

Making the Most of Life - Part 2

by J.R. Miller

The sermon emphasizes the importance of doing the work of spiritual temple-building in silence and obedience to God, and serving Christ through obedience and love.

Scripture: Proverbs 4:23, Matthew 25:40, Colossians 3:23, 1 Peter 2:5

Topics: "Gratitude", "Spiritual Growth"

Description

J.R. Miller emphasizes the importance of silent, diligent work in building our spiritual lives and character, likening our experiences to the quiet quarrying of stones for Solomon's temple. He illustrates that true growth often occurs in the unseen, as we endure life's challenges and allow God to shape us into His masterpiece. Miller encourages believers to recognize their unique responsibilities in their environments, asserting that even small acts of service done in love for Christ are significant. He also warns against the dangers of ingratitude, urging us to express our thankfulness for the blessings we receive. Ultimately, he calls for a life of purpose, swift action, and a commitment to helping others without over-helping, as we navigate our individual paths in faith.

Transcript

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by J. R. Miller, 1891

Chapter 13. Without Axe or Hammer.

We read of the temple of Solomon, when it was being built, that it was built of stone made ready in the quarry, so that neither hammer nor axe nor any tool of iron was heard in the house while it went up.

So it is, that the great work of spiritual temple-building goes on continually in this world. We are all really silent builders. The kingdom of God comes not with observation. The divine Spirit works in silence, changing men's hearts, transforming lives, comforting sorrow, kindling hope in darkened bosoms, washing scarlet souls white as snow! The preacher may speak with the voice of a Boanerges--but the power which reaches hearts is not the preacher's noise; silently the divine voice whispers in the soul its secret of conviction, or of hope, or of strength. The Lord is not in the storm, in the earthquake, in the fire--but in the sound of gentleness, the Spirit's whisper, which breathes through the soul.

Perhaps the best work any of us do in this world, is that which we do without noise. Words give forth sound--but it is not the sounds which do good, which brighten sad faces as people listen, which change tears to laughter, which stimulate hope, which courage into fainting hearts--it is not the noise of our words--but the thoughts which the words carry. Words are but the chattering messengers which bear the sealed messages; and it is the messages which help and comfort. We may make noise as we work--but it is not our noise which builds up what we leave in beauty behind us. It is life which builds, and life is silent. The force which works in our homes is a silent force--mother-love, father-love, patience, gentleness, prayer, truth, the influences of divine grace.

It is the same in the building up of personal character in each of us. There may be a great deal of noise all about us--but it is in silence that we grow. From a thousand sources come the little blocks that are laid upon the walls--the lessons we get from others, the influences friends exert upon us, the truths our reading puts into our minds, the impressions life leaves upon us, the inspirations we receive from the divine Spirit--ever the builders are at work on these characters of ours--but they work silently, without noise of hammer or axe.

There is another suggestion. Down in the dark quarries, under the city, the men wrought, cutting, hewing, polishing, the stones. They hung their little lamps on the walls, and with their hammers and chisels they hewed away at the great blocks. Months and years passed; then one day there was a grand dedication, and there in the glorious sunshine all the secret, obscure work of those years was seen in its final beauty, amid the joy of a nation. If the men who had wrought in the quarries were present that day, what a joy it must have been to them to think of their work in preparing the great stones for their place in the magnificent building!

Here is a parable. This world is the quarry. We are toiling away in the darkness. We cannot see what good is ever to come out of our lonely, painful, obscure toil. Yet some day our quarry-work will be manifested in the glory of heaven. We are preparing materials now and here for the temple of the great King, which in heaven is slowly rising through the ages. No noise of hammer or axe is heard in all that wondrous building, because the stones are all shaped and polished and made entirely ready in this world.

We are the stones, and the world is God's quarry. The stones for the temple were cut out of the great rock in the dark underground cavern. They were rough and shapeless. Then they were dressed into form, and this required a great deal of cutting, hammering, and chiseling. Without this stern, sore work on the stones, not one of them could ever have filled a place in the temple. At last when they were ready they were lifted out of the dark quarry and carried up to the mountain-top, where the temple was rising, and were laid in their place.

We are stones in the quarry as yet. When Christ saved us--we were cut from the great mass of rock. But we were yet rough and unshapely; not fit for heaven. Before we can be ready for our place in the heavenly temple--we must be hewn and shaped. The hammer must do its work, breaking off the roughnesses. The chisel must be used, carving and polishing our lives into beauty. This work is done in the many processes of life. Every sinful thing, every fault in our character--is a rough place in the stone, which must be chiseled off. All the crooked lines must be straightened. Our lives must be cut and hewn, until they conform to the perfect standard of divine truth.

Quarry-work is not always pleasant. If stones had hearts and sensibilities, they would sometimes cry out in sore pain as they feel the hammer strokes and the deep cutting of the chisel. Yet the workman must not

heed their cries and withdraw his hand, else they would at last be thrown aside as worthless blocks, never to be built into the place of honor.

We are not stones; we have hearts and sensibilities, and we do cry out oftentimes as the hammer smites away the roughnesses in our character. But we must yield to the painful work and let it go on, or we shall never have our place as living stones in Christ's beautiful temple. We must not wince under the sorrow and affliction.

There is still another suggestion from this singular temple-building. Every individual life has its quarries, where are shaped the blocks which afterward are built into character, or which take form in acts. Schools are the quarries, where, through years of patient study, the materials for life are prepared, the mind is disciplined, habits are formed, knowledge is gained, and power is stored. Later, in active life, the temple rises without noise of hammer or axe. Homes are quarries where children are trained, where moral truth is lodged in the heart, where the elements of character are hewn out like fair stones, to appear in the life in after days, when it grows up among men.

Then there are the thought-quarries, which are in back of what people see in every human life. Men must be silent thinkers before their words or deeds can have either great beauty or power.

Extemporaneousness anywhere, is of small value. Glib, easy talkers, who are always ready to speak on any subject, who require no time for preparation, may go on chattering forever--but their talk is only chatter. The words that are worth hearing come out of thought-quarries where they have been wrought oftentimes in struggle and anguish. So it is of all great thoughts. Thinkers brood long in the silence and then come forth and their eloquence sways us. So it is with art. We look at a fine picture and our hearts are warmed by its wondrous beauty. But do we know the story of the picture? Years and years of thought and of tireless toil lie in back of its enrapturing beauty. Or here is a book which charms you, which thrills and inspires you. Great thoughts lie on its pages. Do you know the book's story? The author lived, struggled, toiled, suffered, wept--that he might write the words which now help you. In back of every good life-thought which blesses men, lies a dark quarry where the thought was born and shaped into the beauty of form which makes it a blessing to the world.

Or here is a noble and beautiful character. Goodness appears natural to it. It seems easy for the man to be noble and to do noble things. But again the quarry is in back of the temple. Each one's heart is the quarry out of which comes all that the person builds into his life. "As he thinks in his heart so is he." Everything that appears in our lives--comes out of our hearts. All our acts are first thoughts. The artist's picture, the poet's poem, the singer's song, the architect's building, are thoughts before they are wrought out into forms of beauty. All dispositions, tempers, feelings, words, and acts--start in the heart. If the workmen had quarried faulty stones in the caverns, the temple would have been spoiled. An evil heart, with stained thoughts, impure imaginings, blurred feelings--can never build up a fair and lovely character.

We need to guard our heart-quarry with all diligence, since out of it are the issues of life. The thoughts build the life and make the character! White thoughts rear up a beautiful fabric before God and man. Soiled thoughts pile up a stained life, without beauty or honor. We should look well, therefore, to our heart-quarry, where the work goes on in the darkness without ceasing! If all is right there, we need give little concern to the building of character. Diligent heart-keeping, yields a life unspotted from the world.

A little child had been reading the beatitudes, and was asked which of the qualities named in them she most desired. "I would rather be pure in heart," she said. When asked the reason for her choice, she

answered: "If I could but have a pure heart, I would then possess all the other qualities of the beatitudes in the one." The child was right. A pure heart will build a beautiful life--a fit temple for Christ. Thinking over God's holy thoughts after him--will make us like God. Thinking habitually about Christ--Christ's beauty will come into our souls and shine in our faces.

Chapter 14. Doing Things for Christ.

If Christ were here, we say, we would do many things for him. The women who love him would gladly minister to him as did the women who followed him from Galilee. The men who are his friends would work to help him in any ways he might direct. The children who are trying to please him would run errands for him. We all say we would be delighted to serve him--if only he would come again to our world and visit our homes. But we can do things for him just as really as if he were here again in human form!

One way of doing this is by obeying him. He is our Lord. Nothing pleases him so well as our obedience. It is told of a great philosopher that a friend called one day to see him, and was entertained by the philosopher's little daughter until her father came in. The friend supposed that the child of so wise a man, would be learning something very deep. So he asked her, "What is your father teaching you?" The little maid looked up into his face with her clear eyes and said, "Obedience!" That is the one great lesson our Lord is teaching us. He wants us to learn obedience. If we obey him always, we shall always be doing things for him.

We do things for Christ, which we do through love to him. Obedience without love, does not please him. But the smallest services we can render, if love inspires them, he accepts. Thus we can make the commonest tasks of our lives holy ministries, as sacred as what the angels do. Christ scorns no work that is done in love to him. Most of us have much drudgery in our lives--but even this we can make glorious, by doing it through love for Christ.

Things we do for others in Christ's name, are done for him. We all remember that wonderful "inasmuch" in the twenty-fifth of Matthew. If we find the sick one, or the poor one, and go and minister, as we may be able, as unto the Lord--the deed is accepted as if done to him in person.

There are fathers and mothers who find it hard to provide for their children. It takes all their time and strength, and sometimes they say, "I cannot do any work for Christ, because it takes every moment to earn bread and clothing for my little ones, and to care for them." But Jesus whispers, "Yes; yet your children are mine, and what you do for them you do for me."

There is in a home an invalid who requires all the time and thought of another member of the household in loving attention. It may be an aged parent--needing the help of a child; it may be a child, crippled, blind, or sick--needing all a parent's care; or it may be a brother broken in health on whom a sister is called to wait continually with patient love. And sometimes those who are required thus to spend their days and nights in ministry for others feel that their lives count for nothing in work for Christ. They hear the appeals for laborers and for service--but cannot respond. Their hands are already filled. Yet Jesus whispers, "These for whom you are toiling, caring, and spending time and strength are mine--and in doing for them, you are doing for me just as acceptable work as are those who are toiling without distraction or hindrance in the great open field."

Sometimes the work we do for Christ with purest love fails, or seems to fail of result. Nothing appears to come of it. There are whole lifetimes of godly people that seem to yield nothing. A word ought to be said

about this kind of doing for Christ. We are to set it down as true without exception, that no work wrought in Christ's name and with love for him is ever lost. What we, in our limited, short-sighted vision, planned to do, may not be accomplished--but God's purpose goes on in every consecrated life, in every true deed done. The disciples thought that Mary's costly ointment was wasted. So it seemed; but this world has been a little sweeter ever since the breaking of the vase, which let the perfume escape into its common air. So it is with many things that are done, and many lives that are lived. They seem to fail, and there is nothing on the earth to show where they have been. Yet somehow the stock of human happiness is larger and the world is a little better.

Our work for Christ that fails in what we intended, may yet leave a blessing in some other way. A faithful Bible-class teacher through many months visited a young man, a member of her class, in sickness. She read the Bible to him and sang sweet hymns and prayed by his bedside. He was not a Christian and she hoped that he would be led to Christ. But at length he recovered and went out again, unchanged, or even more indifferent than ever to his spiritual interests. All the faithful teacher's work seemed to have been in vain. Then she learned that a frail, invalid girl, living in an adjoining house, had been brought to Christ through the loving work done for the careless scholar. The songs sung by the sick man's bedside, and which seemed to have left no blessing in his heart, had been heard through the thin wall of the house in the girl's sick-room, and had told her of the love of the Savior.

The records of Christian ministry are full of such good work done unintentionally. Failing to leave a blessing where it was hoped a blessing would be received, it blessed some other life. We may not say that any good work has failed, until we know in the last great harvest all the results of the things we have done and the words we have spoken.

Many people die, and see yet no harvest from their life's sowing. They come to the end of their years, and their hands are empty. But when they enter heaven they will find that they have really been building there all the while, that the things that have seemed to leave no result on the earth, have left glorious results inside the gates of pearl.

Then even if the work we do does not itself leave any record, the doing of it leaves a record--an impression--on our own life. There is a word of Scripture which says, "He who does the will of God abides forever." Doing God's will builds up enduring character in us. Every obedience adds a new touch of beauty to the soul. Every true thing we do in Christ's name, though it leaves no mark anywhere else in God's universe, leaves an imperishable mark on our own life. Every deed of unselfish kindness that we perform with love for Christ in our heart, though it blesses no other soul in all the world, leaves its sure benediction on ourselves.

Thousands of years ago, a leaf fell on the soft clay and seemed to be lost. But last summer a geologist in his ramblings broke off a piece of rock with his hammer, and there lay the image of the leaf, with every line, and every vein, and all the delicate tracery, preserved in the stone through these centuries. So the words we speak, and the things we do for Christ today, may seem to be lost--but in the great final revealing the smallest of them will appear, to the glory of Christ and the reward of the doer.

Chapter 15. Helping and Over-helping.

Even kindness may be overdone. One may be too gentle. Love may hold others back from duty, and thus may wreck destinies. We need to guard against meddling with God's discipline, softening the experience that he means to be hard, sheltering our friend from the wind that he intends to blow chillingly. All summer

does not make a good zone to live in; we need autumn and winter to temper the heat, and keep vegetation from luxuriant overgrowth. The best thing we can do for others--is not always to take their load or do their duty for them.

Of course we are to be helpful to others. No aim should be put higher in our life-plans than that of personal helpfulness. The motto of the true Christian cannot be other than that of the Master: "Not to be ministered unto--but to minister." Even in the ambition to gather and retain wealth, the spirit of the desire must be, if we are Christians at all--that thereby we may become more helpful to others; that through, or by means of, our wealth--we may be enabled to do larger and greater good. Whatever gift, power, or possession we have that we do not seek to use in this way--is not yet truly devoted to God. Fruit is the test of character, and the purpose of fruit is not to adorn the tree or vine--but to feed hunger. Whatever we are, whatever we have, is fruit, and must be held for the feeding of the hunger of others. Thus personal helpfulness is the aim of all truly consecrated life. In so far as we are living for ourselves--we are not Christians.

There are many ways of helping others. Some people help us in material ways. It is a still higher kind of help which we get from those who minister to our mental needs, who write the books which charm, instruct, and assist us. Mind is greater than body. Bread, and clothing, and furniture, and houses--will not satisfy our intellectual cravings. Good books bring to us inestimable benefits. They tell us of new worlds, and inspire us to conquer them. They show us lofty and noble ideals, and stimulate us to attain them. They make us larger, better, stronger. The help we get from books is incalculable.

Yet the truest and best help any one can give to others is not in material things--but in ways that make them stronger and better. Money is good--when money is really needed. But in comparison with the divine gifts of hope, friendship, courage, sympathy, and love, it is paltry and poor. Usually the help people need, is not so much the lightening of their burden, as fresh strength to enable them to bear their burden, and stand up under it. The best thing we can do for another, someone has said, is not to make some things easy for him--but to make something of him.

It is just here that friendship makes most of its mistakes. It over-helps. It helps by ministering relief, by lifting away loads, by gathering hindrances out of the way, when it would help much more wisely by seeking to impart hope, strength, energy. "Our friends," says Emerson, "are those who make us do what we can." Says another writer: "Our real friend is not the man or woman who smooths over our difficulties, throws a cloak over our failings, stands between us and the penalties which our mistakes have brought upon us--but the man or woman who makes us understand ourselves, and helps us to better things." Love is weak, and too often pampers and flatters. It thinks that loyalty requires it to make life easy as possible for the beloved one.

Too often our friendship is most short-sighted in this regard, and most hurtful to those we fervently desire to aid. We should never indulge or encourage weakness in others, when we can in any way stimulate it into strength. We should never do anything for another--which we can inspire him to do for himself. Much parental affection errs at this point. Life is made too easy for children. They are sheltered--when it were better if they faced the storm. They are saved from toil and exertion--when toil and exertion are God's ordained means of grace for them, of which the parents rob them in their over-tenderness. There are children who are wronged by the cruelty and inhumanity of parents, and whose cries to heaven make the throne of the Eternal rock and sway; but there are children, also, who are wronged of much that is noblest and best in their inheritance by the over-kindness of parents.

In every warm friendship, too, there is strong temptation to make the same mistake. We have to be ever on our guard against over-helping. Our aim should always be to inspire in our friend new energy, to develop in him the noblest strength, to bring out his best manhood. Over-helping defeats these offices of friendship.

There is one particular point at which a special word of caution may well be spoken. We need to guard our sympathies, when we would comfort and help those who are suffering or are in trouble of any kind. It may seem a severe thing to say--but illness is oftentimes made worse by the pity of friends. There is in weak natures a tendency to indulge sickness, to exaggerate its symptoms, to imagine that it is more serious than it really is, and easily to succumb to its influence. You find your friend indisposed, and you are profuse in your expressions of sympathy, encouraging or suggesting fears, urging prompt medical help. You think you have shown kindness--but very likely you have done sore injury. You have left a depressing influence behind you. Your friend is disheartened and alarmed. You have left him weaker, not stronger.

It may seem hard-hearted to appear to be unsympathetic with invalids, and those who are slightly or even seriously sick; not to take interest in their complaints; not to say commiserating things to them; but really it is the part of true friendship to help sick people fight the battle with their ills. We ought, therefore, to guard against speaking any word which will discourage them, increase their fear, exaggerate their thought of their illness, or weaken them in their struggle. On the other hand, we ought to say words which will cheer and strengthen them, and make them braver for the fight. Our duty is to help them to get well.

Perhaps the very medicine they need is a glimpse of cheerful outlook. Sick people oftentimes fall into a mood of disheartenment and self-pity which seriously retards their recovery. To sit down beside them then, and fall into their gloomy spirit, listening sympathetically to their discouraged words, is to do them sore unkindness. The true office of friendship in such cases is to drive away the discouragement, and put hope and courage into the sore heart. We must try to make our sick friend braver to endure his sufferings.

Then, even in the sacredness of sorrow, we should never forget that our mission to others is not merely to weep with them--but to help them to be victorious, to receive their sorrow as a messenger from God, and to bear themselves as God's children under it. Instead, therefore, of mere emotional condolence with our friends in their times of grief, we should seek to present to them the strong comforts of divine love, and to inspire them to the bearing of their sorrow in faith and hope and joy.

So all personal helpfulness should be wise and thoughtful. It should never tend to pamper weakness, to encourage dependence, to make people timid, to debilitate manliness and womanliness, to make parasites of those who turn to us with their burdens and needs. We must take care that our helping does not dwarf any life which we ought rather to stimulate to noble and beautiful growth. God never makes such mistakes as this. He never fails us in need--but he loves us too well and is too wise to relieve us of weights which we need to make our growth healthful and vigorous. We should learn from God, and should help as he helps, without over-helping.

Chapter 16. The Only One.

There are a great many people in this world--hundreds of millions. Yet in a sense each one of us is the only one. Each individual life has relations of its own in which it must stand alone, and into which no other life can come. Companionships may be close, and they may give much comfort and inspiration--but in all the inner meaning of life each individual lives apart and alone. No one can live your life for you. No one but yourself can answer your questions, meet your responsibilities, make your decisions and choices. Your

relations with God, no one but yourself can fulfill. No one can believe for you. A thousand friends may encircle you and pray for your soul--but until you lift up your own heart in prayer, no communication is established between you and God. No one can get your sins forgiven but yourself. No one can obey God for you. No other one can do your work for Christ, or render your account at the judgment-seat.

In the realm of experience also, the same is true. Each person suffers alone, as if there were no other being in the universe. Friends may stand by us in our hours of pain or sorrow, and may sympathize with us or administer comfort or alleviation--but they enter not really into the experiences. In these we are alone. No one can meet your temptations for you, or fight your battles, or endure your trials. The tenderest friendship, the holiest love, cannot enter into the solitariness in which each one of us lives apart.

This aloneness of life sometimes becomes very real in consciousness. All great souls experience it as they rise out of and above the common mass of men in their thoughts and hopes and aspirations, as the mountains rise from the level of the valley and little hills. All great leaders of men oftentimes must stand alone, as they move in advance of the ranks of their followers. The battles of truth and of progress have usually been fought by lonely souls. Elijah, for example, in a season of disheartenment and despondency, gave it as part of the exceptional burden of his life, that he was the only one in the field for God. It is so in all great epochs; God calls one man to stand for him.

But the experience is not that only of great souls; there come times in the lives of all who are living faithfully and worthily--when they must stand alone for God, without companionship, perhaps without sympathy or encouragement. Here is a young person, the only one of his family who has confessed Christ. He takes him as his Savior, and then stands up before the world and vows to be his and follow him. He goes back to his home. The members of the home circle are very dear to him; but none of them are Christians, and he must stand alone for Christ among them. Perhaps they oppose him in his discipleship--in varying degrees this oftentimes is the experience. Perhaps they are only indifferent, making no opposition, only quietly watching his life to see if it is consistent. In any case, however, he must stand for Christ alone, without the help that comes from companionship.

Or it may be in the workshop or in the school that the young Christian must stand alone. He returns from the Lord's Table to his week-day duties, full of noble impulses--but finds himself the only Christian in the place where his duty leads him. His companions are ready to sneer, and they point the finger of scorn at him, with irritating epithets. Or they even persecute him in petty ways. They are not Christ's friends, and he, as follower of the Master, finds no sympathy among them in his new life. He must stand alone in his discipleship, conscious all the while, that unfriendly eyes are upon him. Many a Christian finds it very hard to be the only one to stand for Christ in the circle in which his daily work fixes his place.

This aloneness puts upon one a great responsibility. For example, you are the only Christian in your home. You are the only witness Christ has in your house, the only one through whom to reveal his love, his grace, his holiness. You are the only one to represent Christ in your family--to show there the beauty of Christ, the sweetness and gentleness of Christ; to do there the works of Christ, the things he would do if he lived in your home. Perhaps the salvation of all the souls of your family depends upon your being true and faithful in your own place. If you falter in your loyalty, if you fail in your duty--your loved ones may be lost and the blame will be yours; their blood will be upon you.

In like manner, if you are the only Christian in the shop, the store, or the office where you work, a peculiar responsibility rests upon you, a responsibility which no other one shares with you. You are Christ's only

witness in your place. If you do not testify there for him, there is no other one who will do it. Miss Havergal tells of her experience in the girls' school at Dusseldorf. She went there soon after she had become a Christian and had confessed Christ. Her heart was very warm with love for her Savior and she was eager to speak for him. To her amazement, however, she soon learned that among the hundred girls in the school, she was the only Christian. Her first thought was one of dismay--she could not confess Christ in that great company of worldly, un-Christian companions. Her gentle, sensitive heart shrank from a duty so hard. Her second thought, however, was that she could not refrain from confessing Christ. She was the only one Christ had there--and she must be faithful. "This was very bracing," she writes. "I felt I must try to walk worthy of my calling for Christ's sake. It brought a new and strong desire to bear witness for my Master. It made me more watchful and earnest than ever before, for I knew that any slip in word or deed would bring discredit on my Master." She realized that she had a mission in that school, that she was Christ's witness there, his only witness, and that she dare not fail.

This same sense of responsibility rests upon every thoughtful Christian who is called to be Christ's only witness in a place--in a home, in a community, in a store, or school, or shop, or social circle. He is Christ's only servant there, and he dare not be unfaithful, else the whole work of Christ in that place may fail. He is the one light set to shine there for his Master, and if his light be hidden, the darkness will be unrelieved. So there is special inspiration in this consciousness of being the only one Christ has in a certain place.

There is a sense in which this is true also of everyone of us all the time. We really are always the only one Christ has at the particular place at which we stand. There may be thousands of other lives about us. We may be only one of a great company, of a large congregation, of a populous community. Yet each one of us has a life that is alone in its responsibility, in its danger, in its mission and duty. There may be a hundred others close beside me--but not one of them can take my place, or do my duty, or fulfill my mission, or bear my responsibility. Though everyone of the other hundred does his work, and does it perfectly, my work waits for me, and if I do not do it, it never will be done.

We can understand how that if the great prophet had failed God that day when he was the only one God had to stand for him, the consequences would have been most disastrous; the cause of God would have suffered irreparably. But are we sure that the calamity to Christ's kingdom would be any less if one of us should fail God in our lowly place any common day?

Stories are told of a child finding a little leak in the Holland dike--and stopping it with his hand until help could come, staying there all the night, holding back the floods with his little hand. It was but a tiny, trickling stream that he held back; yet if he had not done it, it would soon have become a torrent, and before morning the sea would have swept over the land, submerging fields, homes, and cities. Between the sea and all this devastation, there was but a boy's hand. Had the child failed, the floods would have rolled in with their remorseless ruin. We understand how important it was that that boy should be faithful to his duty, since he was the only one God had that night to save Holland.

But do you know that your life may be all that stands, between some great flood of moral ruin--and broad, fair fields of beauty? Do you know that your failure in your lowly place and duty may not let in a sea of disaster which shall sweep away human hopes and joys and human souls? The humblest of us dare not fail, for our one life is all God has at the point where we stand.

This truth of personal responsibility, is one of tremendous importance. We do not escape it by being in a crowd, one of a family, one of a community. No one but ourself can live our life, do our work, meet our

obligation, bear our burden! No one but ourself can stand for us before God to render an account of our deeds. In the deepest, realest sense each one of us lives alone.

There is another phase of this subject, however, which should not be overlooked. While we must stand alone in our place and be faithful to our trust, our responsibility reaches only to our own duty. Others beside us have their part also to do, and the perfection of the whole work, depends upon their faithfulness as well as upon ours. The best any of us can do in this world, is but a fragment. The old prophet thought his work had failed because Baalism was not yet entirely destroyed. Then he was told of three other men, who would come after him--two kings and then another prophet, who each in turn would do his part, when at last the destruction of the great alien idolatry would be complete. Elijah's faithfulness had not failed--but his achievement was only a fragment of the whole work.

This is very suggestive and very comforting. We are not responsible for finishing everything we begin. It may be our part only to begin it; the carrying on and finishing of it may be the work of others whom we do not know, of others perhaps not yet born. We all enter into the work of those who have gone before us, and others who come after us shall in turn enter into our work. Our duty simply is to do well and faithfully our own little part. If we do this we need never fret ourselves about the part we cannot do. That is not our work at all--but belongs to some other worker, waiting now, perchance, in some obscure place, who at the right time will come forward with new heart and skillful hand, anointed by God for his task.

So while we are alone in our responsibility, we need give no thought for anything but our own duty, our own little fragment of the Lord's work. The things we cannot do some other one is waiting and preparing now to do, after the work has passed from our hand. There is comfort in this for any who fail in their efforts, and must leave tasks unfinished which they hoped to complete. The finishing is another's mission.

Chapter 17. Swiftmess in Duty.

Many good people are very slow. They do their work well enough, perhaps--but so leisurely that they accomplish in their brief time only a fraction of what they might accomplish. They lose, in aimless loitering, whole golden hours which they ought to fill with quick activities. They seem to have no true appreciation of the value of time, or of their own accountability for its precious moments. They live conscientiously, it may be--but they have no strong constraining sense of duty impelling them to ever larger and fuller achievement. They have a work to do--but there is no hurry for it; there is plenty of time in which to do it.

It is quite safe to say that the majority of people do not get into their life half the achievement that was possible to them when they began to live, simply because they have never learned to work swiftly, and under pressure of great motives.

There can be no doubt that we are required to make the most possible, of our life. Mr. Longfellow once gave to his pupils, as a motto, this: "Live up to the best that is in you." To do this, we must not only develop our talents to the utmost power and capacity of which they are susceptible--but we must also use these talents to the accomplishment of the largest and best results they are capable of producing. In order to reach this standard, we must never lose a day, nor even an hour, and we must put into every day and every hour--all that is possible of activity and usefulness.

Dreaming through days and years, however brilliantly one may dream, can never satisfy the demands of the responsibility which inheres essentially in every soul that is born into the world. Life means duty, toil, work. There is something divinely allotted to each hour, and the hour one loiters remains forever--an

unfilled blank. We can ideally fulfill our mission only by living up always to the best that is in us, and by doing every day the very most that we can do.

We turn over to our Lord for example, since his was the one life in all the ages, which filled out the divine pattern; and wherever we see him, we find him intent on doing the will of his Father, not losing a moment, nor loitering at any task. We see him ever hastening from place to place, from ministry to ministry, from baptism to temptation, from teaching to healing, from miracle-working to solitary prayer. His feet never loitered. He lost no moments; he seems indeed to have crowded the common work of years--into a few short, intense hours. He is painted for us as a man continually under the strongest pressure, with a work to do which he was eager to accomplish in the shortest possible time. He was always calm, never in nervous haste, yet ever quietly moving with resistless energy on his holy errand.

We ought to catch our Master's spirit in this celerity in the Father's business. Time is short--and duty is large. There is not a moment to lose, if, in our allotted period, we would finish the work that is given us to do. We need to get our Lord's "immediately" into our life, so that we shall hasten from duty to duty, without pause or idle lingering. We need to get into our heart a consciousness of being ever on the Master's errands, that shall be within us a mighty compulsion, driving us always to duty.

Naturally we are indolent, and fond of ease and self indulgence. We need to be carried out of and beyond ourselves. There is no motive strong enough to do this but love to God and to our fellow-men. Supreme love to God makes us desire to do with alacrity, everything he commands. Love to our fellow-men draws us to all service of sympathy and beneficence for them, regardless of cost. Constrained by such motives, we shall never become laggards in duty.

Swiftness or slowness in duty, is very much a matter of habit. As one is trained in early life, one is quite sure to continue in mature years. A loitering child will become a loitering man or woman. The habit grows, as all habits do.

Many people lose in the aggregate whole years of time out of their lives--for lack of system. They make no plan for their days. They let duties mingle in inextricable confusion. They are always in feverish haste. They talk continually of being overwhelmed with work, of the great pressure that is upon them, of being driven beyond measure. They always have the air of men who have scarcely time to eat or sleep. And there is nothing feigned in all their intense occupation. They really are hurried men. Yet in the end they accomplish but little in comparison with their great activity, because they work without order, and always feverishly and nervously. Swiftness in accomplishment is always calm and quiet. It plans well, allowing no confusion in tasks. Hurried haste is always flurried haste, which does nothing well. "Unhasting yet unresting" is the motto of quick and abundant achievement.

There is another phase of the lesson. Not swiftness only--but patient persistence through days and years, is the mark of true living. There are many people who can work under pressure for a little time--but who tire of the monotony and slacken in their duty by and by, failing at last because they cannot endure unto the end. There are people who begin many noble things--but soon weary of them and drop them out of their hands. They may pass for brilliant men, men even of genius--but in the end they have for biography only a volume of fragments of chapters, not one of them finished. Such men may attract a great deal of passing attention, while the tireless plodders working beside them receive no praise, no commendation; but in the real records of life, written in abiding lines in God's Book, it is the latter who will shine in the brightest splendor.

So we get our lesson. There is so much to do in our short days--that we dare not lose a moment. Life is so laden with responsibility that to trifle at any point is sin. Even on the seizing of minutes, eternal issues may depend. Of course we must take needed rest to keep our lives in condition for duty. But what shall we say of those strong men and women who do almost nothing but rest? What shall we say of those who live only to have amusement, who dance away their nights and then sleep away their days, and thus hurry on toward the judgment-bar, doing nothing for God or for man? Life is duty; every moment of it has its own duty. There is no life so sad and so terrible in its penalties--as that which wastes the golden years in idleness or pleasure, and leaves duty undone.

Shall we not seek to crowd the days with most earnest living? Shall we not learn to redeem the time from indolence, from loitering, from disorderliness, from the waste of precious moments, from self-indulgence, from impatience of persistent toil, from all that lessens achievement? Shall we not learn to work swiftly for our Master?

Chapter 18. The Shadows We Cast.

Everyone of us casts a shadow. There hangs about us a strange, indefinable something--which we call personal influence, which has its effect on every other life on which it falls. It goes with us wherever we go. It is not something we can have when we want to have it, and then lay aside when we will, as we lay aside a garment. It is something that always pours out from our life, like light from a lamp, like heat from flame, like perfume from a flower.

No one can live, and not have influence. Says Burritt: "No human being can come into this world without increasing or diminishing the sum total of human happiness, not only of the present--but of every subsequent age of humanity. No one can detach himself from this connection. There is no sequestered spot in the universe, no dark niche, to which he can retreat from his relations to others, where he can withdraw the influence of his existence upon the moral destiny of the world; everywhere his presence or absence will be felt, everywhere he will have companions who will be better or worse for his influence." These are true words. To be at all--is to have influence, either for good or evil, over other lives.

The ministry of personal influence, is something very wonderful. Without being conscious of it, we are always impressing others by this strange power that goes out from us. Others watch us--and their actions are modified by ours. Many a life has been started on a career of beauty and blessing--by the influence of one noble act. The disciples saw their Master praying, and were so impressed by his earnestness, or by the radiancy they saw on his face, as he communed with his Father, that when he joined them again they asked him to teach them how to pray. Every true soul is impressed continually by the glimpses it has of loveliness, of holiness, or of nobleness in others.

One kind deed, often inspires many kindnesses. Here is a story from a newspaper of the other day, which illustrates this. A little newsboy entered a car on the elevated railway train, and slipping into a cross-seat, was soon asleep. Presently two young ladies came in, and took seats opposite to him. The child's feet were bare, his clothes were ragged, and his face was pinched and drawn, showing marks of hunger and suffering. The young ladies noticed him, and, seeing that his cheek rested against the hard window-sill, one of them arose, and quietly raising his head, slipped her muff under it for a pillow.

The kind act was observed, and now mark its influence. An old gentleman in the next seat, without a word, held out a silver quarter to the young lady, nodding toward the boy. After a moment's hesitation, she took it, and as she did so, another man handed her a dime, a woman across the aisle held out some pennies,

and almost before the young woman realized what she was doing, she was taking a collection for the poor boy. Thus from the one little act there had gone out a wave of influence touching the hearts of twenty people, and leading each of them to do something.

Common life is full of just such illustrations of the influence of kindly deeds. Every godly life leaves in the world a twofold ministry, that of the things it does directly to bless others, and that of the silent influence it exerts, through which others are made better, or are inspired to do like godly things.

Influence is something, too, which even death does not end. When earthly life closes, a godly man's active work ceases. He is missed in the places where his familiar presence has brought benedictions. No more are his words heard by those who oftentimes have been cheered or comforted by them. No more do his benefactions find their way to homes of need where so many times they have brought relief. No more does his gentle friendship minister strength and hope and courage, to hearts that have learned to love him. The death of a godly man, in the midst of his usefulness, cuts off a blessed ministry of helpfulness in the circle in which he has dwelt. But his influence continues.

The influence which our dead have over us, is oftentimes very great. We think we have lost them when we see their faces no more, nor hear their voices, nor receive the accustomed kindnesses at their hands. But in many cases there is no doubt that what our loved ones do for us after they are gone, is quite as important as what they could have done for us had they stayed with us. The memory of beautiful lives is a benediction, softened and made more rich and impressive by the sorrow which their departure caused. The influence of such sacred memories is in a certain sense--more tender than that of life itself. Death transfigures our loved one, as it were, sweeping away the faults and blemishes of the mortal life, and leaving us an abiding vision, in which all that was beautiful, pure, gentle, and true in him remains to us. We often lose friends in the competitions and strifes of earthly life, whom we would have kept forever had death taken them away in the earlier days when love was strong.

Thus even death does not quench the influence of a godly life. It continues to bless others long after the life has passed from earth.

It must be remembered that not all influence is good. Evil deeds also have influence. Bad men live, too, after they are gone. Cried a dying man whose life had been full of harm to others: "Gather up my influence, and bury it with me in my grave!" But the frantic, remorseful wish was in vain. The man went out of the world--but his bad influence stayed behind him, its poison to work for ages in the lives of others.

We need, therefore, to guard our influence with most conscientious care. It is a crime to fling into the street an infected garment which may carry contagion to men's homes. It is a worse crime to send out a printed page bearing words infected with the virus of moral death. The men who prepare and publish the vile literature which today goes everywhere, polluting and defiling innocent lives, will have a fearful account to render when they stand at God's bar to meet their influence. If we would make our lives worthy of God, and a blessing to the world, we must see to it that nothing we do shall influence others in the slightest degree to evil.

We should keep watch not only over our words and deeds in their intent and purpose--but also in their possible influence over others. There may be liberties which in us lead to no danger--but which to others, with less stable character and less helpful environment, would be full of peril. It is part of our duty to think of these weaker ones and of the influence of our example upon them. We may not do anything, in our strength and security, which might possibly harm others. We must be willing to sacrifice our liberty, if by its

exercise we endanger another's soul. This is the teaching of Paul in the words: "It is better not to eat meat or drink wine or to do anything else that will cause your brother to fall." "Therefore, if what I eat causes my brother to fall into sin, I will never eat meat again, so that I will not cause him to fall."

How can we make sure that our influence shall be only a benediction? There is no way, but by making our life pure and godly. Just in the measure in which we are filled with the Spirit of God and have the love of Christ in us--shall our influence be holy and a blessing to the world.

Chapter 19. The Meaning of Opportunities.

If people's first thoughts were but as good and wise as their after-thoughts, life would be better and more beautiful than it is. We can all see our errors more clearly after we have committed them, than we saw them before. We frequently hear people utter the wish that they could go again over a certain period of their life, saying that they would live it differently, that they would not repeat the mistakes or follies, which had so marred and stained the record they had made.

Of course the wish that one might have a second chance with any past period of time, is altogether vain. No doubt there oftentimes is much reason for shame and pain in our retrospects. We live poorly enough at the best, even the saintliest of us, and many of us certainly make sad work of our life. Human life must appear very pathetic, and oftentimes tragic--as the angels look down upon it. There are almost infinitely fewer wrecks on the great sea where the ships go, than on that other sea of which poets write, where lives with their freightage, of immortal hopes and possibilities sail on to their destiny. We talk sometimes with wonder of what the ocean contains, of the treasures which lie buried far down beneath the waves. But who shall tell of the treasures which are hidden in the deeper, darker sea of human life, where they have gone down in the sad hours of defeat and failure?

Glimpses of these lost things--these squandered treasures, these wasted possibilities--these pearls and gems of life that have gone down into the sea of our past--we may have when the reefs are left bare by the refluxing tides--but glimpses only can we see. We cannot recover our treasures. The gleams only mock us. The past will not give again its gold and pearls to any frantic appealing of ours.

There is something truly startling in this irreparableness of the past, this irrevocableness of the losses which we have suffered through our follies or our sins.

In youth the hours are full of privileges. They come like angels, holding in their hands rich treasures, sent to us from God, which they offer to us; and if we are laggard or indolent, or if we are too intent on our own little trifles to give welcome to these heavenly messengers with their heavenly gifts, they quickly pass on and are gone. And they never come back again to renew the offer.

On the dial of a clock in the palace of Napoleon at Malmaison, the maker has put, the words, "It does not know how to go backward." It is so of the great clock of Time--it never can be turned backward. The moments come to us but once; whatever we do with them we must do as they pass--for they will never come to us again.

Then privilege makes responsibility. We shall have to give account to God for all that he sends to us by the mystic hands of the passing hours, and which we refuse or neglect to receive. "They are wasted--and are added to our debt."

The real problem of living, therefore--is how to rightly utilize, what the hours bring. He who does this, will live nobly and faithfully, and will fulfill God's plan for his life. The difference in men is not in the opportunities which come to them--but in their use of their opportunities. Many people who fail to make much of their life charge their failure to the lack of opportunities. They look at one who is continually doing good and beautiful things, or great and noble things, and think that he is specially favored, that the chances which come to him for such things are exceptional. Really, however, it is in his capacity for seeing and accepting what the hours bring of duty or privilege, that his success lies. Where other men see nothing, he sees a battle to fight, a duty to perform, a service to render, or an honor to win. Many a man waits long for opportunities, wondering why they never come to him, when really they have been passing by him day after day, unrecognized and unaccepted.

There is a legend of an artist, who long sought for a piece of sandal-wood out of which to carve a Madonna. At last he was about to give up in despair, leaving the vision of his life unrealized, when in a dream he was bidden to shape the figure from a block of oak-wood, which was destined for the fire. Obeying the command, he produced from the log of common firewood, a masterpiece.

In like manner many people wait for great and brilliant opportunities for doing the good things, the beautiful things, of which they dream; while through all the plain, common days--the very opportunities they require for such deeds lie close to them, in the simplest and most familiar passing events, and in the commonest circumstances. They wait to find sandal-wood out of which to carve Madonnas, while far more lovely Madonnas than they dream of, are hidden in the common logs of oak they burn in their open fire-place, or spurn with their feet in the wood-yard.

Opportunities come to all. The days of every life are full of them. But the trouble with too many of us is that we do not make anything out of them while we have them. Then next moment they are gone. One man goes through life sighing for opportunities. If only he had this or that gift, or place, or position--he would do great things, he says; but with his means, his poor chances, his meager privileges, his uncongenial circumstances, his limitations, he can do nothing worthy of himself. Then another man comes up close beside him, with like means, chances, circumstances, privileges, and he achieves noble results, does heroic things, wins for himself honor and renown. The secret is in the man--not in his environment.

Life is full of illustrations of this. The materials of life which one man has despised and spurned as unworthy of him, as having in them no charmed secret of success, another man is forever picking up out of the dust, and with them achieving noble and brilliant successes. Men, alert and eager, are needed, men with heroic heart and princely hand, to see and use the opportunities that lie everywhere in the most commonplace life.

There is but one thing to do, to get out of life all its possibilities of attainment and achievement; we must train ourselves to take what every moment brings to us of privilege and of duty. Some people worry themselves over the vague wonder, as to what the divine plan in life is for them. They have a feeling that God had some definite purpose in creating them, and that there is something he wants them to do in this world, and they would like to know how they can learn this divine thought for their life. The answer is really very simple. God is ready to reveal to us, with unerring definiteness, his plan for our life. This revealing he makes as we go on, showing us each moment one little fragment of his purpose. Says Faber: "The surest method of aiming at a knowledge of God's eternal purposes for us, is to be found in the right use of the present moment. Each hour comes with some little fagot of God's will fastened upon its back."

We have nothing to do, therefore, with anything but the privilege and duty of the one hour now passing. This makes the problem of living very simple. We need not look at our life as a whole, nor even carry the burden of a single year; if we but grasp well the meaning of the one little fragment of time immediately present, and do instantly all the duty and take all the privilege that the one hour brings, we shall thus do that which shall best please God and build up our own life into completeness. It ought never to be hard for us to do this.

Living thus we shall make each hour radiant with the radiancy of duty well done, and radiant hours will make radiant years. But the missing of privileges and the neglecting of duties will leave days and years marred and blemished, and make the life at last like a moth-eaten garment. We must catch the sacred meaning of our opportunities if we would live up to our best.

Chapter 20. The Sin of Ingratitude.

A blessing given ought always to have some return. It is better to be a diamond, lighted to shine, than a clod, warmed to be only a dull, dark clod. We all receive numberless favors--but we do not all alike make fitting return.

Krummacher has a pleasant little fable with a suggestion. When Zaccheus was old he still dwelt in Jericho, humble and pious before God and man. Every morning at sunrise he went out into the fields for a walk, and he always came back with a calm and happy mind to begin his day's work. His wife wondered where he went in his walks--but he never spoke to her of the matter. One morning she secretly followed him. He went straight to the tree from which he first saw the Lord. Hiding herself, she watched him to see what he would do. He took a pitcher, and carrying water, he poured it about the tree's roots which were getting dry in the sultry climate. He pulled up some weeds here and there. He passed his hand fondly over the old trunk. Then he looked up at the place among the branches where he had sat that day when he first saw Jesus. After this he turned away, and with a smile of gratitude went back to his home. His wife afterward referred to the matter and asked him why he took such care of the old tree. His quiet answer was, "It was that tree which brought me to him whom my soul loves."

There is no true life without its sacred memorial of special blessing or good. There is something that tells of favor, of deliverance, of help, of influence, of teaching, of great kindness. There is some spot, some quiet walk, some room, some book, some face--which always recalls sweet memories. There is something that is precious to us because in some way it marks a holy place in life's journey. Most of us understand that loving interest of Zaccheus in his old tree. In what life is there no place that is always kept green in memory, because there a sweet blessing was received?

Yet there seem to be many who forget their benefits. There is much ingratitude in the world. It may not be so universal as some would have us believe. There surely are many who carry in their hearts, undimmed for long years, the memory of benefits and kindnesses received from friends, and who never cease to be grateful and to show their gratitude.

There certainly are unkind hearts--which return coldness for kind deeds. There are children who forget the love and sacrifices of their parents, and repay their countless kindnesses, not with grateful affection, honor, obedience, thoughtfulness, and service--but with disregard, indifference, disobedience, dishonor, sometimes even with shameful neglect and unkindness. There are those who receive help from friends in unnumbered ways, through years, help that brings to them great aid in life--promotion, advancement, improvement in character, widening of privileges and opportunities, tender kindness which warms,

blesse, and inspires the heart, and enriches, refines, and ennoble the life--who yet seem never to recognize or appreciate the benefit and the good they receive. They appear to feel no obligation, no thankfulness. They make no return of love for all of love's ministry. They even repay it with complaint, with criticism, with bitterness! We have all known years of continued favors forgotten, and their memory wiped out--by one small failure to grant a new request for help. We have all known malignant hate--to be the return for long periods of lavish kindness.

Ingratitude is robbery! It robs those to whom gratitude is due, for it is the withholding of that which is justly theirs. If you are kind to another, is he not your debtor? If you show another favors, does not he owe you thanks? True, you ask no return, for love does not work for wages. Only selfishness demands repayment for help given, and is embittered by ingratitude. The Christlike spirit continues to give and bless, pouring out its love in unstinted measure, though no act or word or look tells of gratitude.

Yet while love does not work for wages, nor demand an equivalent for its services--it is sorely wronged when ungrateful lips are dumb. The quality of ingratitude is not changed because faithful love is not frozen in the heart by its coldness. We owe at least loving remembrance to one who has shown us kindness, though no other return may be possible, or though large return may already have been made. We can never be absolved from the duty of being grateful. "Owe no man anything--but love" is a heavenly word. We always owe love; that is a debt we never can pay off.

Ingratitude is robbery. But it is cruelty as well as robbery. It always hurts the heart, which must endure it. Few faults or injuries cause more pain and grief in tender spirits, than ingratitude. The pain may be borne in silence. Men do not speak of it to others, still less to those whose neglect or coldness inflicts it; yet it is like thorns in the pillow.

Parents suffer unspeakably when the children for whom they have lived, suffered, and sacrificed, prove ungrateful. The ungrateful child does not know what bitter sorrow he causes the mother who bore him and nursed him, and the father who loves him more than his own life; how their hearts bleed; how they weep in secret over his unkindness. We do not know how we hurt our friends when we treat them ungratefully, forgetting all they have done for us, and repaying their favors with coldness.

There is yet more of this lesson. Gratitude, to fulfill its gentle ministry, must find some fitting expression. It is not enough that it be cherished in the heart. There are many godly people who fail at this point. They are really thankful for the good others do to them. They feel kindly enough in their hearts toward their benefactors. Perhaps they speak to other friends of the kindnesses they have received. They may even put it into their prayers, telling God how they have been helped by his children, and asking him to reward and bless those who have been good to them. But meanwhile they do not in any way express their grateful feelings to the people who have done them the favors, or rendered them the offices of friendship.

How does your friend know that you are grateful--if you do not in some way tell him that you are? Truly here is a sore fault of love, this keeping sealed up in the heart the generous feeling, the tender gratitude, which we ought to speak, and which would give so much comfort if it were spoken in that ear which ought to hear it. No pure, true, loving human heart ever gets beyond being strengthened and warmed to nobler service--by words of honest and sincere appreciation. Flattery is contemptible; only vain spirits are elated by it. Insincerity is a sickening mockery; the sensitive soul turns away from it in revulsion. But words of true gratitude are always to human hearts--like cups of water to thirsty lips. We need not fear turning people's heads by genuine expressions of thankfulness; on the other hand, nothing inspires such humility, such

reverent praise to God, as the knowledge which such gratitude brings--that one has been used of God to help, or bless, or comfort another life.

Silence is said to be golden, and oftentimes, indeed, it is better than speech. "It is a fine thing in friendship," says George MacDonald, "to know when to be silent."

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