgent appeals.

But amid all these opportunities for usefulness, these waiting, clamorous duties and these pathetic pleadings for help--gifted men and women sit with folded hands!

It is not because they have no interest in the Master's work, or are insensible to the calls of duty and the cries of distress. It is because they do not believe that they have ability to do the things that need to be done. They think it would be presumption for them, with their weak and unskilled hands, to undertake the duties that solicit them. So they fold their talent away and bury it, and think that they have acted in the line of a beautiful and commendable humility, in modestly declining such important responsibilities. It does not occur to them that they have grievously sinned!

Our humility serves us falsely, when it leads us to shrink from any duty. The plea of unfitness or inability is utterly insufficient to excuse us. It is too startlingly like that offered by the one-talented man in the parable, whose gift was so small that there seemed no use in trying to employ it. The lurid light that the sequel to his story flashes upon us, should arouse us to read the meaning of personal responsibility, and to hasten to employ every shred of a gift that God has bestowed upon us.

The talent may indeed be very small--so small that it scarcely seems to matter whether it is used or not--so far as its impression on the world or on other lives is concerned; and yet we can never know what is small or what is great in this life, in which every cause starts consequences that sweep into eternity.

It is the faithfulness of the one-talented million, rather than of the richly-endowed one or two which is needed today to hasten the coming of Christ's kingdom. There is not a gift so small, that it is not needed to make the work of the church complete. There is not one so small, but that its hiding away leaves some life unblest. There is not one so insignificant, that it may not start a wave of influence which shall roll on over the sea of human life, until it breaks on the shores of eternity!

But the most startling phase of this subject is that which concerns the person himself. Instead of being a merely negative act, or even a praiseworthy humility, to decline a responsibility, it is described in the Scriptures as a great dishonor to Christ, who has bestowed his gifts upon us, and as involving the most calamitous and far-reaching personal consequences. All gifts are granted to be used--and used to the utmost. We are required to develop our abilities by exercise, until they have attained the very highest possibility of power and usefulness, and to employ them in doing work which will honor God and bless the world.

The perversion of our gifts, or their degradation to unworthy ends, we all reprobate as sinful. The man with great power for usefulness who employs this power to destroy others, to lead them astray, to corrupt and poison the fountains of life, we condemn as basest of mortals. There are many such men, who live to tarnish purity, to spread ruin, to disseminate falsehood and to lead the unwary to perdition. For these, there must be a terrible retribution. But the phase of this question which I am now considering, is not mis-use but non-use of gifts. It is a fearful thing to take a faculty given with which to bless the world, and use it in such a way as to leave blight and woe and curse, instead of blessing. But it is also a fearful thing to fold up the talent and hide it away. It is the blighting of our own hope of glory, the throwing away of our own crown.

Who can tell how many human lives lie among the wastes and ruins of life, which God intended to fill grand places? When they were called, they declined to accept the responsibility. They folded their talents away and buried them, and forever they will lie in the quarries, pale ghosts of glorious might-have-beens, while the niches in God's temple which they were meant to fill and adorn, remain forever empty, memorials of their hopeless and irreparable failure. It never can be known until the final disclosure, how many glorious gifts have thus been lost to the world, nor how many lives with grand possibilities have shriveled and died under the blighting curse of non-use.

Responsibilities encircle us about. They make solemn all of life's relations. They charge even our lightest acts and our unconscious influence, with the most weighty seriousness. We can only fulfill life's grand meaning, when we accept every responsibility with glad welcome and reverent self-confidence. There is a wide difference between self-conceit and that proper estimate of one's own abilities, that rates them justly and fairly and is not afraid to put them to the test. That confidence is not wrong, which leads us to accept without distrust, the responsibilities which God lays at our feet.

Humility is not meant to make dwarfs out of giants. A man of great gifts, in order to be humble, is not required to esteem himself a poor ungifted and good-for-nothing man. We need to revise our ideas of humility. If we must give account to God for every gift of usefulness, and for its fullest possible exercise--we must honor our redeemed abilities, appreciate their true value, and then devote them to the service of Christ and of our fellow-men.

We are not put into this world for idle ease--but for most earnest work. They misunderstood the meaning of Christian life--who in olden days, fled away to the deserts and dwelt in huts and caves and lonely cells, far from the noise and strife of the world; and they misread the divine writing, also who think in these days to serve Christ only in prayer and devotion, while they go not out to toil for him.

There is no such thing as a consecrated life--which is not consecrated to service. The way to spiritual health, lies in the paths of toil. The reason of so much doubt and discontent in the hearts of Christian people--is that so many sit with folded hands, with no occupation but brooding over their own cares. If they

would but go out and begin to toil for others, they would forget themselves, and the joy of the Lord would flow into their souls. There is no way to fulfill life's grand meaning, and to enter at last into fullest joy--but by living lives of devotion to duty.

Let no one, then, hide away from the solemn responsibilities of his calling, in any imagined humility or lowly estimate of his own abilities. When God calls us to a work--he gives the needed strength. Not one of us knows the possibilities of usefulness that lie folded up in his hand and brain and heart. The Lord can use human feebleness as well as human strength. To him who is faithful in a little--more is given--and more and more.

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