

Steps on the Stairs

by J.R. Miller

The years of our lives should be ascending steps towards heaven, marked by growth in mental and heart qualities, and a spiritual growth with the peace of God ruling in our lives.

Scripture: Matthew 5:16, Romans 12:2, 1 Corinthians 9:24-27, Galatians 5:22-23, Ephesians 4:15, Philippians 3:14, Colossians 3:2, Hebrews 12:1-2, James 1:2-4, 2 Peter 3:18

Topics: "Perseverance in Faith", "Spiritual Growth"

Description

J.R. Miller emphasizes that life should be viewed as a series of ascending steps towards heaven, where true living involves continuous growth in character, wisdom, and spirituality. He encourages believers to recognize that while the journey may be challenging, they are not alone, as divine assistance is always present. Miller warns against equating age or busyness with true progress, urging individuals to focus on inner growth and the impact they have on others. He highlights the importance of marking birthdays as opportunities for new beginnings and personal advancement, rather than mere celebrations. Ultimately, Miller calls for a life dedicated to uplifting others and growing in grace, reflecting Christ's love in every interaction.

Transcript

The years ought to be ascending steps in the ladder of life. We should always be going upward. Heaven is high--a place of perfect beauty and holiness. When we begin to live truly--we begin to climb toward heaven. It looks far away, so far that it seems to us we never can reach it. But we are sure that we can. We are not left to struggle upwards, unhelped. There always are angels on the ladder, going up and coming down--going up on our behalf, to tell of our faith and our struggles, and then coming down to bring us help out of heaven. We need not doubt, therefore, that heaven is really within our reach and that through the help of God, we shall some day enter its doors if only we continue faithful.

But the way is not easy. It is a mountain climb--and it is never easy to go up a steep mountain. This mountain is very high. No matter how long we have been on the way, nor how far we have gone--heaven still keeps far above us. The saintliest people we know, tell us that they have not yet attained--but are still pressing on toward the goal.

A ladder does not suggest rapid going up--but it does suggest patient, continuous ascending. True living is always progressive. The experiences are variable--but persistent faith and courage ever conquer circumstances, and make the hardest conditions yield contentment and hope, so that the feet are ever

climbing higher. The years set their mileposts on the way, and it would be a pity if any one of these should fail to mark some gain, some advance. It is not enough to have the figures grow which register the years. Getting older--is not necessarily getting better. Moving onward--is not always moving upward.

Nor is the doing of a great deal of work in a year, a proof that we are making the truest use of our time; there are those who are always busy--and yet never accomplish anything that lasts. Nor is the piling up of possessions a sure indication that one is really growing. Men too often have buried their manhood away in their accumulations of wealth.

The true upward climbing which the years should mark--must be in the life itself, not in its condition and circumstances, nor in any of its accessories. What a man IS--is the test of his living; not what he does, nor what he has. There must be a growth in mental qualities and resources. Not to have learned anything new in a year, not to be any wiser, not to be able to think more clearly, does not show a worthy use of time and opportunities. There must be a growth also in heart qualities. Time and its experiences should make us gentler, kinder, less selfish, more thoughtful, more considerate of others, with truer sympathy, and larger ability for helpfulness. In the full life, there must also be a spiritual growth. The peace of God must rule in it more and more deeply. Self must have less and less place and power in the directing of the life--and Christ must hold increasing sway. Love's lessons must be better and better learned.

Many lives are hurt by the experiences through which they pass. They have losses, disappointments, sorrows, and, perhaps, are called to endure wrongs; and instead of coming through all victoriously, they yield and become discouraged and embittered. One who lives truly, however, is unhurt by even the most disheartening circumstances. He meets them with cheerfulness and confidence.

Robert Louis Stevenson is a recent example of such victoriousness. It has been said of him: "Rarely has been witnessed a manlier struggle than that made by this exquisite writer and lovable man, who fought life-long disease and weakness for the sake of others, and who remained sunny and cheerful to the end. Into his writings, crept no note of discouragement, no embittered tone, though often the words were penned upon a sick bed. He believed in happiness, not so much for personal pleasure, as to create a circle of kindly influence round about him."

We date our letters, "In the year of our Lord." There is something very inspiring in this designation. The years are Christ's--not ours. He gives them to us, that on each of their pages, we may write something worth while, a word or two which shall make the world richer and better, something of which we shall not be ashamed when the books are opened at the end of time. It is not enough that we do not blot the pages with records of gross sins; we should fill them also with the story of noble and beautiful things. Every day should be rich in ministries of good.

Birthdays are good times for new beginnings. Birthdays are not different from other days in their external aspect. The sun rises no earlier, lingers no later, and shines no more brightly. The sky is no bluer, and the air is no purer. The birds sing no more sweetly, and the flowers are no lovelier. Tasks are no easier, burdens are no lighter, and paths are no smoother. Yet there is a sense in which a birthday is different from all other days. It is a milestone recording another station of progress in the life, and no thoughtful person can pass it without pausing a moment for a look backward--and then forward.

The event is brightened also by the tokens of love and friendship which it brings, for there are few in these good days whose hearts are not warmed by reminders of interest and affection from their friends on their birthdays. Thus the days are made to stand out among the days of the year with a brightness all their own.

It is not enough, however, to have a birthday made happy by the congratulations of friends, by tokens of affection, by letters filled with good wishes. It should be marked also among the days by some uplift, some new beginning, some victory over temptation or fault, some fresh gift from heaven. No tomorrow should be just like today--no better, no more beautiful, no fuller of helpfulness. But every birthday should mark a special advance. We should never be content to live any year--just as we lived the one that is gone. Contentment is a Christian grace--but contentment does not mean self-satisfaction. We are never to be restless--restlessness is a mark of weakness--but we can have perfect poise and the blessing of Christ's peace, and yet be eagerly pressing on all the while, to new attainments and new achievements.

We should mark our birthdays by a clearing away of whatever is out of date and no longer of use in our life, and especially of whatever cumpers or hinders us, whatever impedes our progress. As we grow older--there are many things which we should leave behind. When we become men--we should put away childish things--but some men never do. They always remain childish.

Childlikeness is very beautiful--it is commended by the Master as the very ideal of Christian life and character. But childishness is unbeautiful and unlovely, and should be left behind as we pass on.

Then, we are continually coming to the end of things which may have been important in their time--but we have outlived their necessity. A birthday is a good time to get clear of all these worn-out, superseded things. We should move out of the old house, leaving in the garrets and lumber-rooms, the things we need no more--and making a new home for our souls with only fit and beautiful things in it.

A birthday should be a time also for taking fresh hold of life. The tendency is to live in routine, and routine is likely to be fatal to zest and enthusiasm. We easily lose sight of our ideals--and drift imperceptibly into commonplace living. We need to be waked up now and then--to a fresh consciousness of the meaning of life.

One of the perils of comfortable living is the falling into easy ways. We forget that the easy path does not slope upward; that worthy things can be reached only by climbing; and that the true way is not only steep--but oftentimes craggy. The really noble and worthy things in life--can be attained only at the cost of toil and struggle. Not heaven alone--but whatever belongs to the kingdom of heaven--must be won on the battlefields of life. Yet the revealing of this fact that the prizes of life, cannot be attained easily--should never daunt anyone. Indeed, a large part of the value and blessing in any achievement or attainment, lies in what it costs. We grow most under burdens. We get strength in struggle. We learn our best lessons in suffering. The little money we are paid for our toil--is not the best part of the reward--the best is what the toil does in us--in new experience, in wisdom, in patience, in self-conquest.

But, whatever the cost of life's gains, we should be ready to pay it in full. We need not trouble ourselves greatly, either about earthly position or about our greatness in men's eyes; it is infinitely more important that we make sure of growing in the things that belong to true manhood. A distinguished man said, "If I had a son, I would tell him many times a day--to make himself as great a man on the inside, as possible." That should ever be our aim, and on each new birthday this vision of worthy life should be set freshly before us.

This ideal concerns two things--our own growth in whatever things are lovely and true--and our work on the lives of others. One writes, "To be at once strong and gentle, true and kind, to be braver today than yesterday, swifter to respond to earth's music, slower to notice its discords, to have eye and hand growing ever quicker to note and more ready to aid the need around us, to have the voice take a cheerier tone day

by day, and the eyes a quicker light--this is to be growing in grace. What higher ideal of life can we have--than that of making a little brighter, sweeter, stronger, a little better or happier in some way, every life that touches our own? Whether we do it by sermon or song, by merry laugh or sympathetic tear, by substantial aid, or 'trifles light as air,' matters not at all--so long as it is done for Christ's dear sake and the bringing nearer of his kingdom."

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