

Living Without Worry - Part 1

by J.R. Miller

The sermon teaches that Christians should strive to live without worry by focusing on their duties and trusting God with the outcomes.

Scripture: Philippians 4:6

Topics: "Trusting God's Plan", "Living Without Worry"

Description

J.R. Miller emphasizes the importance of living without worry, noting that worry impedes progress and exhausts vitality. He encourages Christians to focus on doing their best in every situation while leaving the outcomes to God, as worry has no place in a faithful life. Miller illustrates that a good start in life, characterized by clear aims and complete dedication to God, is essential for success. He also highlights the need for self-reflection and the importance of addressing sins of omission, urging believers to actively engage in doing good. Ultimately, he calls for a life of joy and contentment, rooted in faith and trust in God's plan.

Transcript

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One meets few unworried people. Most faces bear lines of care. Men go anxious to their day's duties, rush through the hours with feverish speed, and bring a hot brain and tumultuous pulse home at night for restless, unrefreshing sleep. This is not only most unsatisfactory, but is also a most costly mode of living.

One night the train lost two hours in running less than a hundred miles. "We have a hot box," was the polite conductor's reply to an impatient passenger who asked to know the cause of the long delays at stations. This hot-box trouble is not altogether unknown in human life. There are many people who move swiftly enough, and with sufficient energy, but who grow feverish, and who are thus impeded in their progress. A great many failures in life must be charged to worrying. When a man worries he is impeded in several ways. For one thing, he loses his head. He cannot think clearly. His brain is feverish and will not act at its best. His mind becomes confused, and his decisions are not to be depended upon. The result is, that a worried man never does his work as well as he should do it, or as he could do it if he were free from

worry. He is apt to make mistakes.

Worry exhausts vitality. True, all good in life costs. Virtue goes out of us in everything we do that is worth doing. But for normal, healthy action--nature provides. There is recuperative energy enough to supply the waste. The fountain is filled as fast as it is worn away. Worry, however, is abnormal and unhealthy. It exhausts vitality more rapidly than nature can reinforce it. It is like friction in machinery, and grinds away the very fibre of life. Worry, therefore, both impedes progress and makes work unduly costly and exhausting. One neither accomplishes so much, nor does it so well--while the outlay of vitality is greater.

The ideal theory of life is, therefore, work without worry. At least, this certainly ought to be the ideal for a Christian. We have an express command not to be anxious about anything. Our whole duty is to do the will of God and leave in his hands the outworking of circumstances, the shaping and overhauling of all the complicated network of influences, so as to bring about the right results. The working plan for a Christian life is clearly laid down in our Lord's words: "Seek first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you." "Don't worry about tomorrow, for tomorrow will bring its own worries. Today's trouble is enough for today." This ideal leaves no place whatever for worry. It requires single-hearted devotion to the interests of Christ's kingdom, the elimination of self and self-seeking, uncompromising loyalty to the principles of righteousness, and the faithful and energetic doing of duty--all duty, without regard to pleasure or cost. This is all the human part. Then God will look after the outcome; will take care of us and of the results of our acts. It is the function of faith, when we have done what we can, to put all into the divine hands, giving ourselves no anxiety, while we go forward in peace and confidence to the next duty that awaits.

It is said of a Christian man, who has risen from a humble station to great national prominence, that his motto has always been: "Do the very best you can, and leave the rest to Providence." This is nothing more or less than the putting into plain, crisp Saxon, our Lord's counsel already quoted. If we would all get this bit of practical heavenly wisdom out of our New Testament and into our daily life, it would not only greatly increase our working capacity, and consequently make us more successful, but it would also largely enhance our happiness.

We must notice, however, that this is not a labor-saving ideal for life. It is not a theory for an indolent man. It implies the putting of all life's skill and energy into every piece of work we perform; we are to do always the very best we can. We should train ourselves to bring all our wisdom and all our power even to the smallest tasks. We should learn to decide promptly, and always according to the best light we can get at the moment from all our experience and all our knowledge of the subject, and then to act swiftly, energetically, and with all the skill we can command. When we have so acted, the matter is out of our hands, and should be left to the divine out-working, without a misgiving or an anxious thought. We have done our best in the circumstances, and we know that is all we are ever required to do.

But may we not sometimes decide unwisely? Even with our best and ripest wisdom, may we not make mistakes of judgment? Certainly we may. But even when it appears afterward that our decision was not the wisest that might have been made, we should still refuse to worry over it. We did the best we knew, and that is as far as our responsibility goes. We could have done no better in the circumstances, with our light. We have a right to believe that he who orders all events, will use even our mistake, overruling it in some way for good, if we but leave it in his hands.

Then why should we worry about that which we cannot change, since it has passed beyond our control? We ought to regret our sins and the mistakes which come from our own follies, though even in such cases we should not waste time in tears which ought to be given to amendment. But when we have done our best, with prayer and holy purpose, we have no right to fret and vex ourselves. Perhaps what seems to us to have been unwise was, after all, God's truer wisdom setting ours aside.

So there is really no place in a true, earnest, Christian life for worry. Do your very best in the circumstances, and leave the rest with God. We should aim only to be faithful in duty, and then be at peace, whatever may come. We should work without worrying.

But this is one of those great life lessons which must be learned. It never comes naturally. The capacity for learning it, and the needful help is given, but we must learn the lesson ourselves, just as we learn other lessons. The process must always be slow; no one can in a single day learn to live and work without worry. Usually it requires years. Yet much can be accomplished by everyone who is willing to endure the necessary discipline. We must first accept the truths of the gospel on which the lesson rests, and must believe them--that duty alone is ours, and that results and out-workings are God's. Then we must begin firmly and heroically to practice the lesson, to live by it, to train ourselves to confident, peaceful living.

The lesson is well worth learning, at whatever cost. To live nobly, energetically, up to one's best, and yet without worry, is one of the highest attainments possible. It is the ideal life. It is the life whose vision of beauty is pictured for us in the peace which our Lord promises his people, the peace that passes all understanding that keeps the heart and mind in Christ Jesus--the perfect peace that comes to him whose mind is stayed on God.

Starting Right

"The beginning is half of the whole," says an old proverb. A good start is a move in the direction of success. No time need then be wasted in revising plans, in correcting mistakes, or in changing one's course. No steps need then be retraced. There are no wrong teachings to unlearn; no false systems to abandon. One's whole energy can be given to the carrying out of one's chosen purpose.

On the other hand, many a career of brilliant possibilities is marred by a wrong beginning. There are mistakes of early days which men never get over. The latter half of many a life--is spent in undoing, or vainly trying to undo, the acts of its former half. A bad foundation has caused the wreck of many a noble building. Inadequate preparation for a business or a calling, leads to impaired success at the best, and most frequently it results in utter failure.

The same principles apply in Christian life. It is of the utmost importance that we start well. Many Christians walk in doubt and shadow all their days, never entering into joy and peace, because at the beginning they fail to understand the fullness of the blessedness into which, as children of God, they come when they receive Christ. Many others never attain anything noble and beautiful in Christian life and character, because they do not, at the beginning, wholly disentangle themselves from their old life, and make a full dedication of themselves to Christ. A good beginning, therefore, involves two things:

first, clearness and definiteness of aim, with intelligent views of what it is to be a Christian;

second, completeness of consecration.

Many men fail in life--because they have no settled purpose, no well-defined plan. They have no goal set before them which they strive to reach. There is no ideal in their mind toward which they mean to struggle. They merely drift on the current, and are borne by it wherever it flows. They are not masters in life, but poor slaves. They conquer nothing, but are the mere passive creatures of circumstances. Such a life is unworthy of an intelligent being with immortal powers; nor does it ever reach any high degree of nobleness or success. No sculptor ever touches the marble until he has in his mind a definite conception of his work as it will be when finished. He sees a vision before him, of a very lovely form--and then sets to work to fashion the vision in stone. No builder begins to erect a house until a complete plan, embracing every detail, has been adopted and prepared. He knows precisely what the finished structure will be before he strikes a stroke. No one would cut into a web of rich and costly cloth--until he had before him the pattern of the garment he would like to make. In all work on material things, men have definite aims, and they know precisely what they intend to produce before they begin their work. But in life itself and living--all do not exercise such wisdom. Many never give a thought to such questions as these: "What is the purpose of my life? What ought I to do with it? What should be the great aim of my existence? What should I strive to be, and to do?"

Multitudes live aimlessly, having no thought of the responsibility of living, and never forming any earnest, resolute purpose to rise to any noble height, or to achieve any worthy or beautiful thing. But a true life should always have its aim. To grow up as a plant--without thinking--is well enough for a plant; but men with immortal souls and measureless possibilities should have a purpose, and should seek to attain it. No one begins well or worthily in life--who has not settled in his own mind what he will strive to do with his life.

In entering upon a Christian life, there should always be a clear aim. We should know definitely what it is to be a Christian. With only vague ideas of the meaning of a Christian life, its aim, its requirements, its privileges, its duties--no one can begin well. We need to understand the new relations into which we come as children of God, so that we may realize the full blessedness of our position in Christ. We need to have a clear conception of the final aim of all Christian attainment, so that we may strive toward it. We need to know what is required of a Christian, toward his God and toward his fellow-men, that we may faithfully and intelligently take up every duty. We need to know the conditions of Christian life, in order that we may avail ourselves of the necessary helps provided for us. Thus a clear and intelligent aim, is essential in starting right as a Christian.

Another essential element--is the devotion and consecration of ourselves to the life we have chosen. A good aim is not enough. One may aim an arrow with perfect accuracy, but the bow must also be drawn and the cord let fly--if the arrow is to reach the mark. A vision in the brain is not enough for the sculptor; he must hew the vision into form in the marble. The architect's plan is only a picture, and there must be toil and cost--until the building stands complete in its noble beauty. A good aim is not all of a Christian life. It is nothing more than an empty dream--unless it is wrought out in the life. When Raphael was asked how he painted his marvelous pictures, he replied, "I dream dreams and I see visions--and then I paint my dreams and my visions." Every earnest Christian who looks much at Christ, dreams dreams and sees visions--dreams and visions of wondrous beauty, glimpses of the loveliness of Christ; and, like the artist, he should seek with patient, yet intense purpose--to reproduce the loveliness in his own soul. Many people have sublimest aspirations and intentions--who never take a step toward the realization of them. Mere knowing what it is to be a Christian, makes no one a Christian; many perish with the glorious ideal shining fully and clear before their eyes. Mere seeing the beauty of Christ as it is held before us for our copying--will never fashion us into that beauty. Our knowledge must be wrought into life. We must carve

out in our life--the beauty we see.

We all need to start anew very often. The best purposes need frequent reforming. The intensest energy needs often rekindling. What better new beginning can there be than a fresh look at a life's true aim, and a fresh consecration to the working out of that aim?

Thinking and Turning

It was one of the old Psalm writers who said, "I thought on my ways." It is not likely that he found it a very easy thing to do. It is usually very much harder to think on our own ways--than on other people. Most of us do quite enough of the latter. We keep a magnifying glass to inspect our neighbor's life, a high-power microscope to hunt for specks in his character; but too often we forget to use our glasses on ourselves, or, if we do, we reverse them, and thus minimize our every spot and imperfection. The Pharisee in the temple confessed a great many sins, but they were his neighbor's sins and the publican's sins; he made no confession at all for himself. Most of us are in the same danger. We like to think of our ways when they are good--it flatters our vanity to be able to approve and commend ourselves; but when our conduct has not been particularly satisfactory, we like to turn our backs upon it, and solace ourselves by thinking on our neighbor's naughty ways. And here, strange to say, it seems to please many of us best--to find things we cannot approve or commend in others.

It is a brave thing for a man to say, "I will think upon my own ways," and says it when he knows his ways have not been good and right, but wrong. It is an excellent thing for us to turn our lenses in upon our own hearts, in order to see if our own ways are right. There is only one person in all the world for whose ways any of us are really responsible, for whose life any of us must give account--and that is one's self. Other people's wrong ways may pain us and offend ours sense of right; and it is our duty to do all we can, in the spirit of Christ, to lead our neighbors into better ways. But, after all, when we stand before God's judgment-seat, the only one person in the whole world for which any one of us will have to give account--will be one's self. Certainly it is most important, then, that we give earnest heed to ourselves, and our own ways.

A review of one's life, has a strange power. As we look back upon our ways, they do not appear to us as they did when we were passing through them. Things which seemed hard and painful at the time, now, as we look back upon them, appear lovely and radiant. There are experiences in most lives, which seemed to be calamities at the time--but in the end prove rich blessings. Then there is another class--things which appear attractive and enjoyable at the time, which afterward look repulsive and abhorrent. This is true of all wrong actions, all deeds wrought under the influence of wrong passion. At the time they give a thrill of pleasure; but when the emotions had passed, and the wrong-doer turns and looks back at what he has done--it seems horrible in his eyes. The retrospect fills him with disgust and loathing.

To look at one's ways when they have been wrong, is not by any means a pleasant thing to do. Such looks, if honest, will produce deep sorrow. It is well that it should be so--that regret should grow into sore pain, until it has burned into our hearts the lessons which we ought to learn from our follies and sins. But pain and regret should not be all. The Scriptures speak of the sorrow of the world--which works death. This is a sorrow which passes away like the morning cloud or the early dew, leaving no impression, or the sorrow which ends only in despair. Godly sorrow is the pain for sins which leads to repentance.

The prodigal in the far-off land thought on his ways, and, in his shame, hid his face in his hands, and wept bitter tears over the ruin he had made of his life. But he did more than weep; he rose, and went straight

home to his father. No matter how badly one has failed, the noblest thing to do is, not to sit down and waste other years in grieving over the lost years. Weeping in the darkness of despair, amends nothing. The only truly wise thing is to rise, and save what remains. Because ten hours out of the twelve allotted are lost, shall we sit down and waste the other two in unavailing grief over the ten? Had we not better to use the two which are left, in doing what we can to retrieve the consequences of our past folly?

"We have lost the battle," said Napoleon, "but," drawing his watch from his pocket, "it is only two o'clock, and we have time to fight and win another"; and the sun went down on a victorious army. No young person, especially, should ever yield to despair; for in youth there is yet too wide a margin to blot with the confession of defeat and failure. Even old age, with a whole lifetime behind it wasted, is not hopeless in a world on which Christ's cross stood. A few moments are enough in which to creep to Christ's feet and find pardon. Life does not end at the grave. Its path sweeps on into the eternal years, and there will be time enough then to retrieve all the wasted past. Someone speaks of heaven, as the place where God makes over souls. Even lives only wasted and marred on earth, turning to Christ in the late evening-time of life, may find mercy, and in heaven's long blessed day be made over into grace and beauty.

But nothing comes of thinking on our ways--if we do not turn from whatever we find to be wrong. Godly sorrow works repentance. A few tears amount to nothing, if one goes on tomorrow in the same old paths. Someone says: "The true science of blundering consists in never making the same mistake twice." This rule applies to sins as well as to mistakes. The true science of living, is never to commit the same sin a second time. But even this falls short. We are not saved by negatives. We can never go to heaven by merely turning from wrong ways. True repentance leads to Christ, and into his ways. It is the man who forsakes his wicked ways and wicked thoughts, and returns to the Lord--who is abundantly pardoned. It does not matter how black the sins are--when there is this kind of repentance. Even Christ does not undo the wrong past, and make that which has been done--as though it never had been done. But grace may so make over a marred life, that, where the blemish was--some special beauty may appear. "The oyster mends its shell with a pearl." Where the ugly wound was--there comes, with the healing, not a scar--but a pearl.

The same is true in human souls, when divine grace heals the wounds of sin. Sins that we truly repent of, become pearls in the character. It is the experience of all whose lives grow into Christ-like nobleness, that many of the golden lines of their later lives have been wrought out by their regrets and their repenting of wrongdoings. Even our mistakes and sins, if we leaven them and find our way to Christ, will be transmuted into growth and up building of character. "We can so deal with the past--that we can make it give up to us virtue and wisdom." "We can make wrong--the seed of right and righteousness; we can transmute error into wisdom; we can make sorrow bloom into a thousand forms, like fragrant flowers." That is, if we truly repent of our sins, where they grew with their thorns and poison seeds, there will be in our lives--trees and plants of beauty with sweet flowers and rich fruits.

Sins of Omission

There are sins of not doing. We are not accustomed to look at our sins of omission as we do at our sins of commission. We call it a sin when one does another an injury--but we are not so likely to call it a sin when one fails to show another, when in suffering or in need, a kindness which it was in his power to render. Yet, in God's sight, it is a grievous sin to withhold the good which it is in our power to do.

This is taught in a most striking way by our Lord in his representation of the last judgment. To those on his left hand the King will say, "Depart from me, you who are cursed, into the eternal fire prepared for the devil and his angels. 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 invite me in, I needed clothes and you did not clothe me, I was sick and in prison and you did not look after me." Matthew 25:41-43. There are no sins of commission charged against these condemned people. It is not said that they were liars, or dishonest; that they were unjust, cruel, or inhuman; that they oppressed the poor, crushed the weak, defrauded the orphan and the widow. All that is said of them is that they did not feed the hungry, did not give drink to the thirsty, did not provide hospitable shelter to the stranger, did not clothe the naked, and did not visit the sick or the prisoner. They were condemned for not doing the things of love, that awaited for them day by day. Terrible is the arraignment, too, and terrible the judgment: "Depart from me, you cursed ones, into the eternal fire which is prepared for the devil and his angels," --because you have not done the things of love that made their appeal to you.

We are slow to accept this teaching. At the close of a day we examine ourselves, and review the day's record, to find wherein we have done wrong. We remember the hasty word we spoke, which gave pain to a tender heart, and confess it. We recall with penitence our self-indulgence, our lapses from truth, honesty, or integrity, even our breaches of courtesy. But, in counting up the sins of the day, do we think with regret or pain of the things we did not do? Are we penitent for our sins of omission? We have "passed by on the other side" of many a human need and hunger. Do we confess these sins at the ending of the day?

A young man came to Jesus to ask him the way of life. He was a good man. His life had been blameless and stainless from his youth. He was honored and respected among men. His character was so beautiful that Jesus, beholding him, loved him. Yet he told him frankly that there was a lack. And the fault was not in the things he had done--but in the things he had not done--a "lack," something wanting. The young man was bidden, if he would be perfect, if he would make his life complete--to sell all he had and give to the poor. No doubt there are many people everywhere who live well, whose character is unblemished, whose life is blameless, against whom no one can bring any accusation--but in whom there is a great lack, almost a whole hemisphere of their life blank and empty!

The lesson is needed in our homes. We live together as families perhaps quite lovingly. The fathers are good providers, the mothers are good housekeepers, the parents care well for their children's education and other interests, the children live together in reasonable harmony and good fellowship. Yet there is a lack in the household life. The things that are done may be beyond criticism, almost ideal--but there is something lacking in the family fellowship, in things that are not done which ought to be done.

Sometimes love's duties are crowded out by other seeming duties. There are men so absorbed in their business and in their outer-world life that they have little strength or time left for the cultivation of the home life, and for their duties of love to those who are dearest. In all their relations they are kindly and generous--but there is a lack. They do not minister to the heart-needs of their household.

There are mothers who are so busied with social duties and other outside engagements, that they leave undone many things which would have blessed the world far more than the things they do. These outside things may be important in their way. Christian women have a mission to society. Yet their first and holiest duty is ever to their own home. Whatever work may call a woman outside, whatever needs of other homes may appeal to her; she cannot be excused from the duties she owes to the loved ones of her own

household. These are her own duties, and no other one's. If she does not do them, they must go undone. No other woman can be mother to her children. Outside needs appeal to others as well as to her--but the things of her home are hers alone. It will be very sad, therefore, if she omits the duties of love within her own doors, while she is doing things outside, however important they may be.

It is the sins of omission which are likely to do the greatest harm in family life--the gentle words which lie on our tongues--but which we do not speak; the kindly acts which we feel the impulse to perform--but which we do not perform; the thoughtful things which we might have done, to give cheer and comfort--but which we did not do. We say that silence is golden, and sometimes it is. It is golden when the word that was near being spoken, would have been a hasty word--sharp, cutting, bitter. But silence is not golden when the word which is in our heart is loving, cheering, comforting, and inspiring. We surely wrong our loved ones when we withhold such a word.

We are told that we must give an account for every idle word we speak--but someone reminds us that we must give account as well for our idle silences. Reserve is a good thing in its place; but when it is love which is kept in reserve, and in one's own home, reserve becomes cruelty, robbery. We need to make sure, as we pass along, that no one of our household can ever say to us, "I was hungry-hearted, and you gave me no daily bread of love. I was thirsty for human sympathy, and you gave me no drink. I was a stranger at your heart's door, and you took me not into love's warmth and shelter. I was sick with life's burdens and sorrows, and you ministered not to me from your rich store. I was in prison in my narrow environment, and you did not come to me with companionship that I craved. Living by my side all these years, you did not do love's duty to me." Among the most grievous sins against those who are nearest and dearest to us--are the sins of omission.

But not in the home alone is the lesson needed; there is the same danger in all life's relations. "You shall love your neighbor as yourself." Because a man does not defraud nor inflict bodily hurt upon his neighbor; has he therefore met all the requirements of the divine law? To love a man is a great deal more than not wronging or injuring him.

All along life's dusty wayside, lie men and women who are wounded, hurt, robbed, and left to die. We are continually going by them. Do we pass by on "the other side"? You learned the other morning of a neighbor in trouble. It was your thought to go to him with help. But you did not do it. He bows, in the evening, in the deep darkness, beneath his burden, crushed, almost in despair. He might have been rejoicing, had it not been for your sin of omission. There was a young man in sore temptation. The battle was for his very soul. You knew of it, and meant to find him, and say a brave word to him. But you were busy, and did not go. The young man fell--fell because you did not take him a brother's help.

It is not enough that we commit no evil against others--we must watch lest we fail to do them the good which is in our power to do. We shall be judged, not alone by what we do--but quite as much by what we leave undone. We need to give heed, not alone to our sins of commission--but also to our sins of omission.

The Lesson of Joy

Joy is God's ideal for his children. The Christian is exhorted to rejoice always. This does not mean that his life is exempt from trouble. The gospel does not give us a new set of conditions, with pain and sorrow eliminated. Christian joy is something that overcomes sorrow.

There are many things which are meant to minister joy. This is a beautiful world in which we live. We do not think enough about what God has done for our pleasure in the adorning of our earthly home. Many have said that, when Jesus speaks of the many mansions in the Father's house, he does not refer to heaven only--but means that this world is one of the mansions, while heaven is another. Surely it is beautiful enough for an apartment of the Father's house. No doubt heaven will be more lovely, for sin has left its trail on everything of earth. Yet there is loveliness enough in this world to fill our hearts with rapture.

Another thing which ministers to human joy is the goodness of God in providence. The world is not only beautiful; it is our Father's world. Jesus says that our Father feeds even the birds, and clothes even the flowers; and he assures us that his care for his children is much more tender and sure. "If I could not believe," says one, "that there is a thinking mind at the center of things, life would be to me intolerable." But there is not only a thinking mind--there is also a Father's heart at the center of things. On every leaf is written a covenant of divine love. On every flower and tuft of moss, is found a pledge of divine thought and faithfulness.

It would minister greatly to our joy, if we had a firmer faith in the goodness of the providence which rules in life's affairs. It is said that one of the great diamond fields of South Africa was discovered in this interesting way: One day a traveler entered the valley and paused before a settler's door where a boy was amusing himself by throwing little stones. One of the stones fell at the feet of the visitor, and he picked it up and was about to return it to the boy when he saw a flash of light from it which arrested his attention and made his heart beat with eager surprise. The stone was a diamond. The boy had no thought of its value. To him it was only a plaything. To the passer-by it was only a common pebble, which he spurned with his foot. But to the eye of the man of science, it was a gem of surpassing value was enfolded in the rough covering. All the pebbles scattered about were also diamonds.

Many of the events of Providence appear to ordinary eyes, as uninteresting, unmeaning, and often even unkindly. Yet in each, there is wrapped up a divine treasure of good and blessing for the child of God. We need only eyes of faith to find in every painful experience, a helper of our joy. Precious gems of rarest blessing, are enclosed in the rough crusts of hardship, care, loss, and trial--which we are continually coming upon in life's ways.

Another helper of joy is a happy home. Many of us would never be able, day after day, to face life with its struggles, its duties, its antagonisms, were it not for the renewal of strength which we get in our home. A true home is a little fragment of heaven let down on earth, to inspire us with patience and strength for the way.

A godly life also ministers to joy. One who neglects and disobeys God's commandments, is making unhappiness for himself. Sin's pleasures yield briars and thorns. The later years of life are fields in which the sowings of earlier years come to ripeness. Nothing ministers more surely to happiness, than a well-watched past. Good deeds, gentle ministries, unselfish kindnesses, yield memories of joy.

There is a Persian story of a vizier who dedicated one apartment in his palace to be a chamber of memory. In this he kept the memorials of his earlier days, before royal favor had lifted him from his lowly place to honor. It was a little room with bare floor, and here he kept his crook, his wallet, his coarse dress, and his water-cruze--the things which had belonged to his shepherd life. Every day he went for an hour from the splendors of his palace to this humble apartment, to live again for a time amidst the memories of his happy youth. Very sweet were his recollections, and by this daily visit, his heart was kept warm and

tender amid all the pomp and show, and all the trial and sorrow of his public life.

It would be a wonderful promoter of joy if everyone, in the midst of life's responsibilities and cares, its temptations and struggles, would keep such a chamber of memory filled with the mementoes of his youth's happy days. Most of us grow old too soon. We forget our childhood joys, and we take upon us too early the burdens of maturity. We should keep one room in our heart as a treasure-chamber for the sweet joys that we have left behind. Memory has a marvelous power to make joy for us.

These are some of the ways in which joy is promoted. The word "glad" comes from a root which means to be bright, to shine. Much is said in the Bible about the duty of Christians to be lights in the world. We are lamps which God lights, that we may shine. We are particularly warned against having our light dimmed or obscured. Nothing does this more effectually than unhappiness. A Christian should be a lamp which always shines. A man who had lived an unusually long and noble Christian life, feared that he might fail to honor Christ in suffering. Many Christians fail at this point. When trials come, the brightness grows dim. We forget that it is as sinful to lose our joy and peace--as it is to lose our honesty and truthfulness.

Joy is not a mere privilege for a Christian, a quality which he may or may not have in his life. It is not a matter merely of temperament. It will not do to say that, while some people were born with a sunny spirit, we were born with a gloomy disposition, and therefore cannot be joyful. It is the mission of Christian faith, to change nature. "The fruit of the Spirit is joy." Christian joy is not natural exhilaration--it is converted sadness.

How can we learn to be always glad-hearted? Atmosphere is important. If we live in a malarial region, we need not be surprised if we have malaria. If we move to a place where there is pure, sweet, wholesome air--we may hope to be well and strong. There are spiritual atmospheres, too, some wholesome, some unwholesome, and we should choose our abiding-place where the influences will promote joy. Too many Christians live in the fog and fear of unbelief, and then wonder why they do not have the joy of the Lord.

Far more than we know, is joy a lesson to be learned. It does not come naturally to many of us, at least, although there is a great difference in temperament, and some learn the lesson much more easily than others do. To none is it natural to rejoice in sorrow--this is something which all of us must learn. Nor can we merely, by resolving to be glad, go through all the days thereafter with a song in our heart and sunshine in our face. The lesson can be mastered only through years of patient self-discipline, just as all life's lessons must be mastered.

It will help us in this experience, if we keep ever before us the ideal that we are always to be joyful, that failure here is sin, and grieves God. It will help us, also, if we keep our heart full of the great thoughts which are meant to inspire joy. Longfellow gave a young friend this advice: "See some good picture--in nature, if possible, or on canvas--hear a page of the best music, or read a great poem every day. Then, at the end of the year, your mind will shine with such an accumulation of jewels, as will astonish even yourself." To this may be added: Take into your heart every day some cheering Word of God. Listen to some heavenly song of hope or joy. Let your eye dwell on some beautiful vision of divine love. Thus your very soul will become a fountain of light, and joy will become more and more the dominant mood of your life.

We cannot too strongly emphasize the truth, that joy is a Christian duty. We are here to lighten the world by our life. This we can never do, by going about with sad face and heavy heart. If our religion cannot make us rejoicing Christians, whatever our temperament, or whatever our circumstances may be, we are

not getting the best from it. We cannot serve the world so well in any other way--as by being joyful Christians. Then the light will shine through us wherever we go, and others who witness the victoriousness of our life will want to know of the Savior, who can help us to such triumphant faith.

Can We Learn to Be Contented?

Someone has said that if men were to be saved by contentment, instead of by faith in Christ, most people would be lost. Yet contentment is possible. There was one man at least who said, and said it very honestly, "I have learned in whatever state I am, therein to be content." His words have special value, too, when we remember in what circumstances they were written. They were dated in a prison, when the writer was wearing a chain. It is easy enough to say such things in the summer days of prosperity--but to say them amid trials and adversities, requires a real experience of victorious living.

But just what did Paul mean when he said, "I am content"? The original word, scholars tell us, contains a fine sense which does not come out into the English translation. It means self-sufficing. Paul, as a Christian man, had in himself all that he needed to give him tranquility and peace. Therefore he was not dependent upon any external circumstances. Wherever he went, there was in himself a competence, a fountain of supply, a self-sufficing. This is the true secret of Christian contentment wherever it is found. We cannot keep sickness, pain, sorrow, and misfortune away from our lives--yet as Christians we are meant to live in any experience in unbroken peace, in sweet restfulness of soul.

How may this unbroken contentment be obtained? Paul's description of his own life, gives us a hint as to the way he reached it. He says, "I have learned to be content." It is no small comfort to us common people, to get this from such a man. It tells us that even with him, it was not always thus; that at first he probably chafed amid discomforts, and had to "learn" to be contented in trial. It did not come naturally to him, any more than it does to the rest of us, to have peace in the heart, in time of external strife. Nor did this beautiful way of living come to him at once as a divine gift when he became a Christian. He was not miraculously helped to acquire contentment. It was not a special power granted to him as an apostle.

He tells us plainly in his old age, that he has "learned" it. This means that he was not always able to say, "I am content in any state." This was an attainment of his later years, and he reached it by struggle and by discipline, by learning in the school of Christ, just as all of us have to learn it if we ever do, and as any of us may learn it if we will.

Surely everyone who desires to grow into spiritual beauty, should seek to learn this lesson. Discontent is a miserable fault. It grieves God, for it springs from a lack of faith in him. It destroys one's own heart-peace; discontented people are always unhappy. It disfigures beauty of character. It sours the temper, ruffles the calm of sweet life, and tarnishes the loveliness of the spirit. It even works out through the flesh, and spoils the beauty of the fairest face. To have a transfigured face, one must have heaven in one's heart. Just in proportion as the lesson is learned, are the features brightened by the outshining of the indwelling peace. Besides all this, discontent casts shadows on the lives of others. One discontented person in a family, often makes a whole household wretched. If not for our own sake, then, we ought at least for the sake of our friends to learn to be contented. We have no right to cast shadows on other lives.

But how can we learn contentment? One step toward it is patient submission to unavoidable ills and hardships. No earthly lot is perfect. No mortal in this world, ever yet found a set of circumstances without some drawback. Sometimes it lies in our power to remove the discomfort. Much of our hardship is of our own making. Much of it would require but a little energy on our own part to cure. We surely are very foolish

if we live on amid ills and frets, day after day, which we might change for comforts if we would. All removable troubles we ought, therefore, to remove. But there are trials which we cannot change into pleasures, burdens which we cannot lay off, crosses which we must continue to carry, and "thorns in the flesh" which must remain with their rankling. When we have such trials, why should we not sweetly accept them as part of God's best way with us? Discontent never made a rough path smoother, a heavy burden lighter, a bitter cup less bitter, a dark way brighter, a sorrow less sore. It only makes matters worse. One who accepts with patience what he cannot change, has learned the secret of victorious living.

Another part of the lesson is that we moderate our desires. Paul says, "If we have food and clothing--we will be content with these." 1 Timothy 6:8. Very much of our discontent arises from envy of those who seem to be more favored than ourselves. Many people lose most of the comfort out of their own lot, in coveting the finer things some neighbor has. Yet if they knew the whole story of the life they envy for its greater prosperity, they probably would not exchange for it their own lowlier life, with its homelier circumstances. Or if they could make the exchange, it is not likely they would find half so much real happiness in the other position, as they had enjoyed in their own. Contentment does not dwell so often in palaces--as in the homes of the humble. The tall peaks rise higher and are more conspicuous--but the winds smite them more fiercely than they do the quiet vales. And surely the lot in life which God makes for us--is always the very best that could be made for us for the time being. The cause of our discontent is not in our circumstances; if it were, a change might cure it. It is in ourselves; and, wherever we go, we shall carry it with us.

Envious desires for other people's places which seem finer than ours, prevent our getting the best blessing and good out of our own. Trying to grasp the things which are beyond our reach, we leave unseen, unappreciated, untouched, and despised, the many sweet bits of happiness which lie close about us. Someone says: "Stretching out his hand to catch the stars, man forgets the flowers at his feet, so beautiful, so fragrant, so multitudinous, and so various." A fine secret of contentment lies in finding and extracting all the pleasure we can get from the things we have, while we enter no mad, vain chase after impossible dreams. In whatever state we are, we may therein find enough for our need.

If we would learn the lesson of contentment, we must train ourselves to live for the higher things. One of the ancient wise men, having heard that a storm had destroyed his merchant ships, thus sweeping away all his fortune, said: "It is just as well, for now I can give up my mind more fully to study." He had other and higher sources of enjoyment, than his merchandise, and felt the loss of his ships no more than manhood feels the loss of childhood's toys. He was but a heathen philosopher; we are Christians. He had only his studies to occupy his thought when his property was gone; and we have all the blessed things of God's love. No earthly misfortune can touch the wealth a Christian holds in the divine promises and hopes.

Just in the measure, therefore, in which we learn to live for spiritual and eternal realities--do we find contentment amid earth's trials and losses. If we live to please God, to build up Christlike character in ourselves, and to lay up treasure in heaven--we shall not depend for happiness on the way things go with us here on earth, nor on the measure of temporal goods we have. The lower desires are crowded out by the higher. We can do without childhood's toys when we have manhood's better possessions; we need this world less as we get more of God and heaven into our hearts.

This was the secret of the contentment of the old prisoner whose immortal word is so well worth considering. He was content in any trial, because earth meant so little and Christ meant so much to him. He did not need the things he did not have; he was not made poor by the things he had lost; he was not

vexed by the sufferings he had to endure, because the sources of his life were in heaven, and could not be touched by earthly experiences of pain or loss.

These are hints of the way we may learn in whatever state we are therein to be content. Surely the lesson is worth learning. One year of sweet content, amid earth's troublous scenes, is better than a lifetime of vexed, restless discontent. The lesson can be learned, too, by anyone who truly is Christ's disciple, for did not the Master say: "Peace I leave with you; my peace I give unto you"?

The artist painted life as a dark, storm-swept sea filled with wrecks. Then out on the wild sea-waves, he made a rock to arise, in a cleft of which, high up, amid herbage and flowers, he painted a dove sitting quietly on her nest. It is a picture of Christian peace in the midst of this world's strifes and storms. In the cleft of the rock is the home of content.

Building Our Life on God's Plan

God has a plan for every life. This plan is in God's mind before the person is born. The divine Creator never brings a human soul into being and starts it on its immortal destiny, without knowing precisely what place he means it to fill in this world, what work he means it to do, what he means it to become. The plan is not the same for any two lives; there is a special purpose for each one. We reach our highest success in life and do the noblest work possible for us to do--when we discover what God's thought is for us, and try our best to work it out.

It certainly must be possible, too, for us to learn what God's plan is for our own life. God would never be so unreasonable as to require and expect certain things of us--and not be willing and ready to tell us what they are. He would not have a pattern for us to follow--and then hide it out of sight so that we cannot see it. He will show us the pattern if we look for it at the right place, and if we are really ready to accept it and make it our own.

It will be a pity if any of us disregard God's thought and purpose for our life, and ignore it, and make one of our own instead--a poor, imperfect, short-sighted, faulty plan--instead of God's noble, wise, perfect, and beautiful plan. It would be as if the mere builder of the cathedral should throw aside the great wise architect's plan--and take his own poor ignorant idea instead. It would be a pity if we have a divine plan for our life lying close beside us, within our reach, so that we can see it and follow it--if we should yet fail to see it, and, wondering what God wants us to do, what his purpose is for us, and wishing we might know--and should go stumbling on in darkness, only guessing at the way and at our duty.

God shows us our life's pattern, in his Word. He leads us to these Holy Scriptures and there lets us see patterns for every part of the building of character which he wants us to rear. So there is urgent necessity for a constant reading and pondering and deep study of the Bible--if we would discover the plans and patterns for our life which God has prepared. Imagine the builders working away on a cathedral day by day, without referring to the architect's drawings--just building haphazard, as the fancy struck them. What a struggling, shapeless, mongrel pile, the house would be in the end! Like this would be the life-fabric which one would pile up who did not study the Bible, to find there the Lord's patterns for his life.

Again, God shows us his plans for our life--in other holy lives. Every glimpse of spiritual loveliness we see in a Christian friend or in any saintly character, is a pattern shown to us which we are to seek to work into our own life. When we see sweet patience in a sufferer, peace in one who is in sore trial, quiet meekness in one who is enduring injuries, cheerfulness in one who is passing through afflictions--God is letting us

see gleams and glimpses of what he wants us to be, and the way he wants us to live. Especially as we take our New Testament and study the life and the character of Christ, do we see the perfect pattern. In the best human lives we have only single gleams of spiritual loveliness--perhaps gentleness; or courage; or sympathy--mingled with faults and imperfections almost hiding the beauty--a little flower amid a cluster of briars or thorns, a lily growing out of a black bog. But in Christ we see all the qualities of a perfect life, in their richest, ripest loveliness, without a fault or a flaw. As we behold Christ, therefore, we are looking upon the one perfect pattern.

There are questions of duty, which are not directly answered in the Bible. So far as a matter of character, disposition, temper, spirit, and conduct are concerned--we need no other guide than Scripture. The plans for our life are all there. But the Bible does not tell a young man what business or calling to choose. It does not tell him where he should locate to conduct his business or pursue his profession. It does not tell a young woman what education will benefit her for her life-work. It does not show us which of two courses to choose when we stand at a dividing of the ways. It does not tell men what investments to make, when to buy or sell property. It does not show us just what to do when we are brought face to face with responsibilities, and cannot be sure of the best thing. Sometimes we hear of people opening the Bible and taking the first verse that their eye falls on as an answer to their question, or as a guiding hand in their perplexity. That is only superstition. The Bible is not meant to be played with in any such way.

How, then, are we to learn God's will in cases of this kind? Will God show us the pattern for our life in all these and like cases? Yes; no one need ever take a step in the dark. He does not show us all our life-course in one pattern; but he will let us know our duty--as we go on, step by step. If we do God's will as it is made known to us--we shall never lack knowledge of it. For example, in the matter of promotion in business or in any place of duty or responsibility, it is a question if one should ever seek it for himself. Let him do his duty in the position in which he is placed; let him do it faithfully, diligently, with ever increasing perfectness--but with no scheming for a higher place. In General Grant's autobiography there is this suggestive statement: "I never dared seek promotion. I was afraid if I sought it, I might get into positions which responsibilities I could not fill. I preferred to take promotion as it came to me, providentially." If this rule were followed by all, there would be fewer wrecks of great human responsibilities. God will guide us in his providence into the higher places which he wants us to fill, and the larger work he wants us to do--if only we are faithful in our present place, and wait patiently for him.

We have but one simple thing to do, if we would learn God's plan for our life. We have our present duty to do. If one is in school, his daily tasks are all he has to do. He is not to waste a moment worrying about what he will make of his life next year or in ten years. The duty of the day is the whole will of God for him. When tomorrow comes--it will be tomorrow's duty, and so on day by day. Thus he will in the end fulfill all God's will for him, by doing each little part of it as it is made known to him.

Then work must be well done at every point. Our hand never must slack, even for a day. Life is a great deal more serious than many of us think. Responsibility covers every moment of it. We dare not do anything carelessly. The harness-maker one day did slack work on a pair of lines because he was in a hurry. A few weeks later the horses attached to a family coach became frightened, and when the driver sought to hold them--the line broke and the team ran away, wrecking the carriage and badly hurting two people in it. Carelessness anywhere, for even one hour, is criminal. Besides, it is not working after the pattern. Let us learn to do every duty well. Let us follow the drawing to the smallest particular. Thus only can we build our life on God's plan.

Of course we are never to expect to be led and shown the way and told what to do, as if we had no brains. We have brains--and we are to use them. God gave them to us that we might think for ourselves, that we might inquire and judge and choose a plan. He guides us therefore, in many things, through our own judgment. We are to pray for light, and then think for ourselves and act--doing what seems to us to be the right thing, taking what appears to be God's way. We may sometimes make mistakes, for none of us are infallible. But we learn by making mistakes and grow wiser as we go on.

Our blessed Master in his wondrous love, has given us a work to do in this world. It matters little whether it is small or great in men's eyes; whether it is work which shall be exposed to the world's gaze, or something obscure up amid the rafters, in the shadows of other men's great buildings. But whatever we do--let us do it well. Let us not carve into beauty, only the part men shall see, to win human praise; while we leave the hidden parts unfinished or carelessly wrought. Let us rather work, even in the shadows, in the obscurest things, so perfectly, so beautifully, that when angels and Christ shall look down upon what we have done, they shall say, "It was love that wrought this, love for the blessed Master." Then his greeting to us will be, "Well done--good and faithful servant!"

Enlarge the Place of Your Tent

"Enlarge the place of your tent, stretch your tent curtains wide, do not hold back; lengthen your cords, strengthen your stakes." Isaiah 54:2

It is a great thing for a man to be able by his influence on others, to enrich their lives. It is said that Michael Angelo once paid a visit to the studio of Raphael, when the artist was absent. On an easel there was a canvas with the outline of a human form--beautiful--but too small. Michael Angelo took a brush and wrote under the figure the word "Amplius"--larger. The same word might be written under many lives. They may be good and beautiful--but they are too small. They need to be enlarged. They have not sufficient height or breadth.

There are many people who live in only one room, so to speak. They are intended to live in a house with many rooms: rooms of the mind, rooms of the heart, and rooms of taste, imagination, sentiment, and feeling. But these upper rooms are left unused, while they live in the basement.

A story is told of a Scotch nobleman who, when he came into possession of his estates, set about providing better houses for his people, who were living huddled together in single-roomed cottages. So he built for them pretty, comfortable houses. But in a short time each family was living as before, in one room, and renting the rest of the house. They did not know how to live in higher, better ways. The experiment taught him, that people could not be really benefitted by anything done for them merely from the outside.

Horace Bushnell put it in an epigram--"The soul of improvement--is the improvement of the soul." It is not a larger house which is needed for a man--but a larger man in the house. A man is not made better by giving him more money, better furniture, finer pictures, richer carpets--but by giving him knowledge, wisdom, good principle, strength of character; by teaching him love.

Some lives are narrow, by reason of the way they have let circumstances dwarf them. But we must not say that poverty has this effect--for many who are poor, who have to live in a little house, with few comforts and no luxuries, live a life that is large and free, as wide as the sky in its joy; while on the other hand there are those who have everything earthly that heart could desire, yet whose lives are narrow.

There are some to whom life has been so heavy a burden, that they are ready to drop by the way. They pray for health, and illness comes with its suffering and its expense. Their work is hard. They have to live in continual discomfort. Their associations are uncongenial. There seems no hope of relief. When they awake in the morning, their first consciousness is of the load they must lift and begin again to carry. Their disheartenment has continued so long that it has grown into hopelessness. The message to such is: "Enlarge the place of your tent." No matter how many or how great are the reasons for discouragement, a Christian should not let bitterness enter his heart and blind his eyes--so that he cannot see the blue sky and the shining stars.

Looked at from an earthly view-point, could any life have been more narrow in its condition than Christ's? Think who he was--the Son of God, sinless, holy, loving, and infinitely gentle of heart. Then think of the life into which he came--the relentless hatred of him, the bitter enmity which pursued him, the rejection of love which met him at every step. Think of the failure of his mission, (as it seemed), his betrayal and death. Yet he was never discouraged. He never grew bitter. How did he overcome the narrowness? The secret was love. The world hated him--but he loved on. His own received him not, rejected him--but his heart changed not toward them. Love saved him from being embittered by the narrowness. This is the one secret that will save any life from the narrowing influence of the most distressing circumstances. Widen your tent! Make room in it for Christ and for your neighbor.

There was a woman who had become embittered by a long experience of sickness, and of injustice and wrong, until she was shut up in a prison of hopelessness. Then, by reason of the death of a brother, a little motherless child was brought to her door. The door was opened reluctantly at first; the child was not warmly welcomed. Yet when she was received, Christ entered with her, and at once the dreary home began to grow brighter. The narrowness began to be enlarged. Other human needs came and were not turned away. In blessing others--the woman was blessed herself. Today there is no happier home than hers. Try it if you are discouraged. Begin to serve those who need your love and ministry. Encourage some other disheartened one--and your own discouragement will pass away. Brighten another's lonely lot--and your own will be brightened.

Some lives are made narrow by their limitations. Men seem not to have the same chance that others have. They may be physically incapacitated for holding their place in the march of life. Or they may have failed in business after many years of hard toil, and may lack the courage to begin again. They may have been hurt by folly or sin, and not seem able to take the flights they used to take. There are some people in every community who, for one cause or another, do not seem to have a chance to make much of their life. But whatever it may be which shuts one in a narrow environment, as in a little tent, the gospel of Christ brings a message of hope and cheer. Its call ever is, "Enlarge the place of your tent, stretch your tent curtains wide."

There is danger that some of us overdo our contentment. We regard as an impassable wall, certain obstacles and hindrances which God meant to be, to us, only inspirers of courage. Difficulties are not intended to stop our efforts--but to arouse us to our best. We give up too easily. We conclude that we cannot do certain things, and think we are submitting to God's will in giving up without trying to overcome, when in fact we are only showing our laziness. We suppose that our limitations are part of God's plan for us, and that we have only to accept them and make the best of them. In some cases this is true--there are barriers that are impassable--but in many cases God wants us to gain the victory over the limitations. The call ever is, "Enlarge the place of your tent!"

If there can be no physical victory over physical handicaps, there can always at least be a mental victory. We should never accept of captivity, which shuts our soul in any prison. Our spirit may be free, though our bodily life is shut up in a prison of circumstances. An English writer tells of two birds, caught and put into cages side by side. The starling began to resist and struggle, flying against the wires of its cage in vain efforts to escape. The canary accepted its captivity, and flying up on a bar, began to sing, filling all the place about with glad songs. The former bird was a captive indeed, shut up in a narrow, hopeless prison. The other turned its captivity into widest liberty and its narrow cage into a palace of victory. We say the starling acted very foolishly, and that the canary showed true wisdom. Which course do we take when we find ourselves shut up in any narrow, imprisoned life?

Life should never cease to widen. People talk about the "dead line"--it used to be fifty years; now it probably is less. After crossing that line, they tell us, a man cannot do his best. It is not true--at least it should not be true. A man ought to be at his best during the last years of his life. He ought always to be enlarging the place of his tent until its curtains are finally pushed out into the limitless spaces of immortality!

Help for the Common Days

Every true Christian should desire to be Christlike in character. It is not enough to be honest, and upright, and true, and just. In Christ, these strong qualities were marked--but He was also gentle, and kind, and loving, and patient. If we would be like our Master--we must have these traits of character also in us. When we pray that the beauty of the Lord may be upon us, we must ask for these finer features of His beauty--as well as for the more rugged ones. We need His strength and truth and faithfulness and justice--but we need His love and tenderness as well. And these are among the fruits of the Spirit-filled life.

"Alice is not pretty," said one of her friends, trying to define her character, "and I never heard anybody call her brilliant. But you couldn't put her anywhere--in the poorest, narrowest place--without finding in a little while that things had begun to grow about her. She could make a home in the desert, and not only would it be a home, with all the warm, welcoming feeling of one--but there would be fine, invisible lines stretching out from it to the world in every direction. I cannot imagine her in so bare a place, that she could not find joy in it; nor in so lonely a place, that the sorrowing and troubled would not find their way to her door. She has a gift for living--that's the secret."

That is the way the Spirit works in the heart in which he dwells. He opens a well of heavenly love there and its waters make the life into a garden of God. The beauty in us changes us from glory to glory, until all the grace and beauty of Christ are in us. Not to admit this heavenly Guest--is to be without God. To have him in our hearts--is to be children of God.

The influence of the indwelling Spirit is not shown merely in holy emotions, ecstatic raptures--but in most practical ways in everyday life. To be kind and charitable, to give bread to the hungry and to sacrifice a pleasure to help another over a hard place, are better evidences of the indwelling of the Spirit than any amount of effervescent talk about consecration, in a prayer

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