

Our New Edens

by J.R. Miller

J.R. Miller's sermon encourages families to cultivate their homes as 'new Edens' by inviting Christ into every aspect of their lives and fostering love and peace.

Scripture: Genesis 2:8

Topics: "Family", "Home", "Christ's Presence"

Description

J.R. Miller emphasizes the importance of creating homes that reflect the beauty and peace of the Garden of Eden, urging families to cultivate love, joy, and Christ's presence in their daily lives. He illustrates that every home, regardless of its material wealth, should be a sanctuary filled with love and prayer, where Christ is welcomed as a constant guest. Miller highlights the roles of husbands, wives, and children in nurturing a harmonious home, stressing that love must be expressed and that the spiritual atmosphere is vital for a thriving family life. He concludes that a home infused with Christ's love and peace can withstand life's challenges and become a true reflection of heaven on earth.

Transcript

Our New Edens

J. R. Miller, 1903

The first home there ever was in this world, was in the Garden of Eden. God the Father made it ready for His first children--made it ready for them before they were created. I can imagine with what loving thought He prepared this home for them. He made it very beautiful. He gathered into it all the loveliest things of all the earth--trees, plants, flowers, and fruits. Streams of water rippled through it and there were birds and animals of all kinds in it.

The first home was a 'garden'. Every home should be a garden spot. An important part of our work in this world, is 'garden-making'. We ought to make our homes as beautiful as we can. They may be very plain, perhaps only two or three rooms--but we should put into them all the lovely things we can gather. The first home in this world was in Eden. We should try to make our homes 'Edens'.

Every home should be such a garden. Whether it is a luxurious place--or bare of earthly comforts, it should be sweet with the fragrance of love--and beautiful with the beauty of the Lord.

The 'home' has always been dear to the Divine heart. When Jesus sent His disciples out to preach, one of His instructions was, "Into whatever house you enter, first say, Peace be to this house." On Christ's lips this is more than a salutation; it is a divine benediction as well. Peace means love, heaven's love, the absence of all strife and bitterness. It means also the absence of anxiety and worry.

The New Testament tells us of the home at Bethany where Jesus Himself was welcomed by the sisters. He left peace there. He taught the lesson of quietness and confidence. One of the sisters was disposed to worry--it is not easy to be a housekeeper, to have to provide for the needs of a family, and to manage all the domestic affairs of a home and not sometimes fret a little. Martha was anxious and troubled about many things. But Jesus gently taught her the lesson of peace, and we may be quite sure she never forgot it. We never find her worrying any more.

Jesus comes to the door of each home of ours and says, "Peace be to this house!" We should let the messenger of peace come in. Nothing good ever comes of fretting. We cannot get clear of cares. There are troubles enough in any of our lives to spoil our happiness, if we yield to them. But no matter what comes, what burdens press, what things go wrong, what flowers fade, listen to the Master's word at the door, "Peace be to this house!"

How can we make new Edens of our homes? What are some of the secrets of home happiness? I might gather them all into one word and say--CHRIST! If we have Christ as our guest--our home will be happy!

Christ in the joy--and Christ in the sorrow;

Christ in the day of plenty--and Christ in the day of pinching poverty;

Christ in the business--and Christ in the social life;

Christ at the marriage altar--and Christ as the wedded pair walk together toward the sunset gate.

Christ makes a happy home when He is admitted into all the household life.

The other day a young friend who is to be a bride in a little while came to have a quiet talk about her new life. She has never confessed Christ as her Master and Friend, and she said she wanted to do it soon, adding: "We never know what trouble we may have, and when we may need Christ. I want to take Him now into my new life, and into my home." She is doing right--but her thought of the possible need for Christ reveals a mistaken conception of His mission to us.

Christ is not needed merely in the days of trouble. Religion is not meant to be a lamp for the sick room, or for the days when the shutters are bowed and there is death-crape on the door. It is for the sunny days as well. Christ's first public act after His baptism, was His attendance at a wedding-feast. He would come into all our experiences of gladness--as well as into our times of care or trial. Our joy needs heaven in it--quite as much as our sorrow does.

It is more of Christ we need in our homes--to make their happiness perfect. One of Turner's pictures was being exhibited in the artist's studio. It was rich and beautiful. But those who were present that day saw that it lacked something. It seemed all mist and cloud--hazy, vague, ill-defined, incomprehensible. The friends who looked at the canvas were perplexed--they could not understand the picture. The artist himself saw the lack, and, taking his brush, added a touch of red to his painting. That took away all the mystery, the vagueness, the mistiness, and made it understandable.

Some of our homes seem to have in them everything they need to make them perfect. They are filled with beauty. They have all the equipments and conveniences of modern taste and skill. Music and are and refinement and the best things that money can add, are present. Health and happiness and the gladness of social life, yield their portion to the comfort of these homes. But something is yet lacking to make the picture complete. It is Christ's "Peace be to this house!" It is a touch of the red of Christ's cross--His love shed abroad in the home-life. If Christ were admitted as a guest. His coming would add immeasurably to the joy and sweetness of the home-life.

But there is only one way of taking Christ into our homes and getting His blessing on our home-life. In olden days there would be a little chapel in great castles where God was formally honored on Sundays, while He was shut out of all the life of other days. Not thus, can we take Christ into our homes. He will not come to be a secluded guest, merely to lodge in loneliness in our best room. He must be welcomed into all our life. He must be in each heart. He must sit at our tables and mingle with us in all our family interaction. Christ can bless our home, only through the lives of those who make the home circle.

The husband has a part in making the earthly home, a little garden of Eden. He must be a godly man. He need not be rich, nor brilliant, nor famous, nor clever--but he must be godly. He must always be a lover--even to his old age. Then he must be a man--manly, brave, true, generous, worthy of honor. He must be a man of unblemished life. He must be a man who loves his home and lives for it The husband has an important part in the home garden-making. Some husbands seem not to know this; at least they fail to take their share of the burden.

The wife too has a responsibility. The word "wife" is suggestive. Some lexicographers would connect it with "weave." In olden days the wife's hands wove the garments her husband wore. This is not the case now--but the wife does weave the garments of her husband's character. Most men who amount to anything worth while, confess that they owe it all to their wives. Jeremy Taylor's tribute to a true wife is very beautiful--but as true as beautiful, though it sets a high ideal: "A good wife is heaven's best gift to man; his angel and minister of graces innumerable; his gem of many virtues; his casket of jewels."

The wife is the real home-maker. It is her sweet life that gives the home its atmosphere. Her hands fashion its beauty. Her heart makes its love. And the end is so worthy, so noble, so divine, that no woman called to be a wife, should consider any price too great to pay that she may be the light, the joy, the blessing, the inspiration, of her home!

I know how some good mothers sometimes feel that it is only a dull, dreary, routine life they are living. They contrast it with the lives of certain women who are achieving distinction in other lines, winning honors, doing work which the world praises--and sometimes they feel that their lives are humdrum and insignificant in comparison. But the woman who makes a sweet, beautiful home, filling it with love, prayer, and song--is doing something better than anything else her hands could find to do anywhere beneath the blue skies.

"My day has all gone!" 'twas a woman who spoke,

As she turned her face to the sunset glow.

And I have been busy the whole day long;

Yet for my work there is nothing to show!

No painting nor sculpture her hand had wrought;

No laurel of fame her labor had won.

What was she doing in all the long day,

With nothing to show at set of sun?

You know what she was doing--kindly things all the day long, trifles, perhaps--but trifles that left blessings everywhere. She had put blessings into her husband's heart--as he went forth in the morning to his work. She had brought heaven down about her children's lives--as she prayed with them. She had left touches of beauty in every part of her home--as she went about her task-work. She had kept sweet amid all the home care and turmoil. She had found time to go out to carry to a sick neighbor, or to a home of sorrow--comfort and cheer.

Humbly and quietly all the long day

Had her sweet service for others been done;

Yet for the labors of heart and of hand,

What could she show at set of sun?

Ah, she forgot that our Father in heaven

Ever is watching the work that we do,

And records He keeps of all we forget.

Then judges our work with judgment that's true;

For an angel writes down in a volume of gold

The beautiful deeds that all do below.

Though nothing she had at set of the sun,

The angel above had something to show!

Children, when they come, are also important factors in making the happiness of the home. They bring care, and demand toil and sacrifice, and cost oftentimes pain and grief; yet the blessing they bring to a true home--repays a thousand times the care and cost!

One of the holiest secrets of home happiness, is a true mother. God sends many beautiful things to this world, many noble gifts; but no blessing He ever gives is richer than that which He bestows in a mother who has learned love's lesson well and understands something of the meaning of her sacred calling.

A father also has his share in the making of the Eden home. It is not fair to put all the responsibility for the home-life on the mother. Fathers cannot evade their duty in this regard, without lack of faithfulness and also of chivalrous conduct. God will call them to answer for their part of the responsibility. Then it is not manly, for a man to try to roll the whole burden on her whom he sometimes teases with being the "weaker vessel." If the wife is weak and he is so strong, then let him bear the strong man's part of the load. No

doubt there are parts of the home duty which a mother can do far better than a father. Men's hands are awkward and clumsy, and a woman's hands are gentle and deft in love's arts. But let no man cherish the notion, that he has nothing to do in this home garden-making. His strong life should be the secure shelter beneath which his wife and children may safely abide. His character and disposition should be a continual revealing of the love and holiness of God.

Brothers and sisters also have their part in making the home happiness. Sometimes they forget this. Some young people do not add to the joy and the sweetness of the home in which they have been brought up--as they might do.

They do not give to their parents the comfort and cheer they might give. They do not remember and practice the fifth commandment. Then they do not live together sweetly as they might do, adding to the music of the home. Children carry in their hands--the happiness of their parents. We talk of the responsibility of parenthood--did you ever think of the responsibility of children for their parents? In this home garden-making every child has a share.

The artist was painting a picture of a dead mother, and was using a photograph as his copy. But to make the face look fresher and younger, he was leaving out the lines and marks of old age and care on the face. "No, no,!" said the son. "Don't take out the lines! Leave them, everyone! It wouldn't be my mother if all the lines were gone." Then he told the story of her devotion to her children through their infancy and through times of sickness. The lines which seemed to disfigure the face--were love's records, telling of sacrifice and suffering. We should never forget what we owe to our mothers.

Then may I say a special word about children's thought for their fathers? Mothers are idealized much oftener and with more just recognition and praise than fathers. More children pay honor and love and attention to mothers--than to fathers. Of course, mothers do more for children than fathers do--suffer more, are gentler and sweeter, give more thought and time and strength to them--and deserve more in return. We are not in danger of ever overdoing our gratitude to our mothers or of showing them too much kindness. But fathers also hunger for love from their children.

Max O'Rell has a strong word somewhere about the beauty of a daughter's attention and devotion to her father, saying also that such love and appreciation are rare. Love your mother and give her high honor--but do not forget that you can give your father great joy by being kind to him. He loves you too--and has lived for you all the years. He needs your affection and will be cheered by your thoughtfulness and attention.

I want to say some earnest words about the home-life we must live--if we are to make our homes little gardens of Eden. As in everything, LOVE is the great master secret of home happiness. When love is left gone from the home--the peace is broken. We must remember too that love needs expression. There are men who love their wives and would die for them--but who are not always gentle and kind to them. There are wives who love their husbands--but say little about it and do not take pains to show it. There is need for love that is affectionate, thoughtful, fond in its expression. Bring your flowers while they will do good--and do not keep them for the day of the funeral!

Parents cannot think too seriously of what they should try to make their homes--for the sake of their children. They are given to us in tender infancy to be brought up by us--for holy, worthy, beautiful lives. It is our duty to teach them and train them so that they shall be ready by and by for the positions in life they may be called to fill. The place of the home-life among the educational influences which help to mold and

shape character, is supreme in its importance. It is not enough to have an opulent house to live in. It is not enough to have fine foods, and luxurious furniture, and expensive entertainments. Most of the world's worthiest men and women, those who have blessed the world the most, were brought up in plain homes, without any luxury. It is the tone of the home-life that is important. We should make it pure, elevating, refining, inspiring. The books we bring in, the papers and magazines, the guests we have at our tables and admit to our firesides, the home conversation, the pictures we hang on our walls--all these are educational.

The religious influences are also vitally important. In that first garden home the Lord came and went as a familiar friend. Christ must be our guest--if our home is to be a fit place either for our children or for ourselves. If no window opens into heaven, it is not a true home. If there is no prayer in it, it is not a home at all--it is only a heathen lodging-place!

A godly man tells of going back to the home of his childhood and of being put to sleep in the spare room. Opening a closet, he saw an old stool there, faded and worn, and noticed especially two deep dents in the cushion. Evidently they were dents made by a pair of knees. He understood at a glance. It was on that stool his mother had knelt daily through years as she prayed for her children, and prayed them one by one into the kingdom. There should be such a stool or spot in every home, where mothers and fathers bow morning and night to plead for their children.

They say that family worship is falling into disuse--and going out of fashion. It is a great loss to the world if this is true. There is a story of one man whom his wife urged to begin family prayers. It was hard the first time. A Bible chapter had been read and the two were on their knees--but there was silence--the prayer did not begin. The wife at length cried out, "O God, give John a lift!" The lift was given and the sealed lips were opened. It may not be easy to start family prayers--but if we try, God will give us a lift, and then great joy and good will follow.

There are godly mothers who every day kneel by their children's sides and pray with them--and there is great power in a mother's prayer!

We talk about the dangers of the street for our children, and God alone knows how real and how great the dangers are. What is the best way to save them from these perils? We must do it in the home. There is a tendency to roll the responsibility for the religious care and protection of children--over on the church. But we cannot evade our personal duty in this way. Parents are the custodians of their children's lives. If they would meet their responsibility and be able to look God and their children in the face at the judgment, they must make their homes as nearly 'gardens of Eden' as possible. The way to save the boys from the temptations of the streets--is to make home so bright, so sweet, so beautiful, so happy, so full of love, joy, and prayer--that the streets will have no attractiveness for them, no power to win them away. "Do not be overcome by evil--but overcome evil with good." Romans 12:21

The parents who are ready to do this will not be sorry for it by and by. No other work we can do--will yield larger returns. But there are some who do not care to devote themselves in this way, to the teaching and training of their children. "It is too much trouble!" they say. It is pathetic to think of how many children there are who are always in the way, whose noise always jars home nerves, who never get much love at home.

Let us live with our children! Let us take them into our lives. Let us enter into their lives. The best thing a father can do for his boy--is to be a boy again himself with him. The best thing a mother can do for her daughter--is to be a girl again herself with her. There is no revival needed today quite so imperatively as a

revival of sweet, beautiful homes that shall clutch the lives of the boys and girls in them with a clutch of love, from which no power of temptation or of evil can ever tear them away.

I call upon all parents who care to heed my pleading to begin today--to make their homes more winning, more attractive, more happy, sweeter, heavenlier. Religion? Yes--but not religion made somber or distasteful, so that your children will not be influenced by it. Make your religion sunny, cheerful, full of sympathy with child-life, glad, songful--a religion for boys and girls. There is no reason why religion in a home should not be winsome, just as the life of Christ was. Bring heaven down into your homes. Try to make such a home-life as must have been in Joseph's home at Nazareth, when Jesus was a boy there. God has planted a 'new garden of Eden' for you to dress and keep. Tend it well.

There is an Eastern legend of a rose so sweet, that "even the earth which lies round its roots becomes permeated with fragrance, and little bits of it are sold as amulets and worn by princes." Make your home so sweet, so heavenly, with love and prayer and song and holy living--that all through it, there shall be the fragrance of the heart of Christ!

Thus let us make our homes little Eden gardens, in which something of the beauty, the sweetness, and the joy of heaven shall be reproduced on earth, to make the world believe in the home above in the Father's house, waiting for all the Master's friends!

The Way to God

"I am the way, the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through Me." John 14:6

Jesus says that He is the WAY to God. It is the figure of a road that is in His mind. He had spoken of going away to prepare a place for His disciples, adding that He would come again to receive them to Himself, that where He is--they may be also. He then said further, "You know the way to the place where I am going." Thomas, whose faith was always slow, said, "Lord, we don't know where you are going, so how can we know the way?" Jesus answered, "I am the way." The meaning of His reply, was that it is not necessary to know everything or even anything about the details of the way. If we know Christ, if we are His, if we are following Him--that is enough; we will then find the way. To be with Him is to be in the way--for He Himself is the way.

It is very important that we should know the way to heaven. No one knows where heaven is. There have been guesses and speculations. A certain star is heaven, some have said to us. This great universe, with its millions of worlds and systems of worlds, astronomers tell us, is revolving round one center, one star in a certain constellation. That central star, they suggest, may be the place of the great white throne, the Father's house to which Jesus said He was going, where He told His disciples they also would come--when their work on earth was finished.

But no one knows surely where heaven is--and no one knows the way there. You can find guides to show you the way through the catacombs, or among the Alps, or amid the buildings and ruins of ancient Rome, or across some deep, impenetrable forest. But when you come to die, and your spirit leaves your body, who will show you the way home to the Father's house? And you never can get there alone without guidance. There are no maps or charts of the way.

The question of Thomas seems proper enough: "How can we know the way?" The answer of Jesus is full of comfort: "I am the way." We need not trouble ourselves with speculative geographical or astronomical

questions, nor try to find a chart of the road to heaven. If we are Christ's, no matter where we die--we shall find ourselves in the hands of our Savior, and will be in heaven with Him.

There is another need, still more important than finding the way to heaven. We need to find the way to God. We never can get to heaven, unless we have first got to God. Here, too, Jesus is the way. He said, "I am the way," and then He added, "No one comes unto the Father--but by Me." To get to God is life's first and greatest need. Sin is absence from God.

In a certain sense we never can get away from God. "Where shall I go from Your Spirit? Or where shall I flee from Your presence?" Wherever we turn--God is.

But in a moral and spiritual sense, only those who have repented and returned to God, are near Him. In our sinful state we are in the "far country." We must get to God--or we shall perish. The cry of the world in all ages has been, "Show us the Father!" This is the interpretation of all heathen worship. Men everywhere have been groping in the darkness, trying to find God. Now Jesus says, "I am the way to the Father!"

He does not say, "I will show you the way." He does that too. He came to guide us in the way. He passed over this world, from the cradle to the gates of glory, and left His footprints wherever He went. In the early days of our country, when a pioneer went through a forest--he would blaze his path with his ax, and then others coming after him could easily find the way. Jesus, in going through life, marked His way, and all who come after Him may see where He walked and follow Him. He never went on any wrong path. He never was misled. He marked out for us, the way to God.

But that is not what He says here. He says: "I am the way. I Myself am the way." The figure is very suggestive. Often the words of Christ invite us to Him as if we had to go a distance, longer or shorter, to get to Him. He says, "Come unto Me." We see Him yonder, and He is wondrously gracious. But we must go on over the road that intervenes to reach Him. When we get there, we know He will receive us, welcome us, and bless us. But suppose we never get to Him? Suppose we faint and fall by the way? Yet now we learn that Christ is more than the goal, that He does not fix a point at which He will meet us, that there is no long or even short space to cross over to get to His feet. He is the way--as well as the goal. We have not even one step to take before we come to Him.

A beautiful story is told of Louis Agassiz. When he was a boy, his family lived on the edge of a lake in Switzerland. One day the father was on the other side of the lake, and Louis and a younger brother set out on the ice to join him. The mother watched the boys from her window. They got along well until they came to a wide crack in the ice. The taller boy leaped over easily--but the other hesitated. As she watched a moment she saw Louis, the older boy, get down on the ice, laying himself across the crack, his hands on one side and his feet on the other, making a bridge of his body. Then she saw the little fellow climb over him in safety to the other side, and both the boys run on to find their father.

This illustrates what Jesus Christ did for us. There was a great chasm which sin had made between us and God. We could not cross that chasm ourselves. Our goodness never could reach to the Divine requirements. The holiest of us could never get to heaven by any obedience of our own. Then Jesus came and laid Himself down in love across the chasm, making of His own blessed life a bridge on which whoever will may pass over into the presence and the joy of the Father. "I am the way."

There are two other words here which help us to understand the meaning of this figure. Jesus said, "I am the way, and the truth, and the life."

"I am the TRUTH." He does not say that He speaks the truth, or reveals it. He did this. He was the most wonderful teacher the world ever heard. No man ever spoke as He did. His words are like stars shining in the world's darkness. We cannot begin to understand what the world owes to the teachings of Jesus. The great truths which mean so much, the truths about God's love, mercy, and goodness, seem so familiar to us that they are almost commonplace. Yet it was Jesus who first made known to the world these truths. Two thousand years ago nobody knew them. The earth lay in moral darkness then. Jesus was a great teacher of truth.

But He does not say He is only a revealer of the truth. "I am the truth" is the tremendous assertion. The truth was not merely spoken by His lips; it was embodied in His person and in His life. He is the truth. This is more, too, than if He had said, "I am true." He was true--there was nothing false in Him, nothing insincere. He never professed to be what He was not. He never put forth claims which He did not fulfill. He never made promises which He did not keep. Not one word He ever spoke, has failed or will fail. Many good people are not so good as they profess to be--but Jesus was absolutely true. We may build our hopes for eternity on any one of His sayings.

But there is more than this in what He says here. He is a revealer of the truth. He is true. But He says, "I am the truth." God Himself is the great central fountain of all truth. All truth flows from Him. Christ was the incarnation of God--God manifest, made known, in the flesh. "He who has seen Me--has seen the Father," he said. All that God is--was revealed, was made known, in Jesus Christ. "I am the truth."

He said further, "I am the LIFE." Again notice that He does not say: "I will show you the life. I will tell you how to find life." You and I, if living truly, may show others how to find life. We can lead them to the fountain of life. That is what every sincere preacher of the gospel is doing continually. That is what every faithful teacher is doing. That is what every godly disciple does. But no preacher, no teacher, no holiest saint, can say to any other, "I am the life." We have no life to give to others. We cannot spare any of the oil out of our vessel to give for any other one's lamp. We cannot impart any portion of our little measure of grace to any dearest friend who needs. Only Christ can say, "I am the life." He does not merely tell us that there is life--He says, "Come unto Me--and you shall have life." The life is in Himself--all life's fullness--and if we believe in Him we are brought into union with Him--and because He lives, we live too.

Now because Christ is the truth and the life, He also is the WAY--that is, the way to heaven and the way to God. But how is He the way? In what manner did Jesus by His life or by His death--become a way, or make His life a way to God?

He did it in his incarnation. He was the Son of God--He became Son of man; thus His wonderful being bridged the enormous chasm between earth and heaven, between the "far country" and the Father's house. In His humiliation He reaches down to the lowest depth of human sin and need, and in His Divine life He reaches up to the heart of the Father. Thus He is the way from the abysses of sin--to the supremest reaches of glory, and on Him whosoever will, may go up out of the earth's dust into heavenly blessedness!

Christ is the way to God, also, because He REVEALED God, brought God down into our common life. It was this that made the incarnation so wonderful. Jesus said, "He who has seen Me has seen the Father." Philip and the other disciples had been with their Master all the time for three years, knowing Him intimately and seeing His life in its familiar revealings. They loved Him--but they did not dream that what they saw in Him, was what their hearts were crying out to see--the beauty and glory of the Father. Philip was thinking of some dazzling splendor, some radiance like a transfiguration, when he pleaded, "Show us

the Father." Instead of this, however, he had been seeing the Father all the time--in the sweet, patient, pure, gentle, thoughtful, lowly life of Jesus. We are all apt to make Philip's mistake, looking up to the skies--for the glory that is shining close to our feet.

In one of his poems Lowell tells the story of an ancient prophet who made a pilgrimage into the wilderness until he reached Mount Sinai. God's presence had deserted him; and he thought that at Sinai, if anywhere, he would find it again. As he engaged in prayer on the holy mount, expecting some strange and startling answer to his prayers, the moss at his feet unfolded and a violet showed itself through the moss. That was the answer. Then he remembered that just before he left home his little daughter had come running to him, offering him a bouquet of these very violets. They grew at his own door; he saw them every day. He had traveled all that distance for a message that had been whispering itself to him all the time.

Many people miss the richest revealings of God's love, because they expect the good they seek to come in some startling or unusual way. We do not have to go up to heaven to find God; He has come down close beside us!

Even yet, people read the gospels and wonder if God really loves them, if God really sympathizes with them in their sorrows, if God really cares when they have troubles, if God really hears and answers their prayers, if God really is gentle, patient, kind, easily approached, if God is indeed merciful, gracious, and long-suffering. Even yet, men cry out, "O that I knew where I might find God!" Even yet disciples plead, "Show us the Father."

We look up and round about us, and ask, "Where is God's love?" Yet all the while we have our New Testament in our hands, with its blessed story of the love, the compassion, the gentleness, the purity, the kindness, the wondrous self-sacrifice of Jesus! We do not think that in seeing Him--we are seeing the Father, that the lovely things we behold in Him--are really revealings of God. In Christ, God indeed came down and lived among men to convince them of His love for them, to make them know that He is their Father, to show them His grace and truth. As a revealer, Christ is the way to the Father.

He is the way also as the REDEEMER. God does not love the world because Christ died for it--it is the other way; Christ died for the world--because God loved it. But the Scriptures teach very plainly that it was necessary for the Son of God to die--to make the way to eternal life and heaven. The cross opened the way for men to come to God. There was a veil in the temple which hid the holy of holies, the place of God's presence. No one but the priest could pass behind the veil. That meant separation from God because of sin. When Christ was dying, that veil was torn in two as by an invisible hand. This meant that now the way was opened to God for everyone who would come. Thus Christ became the way to God through His death.

There is another word here. "I am the way ... no one comes unto the Father--but by Me." Not only is He the way to God--but there is no other way. To reject Christ is therefore to reject eternal life and the only way to God. The mercy of God is as wide as the sea. "Whoever will, may come. Him that comes unto Me--I will never cast out." But there is only one way to come. Christ is the way to God. You need not vex yourself about theological questions. You need not be disturbed about the articles of the creed which you cannot understand. Christ is the way to God. To love Christ--is to love God. To have Christ for your friend--is to have God for your friend. To rest in Christ--is to be in the clasp of the everlasting arms.

Thus Christ is the way to peace, the peace of God. He is the way to happiness. He is the way to blessing and to all that is good. Christ is all that we need. The trouble with many of us, is that we think we can find

the satisfying of our desires--in places or things or circumstances.

For a practical thought, set together the question of Thomas--and the answer of Jesus. "How can we know the way?" "I am the way." We are always asking Thomas' question. We come to points every day where we are bewildered, and know not where to go or what to do. We see no path before us. Sometimes it is a question of duty. Sometimes it is a choice that must be made between two courses. And we see no escape from it, no hope of relief or help, no way out of it.

Or it may concern life in a larger sense. What am I? Why am I here? What is there beyond death? What is God? Where is He? Where am I going? How can I find Him? What and where is heaven? How can I get there? Everyone who thinks at all asks such questions at some time. "How can we know the way?"

To all such questions Jesus answers, "I am the way." He is the way through all perplexities. He is the way out of all trouble--into comfort, peace, joy. He is the way through all danger--into safety. He is the way out of doubt--into faith. He is the way from sin--to holiness. He is the way from death--to life. He is the way from earth--to heaven.

Elsewhere He says, "I am the door." A door is for entrance. We pass in through the door--to the beauty, the comfort, the joy, the love, within. Christ is the door to everything that is worthy and good and blessed and eternal. There is only one door; if we will not enter at it, we must stay out in the darkness and sorrow.

One of Christ's great sayings is this: "I am the light of the world; he who follows Me shall not walk in the darkness." We may not know where we are going. We may not understand the things we are experiencing. We may be in sorrow. Loss may be stripping us bare. We may seem to be in a calamity. But if we are walking close to Christ, we are not in darkness. All is plain to Him, and that is enough.

"How can we know the way?" "I am the way." No one can ever be lost--with Christ. No one can ever get out of the way--with Him. The greatest and saddest of all trials--is to be in some trouble and to be alone, to have no one with us. Without Christ what can anyone do in the darkness, or in the storm, or in the floods? How could anyone find the way home through this world's gloom and peril--without Christ? Having Christ we do not need to have to understand things. He understands--and that is enough!

A godly woman suffering for weary months in painful illness said to her pastor one day, shortly before she went to heaven: "I have such a lovely robin that sings outside my window. In the early morning, as I lie here, he serenades me." Then, as a smile brightened her thin features, she added, "I love him because he sings in the rain." That is the most beautiful thing about the robin. When the storm has silenced almost every other song bird, the robin sings on--sings in the rain. That is what one who walks with Christ may do. Anybody can sing in the sunshine; but we should sing on when the sun has gone down, or when clouds pour out their rains, for Christ is with us! We should sing in the rain!

Why should we be afraid, though we cannot see the path, though all seems inextricable confusion about us, though circumstances appear to be against us? Christ is the way--and we never can be harmed and never can get lost while He is with us. To all our questions and fears He answers, "I am the way," and that is enough!

But we must remember that there is no other way to God, to the Father's house, no other way home, no other who can be to us the way in life's darkness and danger. "I am the way no one comes unto the Father--but by Me."

Some of us scarcely know where we are--or where we are going. We are not sure of our ground--whether we are going forward or groping backward. Perhaps we are not sure of our beliefs--we are troubled about some of the doctrines. Perhaps we are not sure we are saved. We are like men lost in a deep, trackless forest, not knowing the way out!

Suppose you found yourself thus lost some day, wandering helplessly, hopelessly, and a man came to you who knew all the tangle of the forest, offering to be your guide, to lead you through into the broad, open plain--and to your home; what would you do? Today, when you are in doubt and fear and perplexity, sure of nothing, in peril of being lost, not knowing what to do or where to turn--One comes to you, One who knows all the way. One who knows all about life because He has lived it all, and He offers to lead you through all the bewildering tangles, out of all the doubt and fears, out of the gloom and the danger--to God, to the Father's house--home. What should you do? What will you do?

"Thank God, thank God, the Man is found

Sure-footed, knowing well the ground.

He knows the road, for this the way

He traveled once, as on this day.

He is our messenger beside;

He is our door and path and guide."

Prayer in the Christian Life

"Pray without ceasing." 1 Thessalonians 5:17

What place should prayer have in a Christian's life? Should we pray little or much? Should we confine our praying to certain days--Sundays, for example; or to certain hours or moments of our days--mornings, for example, than evenings? Should we pray only about certain things, certain affairs, certain portions of our life? Are there things we have no permission to take to God in prayer? Should we pray only in certain places--in our accustomed closet or room at home, or in places set apart for divine worship? Is there any place, where we may not pray?

There is a verse of Paul's which seems to answer all these questions. "Pray without ceasing." That means, pray always and everywhere. There is nothing we may not take to God in prayer--asking for His help. There is no hour of the day when we may not turn to God--and find Him ready to hear and bless us. The gates of prayer are never shut, by day or by night.

There is no place where we may not pray. God is as accessible to us on the street, in the desert, in the midst of a great storm at sea, or in the most debased spot of the earth--as He is in our own sacred closet of prayer, in a consecrated building, or at the Lord's table. "Pray without ceasing."

But how is it possible to obey this teaching? Are we to spend all our time on our knees? This certainly is not the meaning. We have our duties, our tasks, our work to do. Suppose that men should spend all their days at home, praying, for a month, for a year--what would become of their business? What would their families do? Suppose that women should give up all their duties--their household duties, their social duties, all the work that now fills their hands--and literally pray without ceasing the remainder of their days,

would they please God?

Evidently we are not to interpret the lesson that way. We are put here to work. "Six days shall you labor." Our duties fill our hands every hour. We sin against God, when we neglect any of these. I can conceive even of a kind of praying that would be sinful--praying when some imperative task demands attention, when someone needs help, neglecting a duty of love, that you may attend some religious service or keep some appointment for devotion. There are times when prayer is not the duty of the hour. What, then, are we to understand by the counsel, "Pray without ceasing"?

For one thing, prayer is part of the expression of the Christian's very life. One who does not pray--is not a Christian. He may be a moral man. A gentleman said the other day of a certain prominent business man, "He is the most moral and the least religious man I ever knew." He meant that the man is honest, honorable, just, generous, charitable, very careful and exact in all his relations to men--but that toward God he is utterly indifferent, never thinks of Him, never recognizes Him in any way, never prays. So far as he is concerned, there is no God. This man would not himself admit as much. He would say he believes in God. But practically, he is an agnostic or an atheist. He is utterly without true religion, which means knowing God, recognizing God as Father and Friend, living in personal relationship with God.

When the Lord would make Ananias understand that Saul the persecutor, was now a Christian, he said, "Behold he prays." When a man begins really to pray--there is no doubt of his conversion. Saul prayed a great deal before he accepted Christ. He was a rigid Pharisee and was very religious, so far as forms of religion were concerned. But he had never prayed before--as he prayed that day after he had seen Christ. The Christian should know God intimately. One writes, "I talk to God as to a companion, in prayer and praise, and our communion is joy." That is true religion, and prayer is the heart of it! It is not a matter of times and places. Wherever we go--we are with God. Whatever we are doing--our hearts are going out to Him.

"Prayer is the Christian's vital breath--the Christian's native air."

God is our Father and we are His children. We can easily think of the child of a good, noble, and loving father, who is entirely out of relations with that father. One was telling of a young man who has not spoken to his father for five years. He is estranged from him. The father is a most worthy man--the fault is not his. He has a heart of love--he loves his estranged son and longs to give him back his place of confidence and honor. But all these years the son has lived as if he had no father in the world.

God is our Father, with infinite love in His heart for us, ready and eager to help us and bless us in every way. We can cut ourselves off from Him if we will. Religion, faith, is putting ourselves in the children's place toward God. We do not then pray to make God willing to give good things to us--He is always willing to give. The Master said: "If you then, being evil, know how to give good gifts unto your children, how much more shall your Father who is in heaven give good things to those who ask Him?" Prayer then, is going to God, believing in His love for us, knowing that He wants to help us, and asking Him as children ask their parents for the things we need.

The true child always has the child's place in the home. He is not granted the privileges of a child only on certain days or at certain hours. To pray without ceasing--is to be always in happy relations of love with our Father.

If we always keep ourselves in the relation of children to God--loving, obedient, trustful, submissive to His will--we shall really pray without ceasing. Every act--will then be a prayer. Every word--will be a song of praise. All we do--will then be reverent worship.

Again, to pray without ceasing is to do everything with prayer. This does not mean that every piece of work we undertake, must be begun with a formal act of prayer--stopping, kneeling down, and offering a spoken petition. To pray without ceasing is--to have the heart always in converse with God. It is to live so near to God--that we can talk with Him wherever we go, ask Him questions--and get His answers, seek His help, His wisdom, His guidance--and obtain what we ask.

There is no habit that we should more sedulously form, than that of talking with God about everything we do. We are often told that we should begin every day with prayer. That is very needful and beautiful. The first face our eyes see in the morning--should be Christ's! His too should be the first voice we hear, and to Him our first words should be spoken! Ten minutes in the morning, yes, two minutes, spent really with Christ, will change all our day for us. A day without prayer--is a day of spiritual darkness and sadness.

It is often said that we should 'count that day lost' in which no kindness is done, no deed of love to anyone, no help given. But sadder far--is a day without prayer! It is a day without God, without heaven's light shining into it, a day unblessed! The morning you forget to pray--is an unhappy morning for you.

"Do not be anxious about anything, but in everything, by prayer and petition, with thanksgiving, present your requests to God." Philipians 4:6

"Pray at all times and on every occasion in the power of the Holy Spirit." Ephesians 6:18

But besides beginning each day with prayer, we should live all the day with prayer. We should form the habit of praying at every step, as we go along. That was part of Paul's meaning when he said, "Whatever you do, in word or in deed--do all in the name of the Lord Jesus." He would have us include every word we speak--as well as every deed we do. Think what it would mean to have every word that passes our lips winged and blessed with prayer--always to breathe a little prayer before we speak, as we speak. This would put heavenly sweetness into all our speech! It would make all our words kindly, loving, inspiring words--words that would edify and minister grace to those who hear. We can scarcely think of one using bitter words, backbiting words, unholy words--if his heart be always full of prayer, if he has trained himself to always pray before he speaks.

But we are to do all our deeds, too, in the name of the Lord Jesus. That means that we should do everything for Him, to please Him. If we could get this lesson learned, if we would really pray without ceasing--how beautiful our lives would be! How well we would do all our work! Only think of a man in business doing all his day's business in a spirit of prayer--breathing a little prayer as he makes a bargain, as he writes a business letter, as he talks with other men. Think of a woman amid her household cares--taking everything to God for His blessing, for His approval, for His direction. These are not by any means impossible suppositions. Indeed, this is the way a Christian is to live, should always live--doing all in the name of the Lord Jesus!

We are exhorted elsewhere, too, to make all our requests known to God in prayer. We do not know what we miss--by leaving God out of so much of our life. We wonder often why we fail, why so little comes of our efforts, why we do not get along better with people, why we are not happy, why joy is so lacking in our experience, why we are so easily fretted and vexed and made discontented, why we fall so easily into

surliness and bad temper. It is because we cease to pray!

"O what peace we often forfeit,

O what needless pain we bear,

All because we do not carry

Everything to God in prayer."

You say you haven't time to pray so much.

"Haven't time?" You have time for everything else--time for many things, perhaps, of questionable importance. Have you not time to look into God's face for a moment--before you begin a new piece of work, before you make a new investment, before you start on a business trip, before you go out to spend an evening, before you open a new book?

"Haven't time?" Does it seem wasted time when you stop to eat your meals? Do you regard your hours spent in sleep--as lost hours? Does being courteous waste time? Nor is time spent in getting God's blessing ever lost time. The Sabbath hours given to worship are not wasted hours.

But really the habit of unceasing prayer--does not require time. It is but looking into God's face and saying, "Lord, help me in this." "Lord, bless me as I do this."

A certain godly man was mighty in prayer. God's blessing seemed to be on everything he did, on every word he spoke. One who loved him desired to learn the secret of his devotions, and watched him to see how he prayed. All he saw was this--again and again, he was heard saying, with bowed head and clasped hands, the name of Jesus, "Jesus! Jesus!" That was the way he prayed. He did everything in that blessed name, and all the power of Jesus was in what he did. It wastes no time to speak that name as we enter a new path, or begin a new task, or go out to a new duty. Yet that is what it is to pray without ceasing.

It is well for us to learn this lesson--to take everything to God in prayer, to pray as we go from task to task--always silently, unostentatiously. We need to guard against making a show of our praying, talking about it. But we may form the habit of putting up little 'sentence prayers' continually. When you feel an inclination to speak bitterly, to answer sharply; when you have been stung by another's speech or act; when you are tempted to refuse a request for help, to do some selfish thing, to pass by a human need, to speak an untruth--lift up your heart in the prayer, "Jesus, help me to do Your will." Or if you meet a sudden temptation and are in danger of being swept away, look up and cry, "Jesus, save me!"

Do you suppose that God is far off from you these days, any day? Do you suppose that Christ ever leaves you alone for an instant, anywhere you may chance to be? No, no! He is nearer to you all the time--than your dearest nearest friend, now close by your side. Believe this, and when you feel any need, any heart hunger, any sense of loneliness, the creeping over you of any shadow of danger, the coming upon you of any enemy; when you fear you will fall, or stumble, or say some word you would not say, or let some evil feeling into your heart you would not admit there; if you are growing discontented or discouraged, speak His name. That will be prayer enough.

It is impossible to tell of the blessing of such a spirit and habit of prayer. Those who have not learned to pray "without ceasing" have no conception of what they are missing. If we all had learned this lesson, what

a company of overcoming Christians we would be! The world would have little power over us--we would tread it under our feet! We would be strong--where now we are so weak. We would be victorious over temptation, where now we fail so sadly. If you knew that Christ was always actually walking with you--how strong you would be!

Some people seem to think that all prayer is request, asking favors from God. They never go to God, unless they want Him to give them something, to do something for them, or to get them out of some trouble or danger. But if we pray only when we have a favor to ask, we do not love God as we should. Really, request is but a small portion of truest praying.

You have a dear human friend whom you love very much. You greatly enjoy being with this friend. You say it strengthens you, cheers you, helps you, to spend an hour with him. Now when you are with this friend, what do you talk about? Do you do nothing but make requests and ask favors, and beg your friend to do things for you? I am quite sure, that is not all you do. Ofttimes you pass the whole hour that you are together, and do not make one request nor ask one favor. You commune--that is the word. You sit together, your friend and you, and talk of many things that are dear to you both. Then sometimes, you do not talk at all. It is just enough to be with your friend, to have his presence near you, to look into his face, to know that he loves you. It strengthens you just to be with him.

The same is true of communion with Christ. It is not all request. We come to Him many times with no definite favor to ask. We want just to be with Him, to look into His face, to sit in the sweet atmosphere of His presence, to let His love pour into our hearts!

There is no lesson we need to take more to heart--than this lesson of unceasing prayer. This is not a praying age. Every call is to work, to activity. We are living in most strenuous times. The pressure of active duty is tremendous. In all departments of life, this is true. Men have little time for leisure. In the church, too, the call is to activity. The cry is for the evangelizing of the world. It is a missionary age in which we are living. Christians hear but little about the duty of meditation, of devotion, of prayer--rather they are called out into the field to Kingdom work.

This is well. Every redeemed life should be consecrated to service. But there is danger in this intense activity. The danger is not that we become too strenuous in carrying the gospel to men--this never could be--but that we get too little quiet in our lives for the cultivation of our own heart piety! There must be root--before there can be strong branches and much fruit. We must sit at Christ's feet to be fed--before we can go out to feed others! Not a word should be said to restrain earnestness, to check enthusiasm in Christ's work, to hold anyone back from the service of Christ. But in our much serving and work--we should never forget the necessity of Bible reading and communion with Christ, to prepare us for the noble work we are striving to do. All the best things of Christian life--are the fruit of silent meditation.

Life is not easy for any of us. We can live nobly, purely, Christly--only by being much with Christ! We will rob ourselves of Divine blessing, of beauty of character, of power in service--if we fail to make room in all our busy days--for quiet retreats from the noise and strife, where we may sit at Christ's feet to hear His words, and lie on His bosom that we may absorb His spirit, to prepare us for the toil of the day!

It is only in the "valley of silence" with Christ--that we can dream the dreams and see the visions which we would translate into noble living, Christly character, and worthy deed, out among men. We must hide away much in prayer--if we would get strength for valiant struggle and effective service for our Master!

A Parable of Christian Growth

"I will heal their waywardness and love them freely, for my anger has turned away from them. I will be like the dew to Israel; he will blossom like a lily. Like a cedar of Lebanon he will send down his roots; his branches shall spread. His splendor will be like an olive tree, his fragrance like a cedar of Lebanon." Hosea 14:4-6

God's forgiveness is astonishing. If we fail--He gives us another opportunity. Even the saddest ruin of a life, may be built into a holy temple of God. We have it all in a chapter in Hosea. We have the Divine pleading: "O Israel, return unto Jehovah your God; for you have fallen by your iniquity." Then the way back is marked out--confession, repentance, consecration. Then comes the assurance: "I will heal their waywardness and love them freely, for my anger has turned away from them." Then follows this wonderful promise of restoration and prosperity: "I will be like the dew to Israel; he will blossom like a lily. Like a cedar of Lebanon he will send down his roots; his young shoots will grow. His splendor will be like an olive tree, his fragrance like a cedar of Lebanon."

It is a picture of beauty and fruitfulness. There had been bareness and desolation. Sin is drought. It causes blight. Every flower fades and every green thing withers. But God's love is like rain. It falls on the parched life and changes it to garden loveliness.

The prophet's words contain a parable of spiritual growth. We may note some of the features, for they belong to all true Christian life.

One of these qualities is purity. "He shall blossom like the lily." Recently a friend sent me half a dozen white lilies, and all the days since they have kept their freshness and their unblemished whiteness. They have preached their little sermon to everyone who has come in, saying, "Blessed are the pure in heart--for they shall see God." Have you ever noticed how earnestly this lesson of purity is taught in the Bible? Thus in one of the Psalms we have the question and the answer: "Who shall ascend into the hill of Jehovah? and who shall stand in His holy place? He who has clean hands, and a pure heart."

Then James tells us that we are to have "pure and undefiled religion before our God and Father." He tells us also that we are to keep ourselves "unspotted from the world." We are not to flee away from the world, for our duty is in it, and we must be in it to bless it, to do good in it, to be light in its darkness, to comfort its sorrow; but while in the world we are not to become stained by its sin or to have our garments soiled by its evil.

Someone tells of seeing an enameled plant growing on the edge of a coal mine. Though the black dust floated about it continually, not a particle of it adhered to the plant, and its snowy whiteness took no stain. This illustrates the purity which should always be found in the Christian life--in the world, but unspotted by its evil. That is the way the Master passed through this world. That is the way He would have us go through it.

Something else is necessary, however--more than our own good resolve--if our hearts and lives are to be like the lily in its immaculate whiteness. We need both Divine cleansing and Divine keeping. Meyer tells of calling one day, in his pastoral rounds, on a washerwoman whom he found hanging the last of her day's washing on the line. During his brief stay in her house there came a thick and sudden fall of snow. When he came out the ground was white. "Your clothes do not look as white as they did when I came in," Mr. Meyer remarked. "The clothes are just the same," the woman answered, "but what can stand against

God's perfect white?" Compared with the snow, the whitest garments look soiled and dingy. We think we are reasonably pure and good--but when we stand beside the holy Christ--we see that we are unholy and unworthy and need cleansing. We must pray the prayer, "Wash me--and I shall be whiter than snow." Only Christ can cleanse us. Only He can keep us pure and clean. Purity is one of the qualities of the ideal Christian life.

Another quality of a true spiritual life is root. "Like a cedar of Lebanon he will send down his roots." Lilies are pure and gentle--but they are very frail, with shallow rooting, easily torn out of the ground. No one comparison tells all the story of a noble and worthy life. The cedar sends its roots down deep into the earth, anchoring it so securely that the wildest storm cannot tear it loose. Purity is essential in a Christian life. Gentleness and delicacy are unfailing characteristics of a Christlike spirit. But there must also be strength. It is never easy to live well in this world. We cannot hope to be kept always in a shelter of tender love, where no storm beats, where there are no struggles. Jesus Christ, God's only beloved Son, faced the most terrible temptations. His life was exposed to all manner of trials. No follower of His can pass through life and miss antagonism. There must be strength to withstand the tempest--as well as purity to look into God's face. Roots are important, as well as whiteness. The trees that grow on the mountains are deeply and strongly rooted. So if we would stand true, steadfast, unmovable, as we are bidden to stand--we must be anchored by an unwavering faith in Christ.

The root is not the part of the tree that we admire the most. Indeed, it is not seen at all. No one praises it. It creeps down into the dark earth and is hidden. But we know its importance. It feeds the tree's life and then it holds the tree in its place amid the storms. Every strong character must have a deep root. Shallow rooting means a feeble power of resistance. Because it lacked root, the seed sown on rocky ground withered away in the first hot sun. We must be deeply rooted in Christ--if we would endure unto the end.

It takes both the gentleness of the lily, and the strength of the cedar--to make a true Christian character. Gentleness without strength is not noble--it is weakness. Strength without gentleness is not great--it is only brute force. But sweetness and strength combined, yield heroic manhood. Such a man was Jesus Christ.

Another quality in the beautiful life is breadth. "His branches shall spread." If there is strength with deep rooting, there will also be the extending of boughs. Life broadens as it grows. We all begin as babies--but we ought not to continue babies. We ought to grow into men, putting away childish things. Some people, however, seem never to advance in spiritual life.

One of the strange freaks of Japanese horticulture, is the cultivation of dwarf trees. The Japanese grow forest giants in flowerpots. Some of these strange miniature trees are a century old, and are only two or three feet high. The gardener, instead of trying to get them to grow to their best, takes infinite pains to keep them little. His purpose is to grow dwarfs, not giant trees. From the time of their planting--they are repressed, starved, crippled, stunted. When buds appear, they are nipped off. So the tree remains only a dwarf all its life.

Some Christian people seem to do the same thing with their lives. They do not grow. They rob themselves of spiritual nourishment, restrain the noble impulses of their nature, shut out of their hearts the power of the Holy Spirit, and are only dwarf Christians--when they might be strong in Christ Jesus, with the abundant life which the Master wants all His followers to have.

There is not enough breadth in many lives. We ought to grow in height, reaching up to the fullness of the stature of Christ. We ought to grow in the outreach of our lives. We ought to know more of God and of heavenly things tomorrow, than we do today. We are told that if we follow on we shall know, that if we do the little portion of the will of God, we understand we shall be led on to see and know more of that will. We ought to grow in love also, becoming more patient, more gentle, more thoughtful, more unselfish day by day, extending the reach of our unselfishness and helpfulness.

There is something else about these spreading branches. A little farther down in the chapter we read this: "The people will return and live beneath his shade." People find shelter and rest under the shadow of the good man's wide-spreading life. We all know people of whom that is true--others come and live beneath the shadow of their love, their strength, their beneficence. They live to serve others--not to be served by others. They seek always to do good to everyone they meet. Their doors are ever open to those who come needing counsel, cheer, help, and hope. They are an unspeakable blessing and comfort in the world. Their lives are like trees which cast a wide shade in which children play, beneath which the weary stop in their journey to rest.

There is something very admirable in the beauty of such a life a

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