

The Art of Living With People

by J.R. Miller

The art of living with people requires self-forgiveness, self-restraint, and love, and involves being patient, tolerant, and willing to yield and give up our rights.

Scripture: Proverbs 15:1, Matthew 5:9, Romans 12:10, 1 Corinthians 13:4-7, Galatians 5:22-23, Ephesians 4:2, Philippians 2:3-4, Colossians 3:13, James 1:19, 1 Peter 4:8

Topics: "Love and Patience", "Interpersonal Relationships"

Description

J.R. Miller emphasizes that living with people is life's best school, teaching us invaluable lessons about love, patience, and selflessness. He acknowledges the challenges of interpersonal relationships, including hurt and friction, but insists that these experiences are essential for personal growth and character development. Miller encourages us to practice unselfishness and tolerance, especially with those who are difficult to get along with, reminding us that we too may have faults that others must endure. He highlights the importance of love as a lubricant in relationships, advocating for a spirit of yielding and patience to foster harmony. Ultimately, he calls us to embody Christ-like love in our interactions, becoming peacemakers in a world filled with conflict.

Transcript

Life's best school--is living with people. It is there we learn our best lessons. Someone says, "It is better to live with others--even at the cost of considerable jarring and friction, than to live in undisturbed quiet alone." It is not ideally the easy way. It means oftentimes--hurts, wrongs, injustices, many a wounding, many a heartache, many a pang. It requires self-forgetfulness, self-restraint, the giving up of one's rights many times, the overlooking of unkindnesses and thoughtlessnesses, the quiet enduring of things that it would seem no one should be required to endure from another. Nevertheless, it is immeasurably better to live with people, though it is not easy--than to live alone.

Living alone nourishes much that is not good and beautiful in human nature. It promotes selfishness. It gives self-conceit an undue opportunity for growth and development. It permits us to do too much as we please, which is bad training for any of us; to be independent, to indulge our own tastes, feelings, and whims without limitation, without protest, since no one is near enough to us to be seriously affected.

Living alone deprives us of the opportunity for discipline and education, which we can get only by living in daily contact with others. One can never grow into true nobleness of character, sweetness of disposition, and beauty of life--while living in solitude. As one says, "We need to have our sharp corners rubbed off,

our little pet desires punctured, and most of all to learn self-control, 'sweet reasonableness' and tolerance for other people's point of view."

Then we never can learn the lesson of love--but by living with people. We may learn the theory of loving each other--and be able to preach about it, and write delightful essays on the subject--but that is different altogether from getting the lesson into our own lives!

A man said to his pastor at the close of a year, "I have been through the Bible five times this year." The pastor asked him quietly, "How often has the Bible been through you this year?" Only when the Bible goes through us--is it to us what it is meant to be. Memorizing the teachings about loving each other--is one thing; getting these teachings into our hearts and lives--is quite another thing. The latter we can achieve only in personal contacts with others, with all sorts and conditions of men. Nothing will teach us unselfishness, but the practice of unselfishness under pressure of necessity. We cannot learn patience with others--except in experiences which put our patience to the test. The same is true of all the virtues and graces--they can be acquired only in practical life. Thus it is that in very many ways--people are the best means of grace to us!

It is important, then, that we learn the art of living with people. It should not be hard to live with those who are sweet, gentle, patient, thoughtful, and unselfish--anybody ought to be able to get along with such pleasant people. But not all with whom we mingle, are of this class. There are disagreeable people, those who are thoughtless, uncongenial, exacting, quick-tempered, unreasonable, over-sensitive; and our duty of living sweetly with others includes these, too. It may help us if we will always remember, when we find it hard to get along with anyone, that this is only a new lesson in loving set for us. Of course it would please us--if the disagreeable person should by some process, be quietly changed into sweet reasonableness and Christ-like agreeableness, so that there no longer should be any uncongeniality to fret us. But it is not probable that any such miracle will be wrought to make it easier for us to get along together.

Almost certainly, the task set for us must be worked out without any perceptible amelioration of conditions. The problem is ours--we must meet it. It is ours to be Christians, which means Christ-like, just where we find ourselves. Our Master had a great deal harder conditions than ours, in which to live his life--but he never once failed in the sweetness and patience of love, and he will help us to live as he did, if we will accept his help.

There is another thing for us to remember, which may help us. It is not unlikely that others may find it difficult at some points, at least--to live with us. It is possible that WE have serious faults, uncongenial qualities, and disagreeable habits. Perhaps those with whom we find it hard to get along sweetly--are experiencing similar difficulty in adjusting themselves to us! Not many people are entirely perfect. Most earthly saints still have their faults or idiosyncrasies. We cannot see our own face--and we do not see ourselves just as other people see us. Someone has given this bit of advice, "When anything goes wrong, blame yourself." That is not the way we usually do--we like to blame the other person. But it will help much in working out the problem we are considering, if we admit that the trouble may be at least partly with ourselves, partly our fault. For one thing, this will make us more patient with others. Then it will also make us more willing to try to learn the lesson set for us. The self-conceit that never confesses mistake or fault is incapable of being made better, is indeed hopeless!

The trouble with too many of us--is that we are not willing to do this. We are not disposed to overlook things in others, which do not fall in with our ideas of the way they should treat us. We are not willing to

accord to them the rights which they claim--or to be lenient toward their uncongeniality and tolerant with their faults. We insist upon their coming up always to our requirements, and doing only the things that please us. A little honest thought, will show us that this is not the Christly way. Instead of insisting that others should think always of him and minister to his comfort--our Master put it the other way, and sought rather to minister to them instead. It is worth our while to think this out for ourselves.

If we would learn the lesson of living together--we must exercise love. In one of Charles Parkhurst's little books, there is a chapter on love as a lubricant. The author relates this incident: One day there was a workman aboard a trolley car, and he noticed that every time the door was pushed open it squeaked. Rising from his seat, he took a little can from his pocket, let fall a drop of oil on the offending spot, and sat down again, quietly remarking, "I always carry an oil-can in my pocket, for there are so many squeaky things, that a drop of oil will correct."

The application of the incident is obvious. In human society there are continual contacts of life with life, and there cannot but be frictions oftentimes which will surely develop unpleasantly unless they are relieved in some way. Here it is, that the oil-can comes in well. A drop or two of its efficacious contents will work wonders in even the most obstinate cases.

There is a great deal of sinful human nature in most people. This leads us to want to have our own way regardless of the rights and the feelings of others. But when two people are trying to live together, and each is set on having things just as he wants to have them--there is sure to be clashing! It is then that the gentle ministry of the oil-can will prove beneficent in allaying friction and preventing unkindly or unseemly contacts. The ideal way in such cases, is for both parties to be not only tolerant and patient--but ready to yield rather than have strife. Sometimes, however, one of the two must do the larger part of the yielding, and exercise all the necessary tolerance and patience, if unhappy friction is to be avoided. Of course this is not just, if the law of the equities is to be followed. Yet it is the part of love--always to be ready to give up its rights, even if the other person will not. He loves most, and is most like the Master--who takes the larger share in yielding, and does it sweetly and cheerfully.

Some good people are ready to claim that there is a limit to our duty of giving up. But not many of us are in danger of going too far in this phase of loving. We need only to recall the Master's teaching about turning the other cheek and letting the relentless litigant have our cloak--as well as the coat he demands, and then to remember also the Master's own example of giving up and submitting to wrong and injustice, in order to manifest what the law of love really means.

Paul also counsels Christians as far as possible--to live peaceably with all men, of course including the quarrelsome. He tells us too that the servant of the Lord must not strive, that is, must not be contentious--but must be gentle unto all men. Then, in that matchless picture of love which is a New Testament classic, we are taught that "Love is patient and kind. Love is not jealous or boastful or proud or rude. Love does not demand its own way. Love is not irritable, and it keeps no record of when it has been wronged. It is never glad about injustice but rejoices whenever the truth wins out. Love never gives up, never loses faith, is always hopeful, and endures through every circumstance." 1 Corinthians 13:4-7

The ideal way for two to live together, however, implies two oil-cans--neither person disposed to quarrel, both willing to give up. But though others may not be disposed to patience and forbearance, we are responsible only for ourselves, and we must love on and our patience must not fail, whatever the conditions are. There are few people so hard to get along with--that we cannot live peaceably with them, if

only our own heart is full of patient love.

One of our Lord's beatitudes is, "Blessed are the peacemakers." This applies not only in our personal relations--but also in our influence upon those about us. We see a man now and then who, without being officious or a meddler in other people's affairs, is always dropping oil in most timely fashion on "squeaky things." When he meets a friend who is excited, he says a gentle word which acts like a charm in quieting him. When one complains to him of a slight or an injury received, he allays the hurt feeling by suggesting the Christly way of looking at it. Wherever he goes--he is a peacemaker. He carries in his own life, an influence which makes men ashamed of unlovingness, and inspires them with the desire to live sweetly and in patient love!

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