

Life's Double Ministry

by J.R. Miller

The sermon emphasizes the importance of the unconscious and unintentional ministry that flows from a person's life, and how it can have a greater impact than intentional and purposed acts.

Scripture: Proverbs 27:17, Matthew 5:16, Matthew 7:20, Romans 12:1-2, 2 Corinthians 2:14, Galatians 2:20, Ephesians 4:29, Philippians 2:15-16, Colossians 3:23-24, 1 Peter 3:1-2

Topics: "Influence", "Character Development"

Description

J.R. Miller emphasizes the dual impact of every life, consisting of intentional achievements and unconscious influences. He illustrates how a person's legacy includes not only their tangible accomplishments but also the subtle, often unnoticed ways they affect others through their character and actions. Miller argues that the unpurposed influence, such as kindness and patience, often holds greater value than the overt successes we typically celebrate. He encourages individuals to be mindful of their inner lives, as it is the essence of who they are that shapes their lasting impact on others. Ultimately, he calls for a life filled with the Spirit of Christ to enhance this unconscious ministry of goodness.

Transcript

A twofold influence attends and follows every life:

the one is planned and intentional,

the other is unpurposed and unconscious.

A man lives fifty years of active life in a community, growing from poverty to wealth; and there are two classes of results left behind him when he is gone. There are the buildings he has erected, the business he has established and organized, the improvements he has made in the town, and the wealth he has accumulated; these are all purposed results. He lived to do these things; he thought about them, and then with labor and pains wrought them out. But while he has been toiling and building, with earnest ambition and intense energy, he has, day by day, been leaving behind him another class of results, which were not in his plans, and the columns of which he does not calculate up when he estimates how much he has made during his life, or which he does not bequeath when he writes his will. These are the things he has done along the years of his busy life, by the words he has spoken in daily fellowship with men, by his attitudes and his dispositions, by the little wayside ministries which he has wrought oftentimes without conscious thought or intention, and through the silent influence that has flowed forth from his character

and example, as fragrance is poured out on the air by a sweet flower, or as the soft beams of light stream in welcome radiance from a star.

Every life has this double history, and leaves this double record. In the ordinary reckoning of the results achieved by men--only the purposed things are counted. We say he made a million dollars; or we point to the bridges he built, or the cathedrals he planned, or the pictures he painted, or the books he wrote; or we say he traveled so many miles, and preached so many sermons, and made so many visits; or we sum up in our funeral eulogy the great and conspicuous things of his career--and we think we have given all his biography; but we have not. There is a part of his history that is never written, that cannot be written; and it is probable that in nearly every life--this is the better part, that a godly man's unconscious, unrecorded, unintended influence, accomplishes more good in the end than his purposed acts.

Anyone who carefully notes the comparative value of lives in a community, will soon learn that the element which counts for the most, is that subtle thing which we call personal influence. One may give much money to religious and charitable objects; another may be an eloquent talker, and his voice may often be heard in public meetings; another may be enterprising, foremost in all progressive movements; another may be scholarly, a writer, an author, an oracle on all questions of learning; another may represent the best things in art, in taste, in whatever is beautiful and refined. Yet not one of these may impress himself on the community as does some quiet man, without either wealth or eloquence, or public spirit or scholarship--but who possesses that mysterious, indescribable power--a beneficent personal influence. There is something in him more subtle than money or speech, or activity or beauty--a spiritual force, which flows out from his life, and touches all other lives, and strangely affects them. It is to him what fragrance is to a flower, what light is to a lamp--it is part of himself, and yet it reaches outside and beyond himself.

It is, so to speak, the projection of the man's own character, the flowing-out of his own life into other lives; it is the energy of the man's spirit working, as it were, beyond his body--and working without hands. In the godly man, it is goodness--goodness dwelling in his soul, and pouring out like light from the windows of a cottage on a dark night. In the Christian, there is more than mere human goodness: God's Spirit dwells in him. Every true Christian is in a sense a new incarnation. the apostle Paul said, "Christ lives in me;" and he prayed for others that they might be "filled with all the fullness of God." The lamp that burns in a Christian's heart, is the flame of the Divine Spirit, and the personal influence of a Christian becomes spiritual power. It is like the shadow of Peter--it has a healing, life-giving effect wherever it falls. Such a man goes about his daily duty as other men do; but while he is engaged in common things, he is continually dropping seeds of blessing, which spring up behind him in heavenly beauty and fragrance.

Every godly life, is constantly scattering these unconscious, unpurposed influences. A mother works hard all day in her home, keeping her house in order, preparing comforts for her family, watching over her children. She can tell, in the evening, just how many garments she has mended, how many rooms she has swept, and the entire day's history; but all day long she was patient, gentle, kind. At every turn, she had a bright smile for her children; she had cheering words and fond attentions for her husband; she had a pleasant welcome for the friends who called. In all these things, she was unconsciously scattering seeds that will spring up in sweet flowers in other hearts and lives.

Who doubts which of these two ministries, is in reality the richer and the more effective? Yet the tired woman does not think of counting these wayside influences and services at all in her retrospect of the day's work. If she could do so, it would greatly cheer her, and strengthen her for a new day's life when it begins. She oftentimes comes to the day's close discouraged and depressed, because she has seemed to

do so little beyond the endless routine of her household duties. When she sits down with her Bible, after all are quiet in her household, and looks back--she can scarcely recall one earnest word she has spoken for her Master. The whole day has been filled with earthly commonplace, and she thinks of it with pain and disheartenment; yet if she has lived sweetly and patiently amid her toils and worries, dropping cheerful words in the ears of her household, singing bits of song as she went about her work, bearing herself with love and faith amid all the experiences of the day--she has unconsciously performed a ministry of blessing, whose value she can never know until she gets to heaven.

A bit of written biography fits in here. A young man, away from home, slept in the same room with another young man, a stranger. Before retiring for the night, he knelt down, as was his accustomed, and silently prayed. His companion had long resisted the grace of God; but this noble example aroused him, and was the means of his awakening. In old age he testified, after a life of rare usefulness, "Nearly half a century has rolled away, with all its multitudinous events, since then; but that little chamber, that humble, silent, praying youth--are still present to my imagination, and will never be forgotten amid the splendors of heaven, and through the ages of eternity." It was but a simple act of common faithfulness, unostentatious, and without thought or purpose of doing good, except as the prayer would bless his own soul; yet there went out from it an unconscious influence, which gave to the world a ministry of rare power and value.

We do not realize the importance of this unconscious part of our life-ministry. It goes on continually. In every greeting we give to another on the street, in every moment's conversation, in every letter we write, in every contact with other lives, there is a subtle influence that goes from us that often reaches farther, and leaves a deeper impression, than the things themselves that we are doing at the time. After all, it is life itself, sanctified life, that is God's holiest and most effective ministry in this world--pure, sweet, patient, earnest, unselfish, loving life. It is not so much what we do in this world, as what we are, that counts in spiritual results and impressions. A good life is like a flower, which, though it neither toils nor spins--yet ever pours out a rich perfume, and thus performs a holy ministry.

There is no place where this unconscious ministry is so potent as in the home. The lessons which parents teach their children are not one-thousandth part so important, as the life they live before them day after day.

This incident has appeared in some of the newspapers, and, though so homely, has its illustrative value: A gentleman who has a golden-haired little daughter, three years of age, took her to church for the first time the other day. At home she causes much amusement by attempts in cunning baby-fashion to do just as her father does. It was an Episcopal church, and she sat through the service and sermon with mature gravity and sedateness. It happened to be communion Sunday; and, being a communicant, her father went with others toward the altar, unconscious that his little daughter was following him. As he knelt, and bowed his head, she took her place beside him, and bowed her head upon her tiny hands. The story is an example of what is going on perpetually in every home. The child is not merely imitating the parents' acts--but is drinking in their spirit, as flowers drink in the morning dew and the sunshine, to reproduce the same in permanent dispositions, tempers, and principles.

How, then, can we give direction and character, to this unconscious ministry of our lives? When we do things voluntarily and with purpose, we can give shape to the effects; but how can we guard this perpetual outgoing of unintended influence? Only by looking well to our hearts. It is what we are when we are not posing before men--that we are really; and it is this which counts in this subtle ministry. We must be, therefore, in our own inner, secret lives--what we want our permanent influence to be. This we can

become, only by seeking more and more the permeation of our whole being by the loving, indwelling Spirit of Christ. No one will say that this unconscious and undesigned ministry of holy living, is not under God's direction. Though it is not in our thought to scatter the blessings which we thus unconsciously give out, it is certainly in his thought. Every influence of our lives, God uses as he will, to do good to whoever it pleases him to send the blessing.

Part of our every morning prayer should be, that God would use our influence for himself, and take the smallest fragments of power for good that drop from our lives, and employ them all for his glory, and as seeds to grow into beauty in some of this world's desert spots.

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