

# Life's Byways and Waysides

by J.R. Miller

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*Life's byways and waysides offer opportunities for noble service and kindness, and living a life of love is the truest gain in life.*

**Scripture:** Matthew 25:40, Luke 10:33

**Topics:** "Humility", "Service"

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## Description

J.R. Miller emphasizes the beauty and significance of life's byways and waysides, illustrating that many of life's treasures and acts of kindness occur away from the spotlight. He contrasts the fleeting nature of fame with the enduring value of unrecognized service, highlighting that many unsung heroes contribute nobly to their communities without seeking recognition. Miller encourages believers to embrace opportunities for service in humble and overlooked places, drawing parallels to Jesus' own wayside ministries. He reminds us that true worth is not measured by public acclaim but by the love and kindness we extend to others in our daily lives. Ultimately, he calls for a life of love and service, suggesting that these quiet acts are often the most impactful in God's eyes.

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## Transcript

Many of the best things of life are found in the byways. The map-makers show us the great thoroughfares, but they pay no heed to the country roads and the paths that run through the meadows, forests, and gardens, and climb the mountain sides. Yet many of the loveliest things in nature are found along these byways! Much of the world's beauty hides in out-of-the-way nooks, where human feet rarely go. Some of the sweetest flowers on the earth, grow on beetling crags, or in the crevices of cold, grey rocks, where one would scarcely expect to find any trace of life. Nature does not array herself in loveliness, merely to be seen of men; for in the depths of great forests and in inaccessible valleys among lofty mountains, where no human eye has ever looked upon them--the flowers are as rich in their beauty as in the gardens where throngs are ever passing and admiring.

There are byways also in life. There are a few distinguished people whom everybody seeks to know, and whose praises are borne on every breeze. But, meanwhile, in the list of those unknown to fame--are countless lives just as noble, as brave, as holy, as unselfish, as useful, as many of those who receive the world's commendation. The real worth of men's and women's lives, is not to be rated by the measure of their earthly fame. Popularity itself, is oftentimes but the whim of a day, to be replaced tomorrow by forgetfulness and neglect, perhaps by execration!

There is a picture by Tintoretto, which shows Jesus on His cross. Then, as the observer looks closely, he sees in the background a donkey feeding on withered palm leaves, the palms which had been waved on Palm Sunday. This feature of the picture is intended to recall the acclaim of the triumphal entry--in contrast with the demand of the people, five days later, for the crucifixion of Jesus!

Fame is often but the glitter of an hour. Then even when it is born of love, and is the just merit of true worth, it carries in it no disparagement of other lives, which do not receive human praise. Many of the unpraised have as high esteem with God as those whom men applaud. Many of earth's unsung heroes are greater heroes in the sight of God--than those for whom monuments are set up in public squares, and whose deeds are commemorated in oration and song. Many of the world's nameless saints have higher honor in heaven--than those whose devotion, service, and sacrifice are enshrined in immortal memory in the church.

If all the life of any day could be seen, it would appear that in the quiet byways, in lowly homes, and among the poor--there are thousands of God's children who are living nobly, beautifully, self-sacrificingly, making whole neighborhoods purer, sweeter--yet hearing not one word of human praise. They stay near the heart of Christ. They come every morning from His presence, their very garments smelling of myrrh, aloes, and cassia, out of the ivory palaces. They go through their humble daily rounds in the spirit of love. They pour blessings on the common paths wherever they move, making the world a little sweeter, happier, and holier--for their staying in it. We do not know how much of the healing of the world lays in its nameless saints!

There are byways of usefulness. There are in every community a few people who are noted for their large charities, for their valuable services, or for their personal helpfulness. They are like the shadow of a great rock in a weary land, to the troubled and distressed who turn to them. They are comforters in every home of sorrow. Their influence is a benediction over a wide neighborhood. They have a share in every good work.

But there are many others who, in quiet ways, and without appreciation, give out blessings scarcely less rich and helpful. The circle in which they move is narrower; the things they do seem smaller; yet they minister continually in Christ's name, and seek not to be ministered unto. They shine as quiet lights, brightening a little space about them.

Some of the divinest things done on this earth, are done by the poor--for others who are poor. They make sacrifices and spend their strength in rendering personal assistance in times of trouble. The other day, at the house of a sick woman, another woman was met, who had walked three miles, carrying one child in her arms, with another tugging at her skirts, for the purpose of putting her neighbor's house in order, preparing some food, and doing whatever she could for the comfort of the patient. The rich give their money--but the poor give themselves! Nothing is holier than such ministry, and yet it gets no earthly praise.

Mary Lyon used to say to her pupils on graduation day, "My dear girls, when you choose your fields of labor, go where nobody else is willing to go!" There are always plenty of workers for conspicuous places. There is no trouble in finding pastors for great city churches, which pay large salaries. After having passed through the experience of considering the claims and qualifications of the applicants for one of these conspicuous and attractive places--one would never think that laborers are few. There seem to be a great many people who try to get their field of labor--where everybody else would like to go!

But, meanwhile, what about the byways of service and usefulness? There is always room enough here for all who will consecrate themselves to such work for the Master, and there is a field here also for the largest measure of usefulness. There is no throng at the gate, pressing applications, urging brilliant gifts, and bringing piles of endorsements and commendations, competing for the privilege of doing the Master's work in these obscure and unsalaried places! There are not many who are really seeking to go where nobody else is willing to go. Here, indeed, it is found that the Master's lament, "The harvest is plenteous--but the laborers are few," is still to be made.

Yet, in all the world there are no richer fields for Christ's service than are found in these byways. No one can do more wisely, than choose a place and a work which no other one desires to take! Years ago, there lived and wrought in Italy, a great artist in mosaics. With bits of glass and stone he could produce the most striking works of art--works which brought a great price. In his shop there was a boy whose business it was to keep the place in order. One day he came to his master and asked that he might have for his own--the bits of broken glass which were thrown upon the floor. The boy's request was granted. "The bits are good for nothing," said the master; "do as you please with them." Day after day the child was seen examining the pieces, throwing some away, and laying others carefully aside.

One day the master came upon a beautiful work of art in an unused storeroom. The poor boy, with an artist's soul, had used the rejected fragments, and had patiently and lovingly fashioned them into this a real masterpiece! So may those do, who choose to serve in life's byways, doing the things of love--which no others care to do. These are Christliest ministries. When the Master comes, it will be seen that those who have wrought in these lowly ways, have been preparing for themselves a record of blessing whose glory shall be eternal.

There is another class of Christian service which may be called wayside ministry. Much of the best work of life is of this order. We do not plan to do it. We go out to do other things, and on our way, this comes to our hand, and we do it, and it proves full of helpfulness and blessing.

Many of the most beautiful deeds of love in the life of Jesus, were wayside ministries. One day He was going with a troubled father to heal his dying child. As He passed through the crowds there was a timid touch on the hem of His garment. There was a heart's cry in the touch, a poor woman's pleading for healing. Instantly Jesus stopped, not minding the appealing look in the eyes of the anxious father, and patiently and sweetly ministered to the need of the sufferer who had crept up timidly behind Him. The healing of this woman who touched the hem of His garment, is one of the most interesting of all the miracles of Jesus; and yet it was a piece of wayside ministry, which came, as it were, by accident, without purpose, into His life, and was wrought as He hurried on another errand!

The talk with Nicodemus seems also to have been a bit of wayside ministry. It does not appear to have been planned for as part of the day's work. We may suppose that one evening the Master came to the house of a friend, weary from the day's toils and strifes. He was preparing for a quiet, restful evening, when a visitor was announced. Nicodemus, the ruler, came in and desired to talk awhile with the 'Rabbi'. Then followed that wonderful conversation which has proved such a blessing all the years since, and which was but a fragment of unstudied wayside talk.

Another time the Master was very weary after a long journey in the heat, and sat down on an old well-curb to rest, while His disciples went to a neighboring village to buy food, for He was hungry as well as tired. He had just settled down for a quiet time of rest, when there came a woman to the well to draw water. Her

sore need appealed to His quick sympathy, and He roused Himself to help her. The conversation which took place--one of the very gems of the gospel--was also an hour's wayside talk.

These incidents illustrate and confirm the statement that much of the most valuable service in the life of Jesus, was wayside ministry. As He went to and fro on His purposed errands, these opportunities for helpfulness were continually breaking in upon Him; and He never thrust one of them away from Him. There was not a day, however full, which was not crowded with common kindnesses to those He met on the way--pieces of beautiful wayside work. Sometimes He was working miracles, sometimes He was preaching--but always, wherever He went, He was serving in a thousand gentle ways.

There is a legend that when Jesus arose from His grave and walked out of Joseph's garden, white lilies blossomed in His footsteps, so that wherever He went--bloom and beauty sprang up. The legend faintly illustrates what was true of Him, all His days on earth. Blessings followed in His footsteps. The sick were healed, discouraged ones were cheered, sorrowing ones were comforted, and the weary received inspiration and strength from His words.

In our lesser degree, because of the littleness of our lives--all of us may continually perform a wayside ministry as we go along on our purposed errands for God. We have our allotted tasks for the day, and these are enough to fill our hands. But this need not make machines of us. We have human hearts, and while we are busy, with not a moment to lose--our sympathy and love may be flowing out to all whom we meet or touch. We may be kind to our fellows who are working beside us. We may be thoughtful in speech. Our joyful face may carry in it a blessing for everyone who passes. Our merest hand-shake and cheerful "Good-morning!" may be full of God's hearty love, and may send those whom we greet, to a brighter, braver, happier day.

Such wayside kindnesses will never hinder us in our day's task-work. Jesus bade His disciples to greet no man along the way, as they passed abroad on His errands. That was because in Oriental lands it took a long while to make such a salutation, and time spent in such a senseless way was wasted, when human lives were waiting for the coming of the messenger and the word of mercy which he bore. But we can give out our blessings of love as we go along life's byways, without wasting time or dallying on our way. We need not even slacken our pace, nor lose a moment!

Then, even if sometimes services of love do break into our busy days and do hinder us somewhat, may it not be that these are fragments of God's will, bits of God's work--sent for us to do, even at the cost of interrupting our own plans, breaking into our own program? This is the only way the Master can get some of us to do any work of His, for our hearts and hands are so full of our own things--that we have no time for tasks for Him. We need never fear that our hands will be any less full at the end--because we have slackened our pace a little now and then, to do some slight wayside service for Christ.

There is a story of one who was the leading runner in a race. But by-and-by he stopped to lift up a fallen child and place it out of danger, thus losing some of his lead. Farther on, a fainting comrade appealed to his sympathy, and he turned aside to help him to rise. Again he stopped his steps for a little, to guide a feeble woman to safety. Whenever duty called or sorrow appealed--he left his chosen path to give aid or comfort. Thus he fell behind, and another won the prize which might have been his. He stood unheeded, uncrowned, with empty hands, at the end. But who will say that in God's sight--he was not the real winner of the race? He had lost the prize--but he had brightened all the course with gentle ministries of love.

Many of what to men seem failures--will prove in the great revealing, to have been divinest successes. To be true and to strive truly--is to succeed, though nothing seems to come of it.

It may be, that those who live a life of love in this world, while they also do well their part in the business of the passing days--will sometimes seem losers. They have not gotten on so well in the world as their competitors. Yet their loss--is truest gain! It is not worth while to live at all, if love is left out. The priest and the Levite got clear of some delay, some trouble, and some cost--by passing on when they saw the wounded man by the wayside; but who will say that the good Samaritan did not make more of his opportunity that day--than they did? The priest and the Levite neglected the wayside work for humanity, which was offered to them, sparing themselves trouble--but missing the reward of faithfulness and kindness. The good Samaritan stopped in his journey to do love's service, doing it well, making personal sacrifice to do it; but he was never sorry for it, nor the poorer for what it cost him.

Life's byways and waysides are full of opportunities for noble service. He is wise who is not afraid to leave the beaten path, and the purposed task--to do God's work where it waits!

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