

# The Beauty of Every Day

by J.R. Miller

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*The sermon emphasizes the importance of seizing the present opportunity and being present in the moment, as we never know when it will pass.*

**Scripture:** Matthew 5:14, Mark 14:7

**Topics:** "Seizing Opportunities", "Divine Presence in Everyday Life"

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## Description

J.R. Miller emphasizes the beauty of everyday life, urging us to recognize and seize the fleeting opportunities for love and kindness that each day presents. He illustrates how Jesus valued personal connections and moments of service over material concerns, reminding us that we may not always have the chance to express our love or help others. Miller encourages us to see the divine in the ordinary, suggesting that every encounter is an opportunity to reflect God's love. He also highlights the importance of being present and attentive to the needs of those around us, as these moments are often the most significant. Ultimately, he calls us to live with intention, making the most of each day as a gift from God.

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## Transcript

The Beauty of Every Day

J. R. Miller, 1910

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## PREFACE

These simple chapters may have their message for new friends and old--for those who for many years have been reading the author's books, and those who may pick up this volume by chance. The lessons are not new, yet they may touch lives that need them; and if they do not take away burdens, they may make hearts braver and stronger to bear them.

While We May

"The poor you will always have with you, and you can help them any time you want. But you will not always have Me!" Mark 14:7

Jesus defended Mary when the disciples criticized her anointing of him. They said the ointment should have been sold--and the money

given to the poor, instead of being used for a mere personal service. But Jesus said to them, "The poor you will always have with you, and you can help them any time you want. But you will not always have Me!" Whatever they did for him--they must do then. In a little while, he would not be with them any more. There would never be a day when they could not minister to the poor, but he would not sit again at Mary's table. If she had not brought her alabaster cruse that evening and broken it--she never would have done it!

If you know that this is the last day you will have a certain rare friend, that tonight he will vanish from your companionship, and you will never see him again--you will surround him with the warmest devotion and lavish upon him your heart's holiest affection while you may.

This is a lesson we should learn well. Opportunities come today and pass--and will never come to us again! Other opportunities will come tomorrow--but these will never return. The human needs that make their appeal to you now--will be beyond the reach of your hand by another day. Whatever kindness you would do--you must do now--for you may not pass this way again.

If we realized this truth as we should, it would make the common events of our life mean far more than they do. We are always meeting experiences which are full of rich possible outcomes. God is in all our days and nights. Opportunities come to us with the hour, with the moment, and each one says to us, "You will not always have me!" If we do not take them as they come, we cannot take them at all.

There are two kinds of sins: sins of omission and sins of commission; sins of doing wrong, as when we do evil things; and sins of not doing good, as when we neglect to do the things we ought to have done.

One comes to you in distress, needing cheer, some kindly help, or deliverance from some danger, and you let the trouble go unrelieved, the sorrow uncomforted, the need unsupplied. The opportunity has passed--and you have missed it. There is a blank in your life; you have left a duty undone.

Everyone we meet any day, comes to us either to receive some gift or blessing from us, or to bring some gift or blessing to us. We do not think of this, usually, in our crowded days, in the confusion of meetings and partings. We do not suppose there is any meaning in what we call the incidental contacts of life, as when we ride upon the bus beside another, for a few minutes; or meet another at a friend's house and talk a little while together; or when we sit beside another in the same office day after day. We are not in the habit of attaching any importance to these contacts with others. We do not suppose that God ordered this or that meeting; that he sent this person to us because the person needs us--and that we are to do something for him; or else we need something, some influence, some inspiration, some cheer--from him. But the fact is--that God is in all our life--and is always ordering its smallest events.

When older people really think of it, they will see that this is true. When they look back over their years, they will find that the strange network of circumstances and experiences that has marked their days, has not been woven by chance, is no confused tangle of threads, crossing and re-crossing, without any divine plan or direction--but rather that it makes a beautiful web, with not one thread out of place! The whole is the filling out of a pattern designed by the great Master of life.

Most of the friendships of our lives are made in this way--you and your friend meeting first by chance, as we would say. You did not choose each other. Emerson spoke for all when he said, "My friends have come to me unsought; the great God gave them to me." All of life--is thus full of God.

Jesus taught the importance of the present opportunity in the Garden of Gethsemane. He asked three of his disciples to keep watch with him while he went deeper into the shadows and knelt in prayer. A great anguish was upon him, and he needed and craved human sympathy. After his first agony of supplication, he came back to his friends, hoping to get a little strength from their love--but found them asleep! In his bitter disappointment he returned to his place of prayer. A second time he came back--and again they were asleep! The third time he said to them, "Sleep on now, and take your rest." There was no need to wake and watch any longer. The hour had come, the traitor was approaching, and the torches were flashing through the trees.

There is a strange pathos in the Master's final words. The disciples had had their opportunity for helping him--but had not improved it. They had slept--when his heart was crying out for their waking. Now the hour was past when waking would avail--and they might as well sleep on!

We do not dream of the criticalness of life, of the mighty momentousness there is in the hours through which we pass: what blessing and good come to us--when we watch and are faithful; what loss and sorrow come to us--when we sleep and are faithless. "You will not always have ME!" is the voice of every

opportunity to receive good in some form. We miss God's gift, because we shut our hearts upon it; and only when it is too late, when the gifts have vanished, are we ready to accept them. Or it may be an opportunity to do something for another. We dally, and the opportunity passes. The person perishes, perhaps, because we were not awake!

Opportunities differ in their importance. "The poor you will always have with you, and you can help them any time you want. But you will not always have Me!" Jesus was defending Mary's act of love to him. If Mary had not brought her precious ointment that night--she never could have brought it. "Leave her alone! Why are you bothering her? She has done a beautiful thing to Me!" We never can know what great good she wrought for him, how much comfort and strength she gave to him. He was carrying then the heaviest load that any heart ever carried. We all remember hours of great need in our own lives, hours of anxiety, of sorrow, of pain--when a word spoken to us, or a flower sent to our room, or a card coming through the mail, or some little human touch--came to us as a very messenger of God. We never can tell how Mary's love helped Jesus that night.

The disciples said the ointment was wasted, did no one any good. Ah! they did not know what that expression of love meant to the Master, how it cheered him, how it heartened him for going on to his cross. If they had known--they never would have said that the ointment would have done more good, if it had been applied to relieving the poor.

There would have been times when the poor should have had the benefit of Mary's gift. If the cruse of oil had been broken to honor some unworthy man--it would have been wasted. But Jesus was the Son of God. This particular hour was one when he needed love, when he craved sympathy, when he longed to be strengthened.

In all time there never was an hour when a simple gift of love could have meant so much as Mary's meant, that night in Simon's house!!

"You will not always have Me!" The blessing which that money would have given to the poor, never could have been compared for a moment, with the blessing which the ointment, as an expression of love, was to Jesus!

Life is full of similar contrasts, in the value of opportunities. There are commonplace opportunities, and there are opportunities which are radiant and splendid. There are days and days when the best use one can make of money--is to give it to those who need it, or to some Christian institution. Then there comes a day, an hour, when some rare and sacred need arises, which eclipses in importance as day excels night in its brightness, all common needs--a need which must be met instantly and heroically and at once.

A few times in every godly man's life, there comes a moment of supreme importance, when every other appeal or call for help must be unheeded--for one which must be answered at once. There are many things which must be done instantly, or they cannot be done at all.

An artist was watching a pupil sketch a sunset scene. He noticed that the young man was lingering on his sketching of a barn in the foreground, while the sun was hastening to its setting. The artist said to his pupil, "Young man, if you lose more time sketching the shingles on the barn roof--you will not catch the sunset at all."

This is just what many people do. They give all their time to commonplace things, to fences and barn roofs and sheds--and miss the glorious sunsets! They give to the poor and help them--but have no thought for Christ. They toil for honor, money, and fame--and never see God nor get acquainted with him.

There are friendships which never reach their possible richness and depths of beauty, playing only along the shore, while the great ocean of love lies beyond unexplored! They miss the really splendid things in life--while they live for the poor and sordid things!

We do not begin to realize how many of us pay heed only to second-rate things, while we miss altogether the great things of life. We spend hours upon newspapers, never reading a book that is truly worth while. All the best opportunities of life are transient. They are with us today--but tomorrow they are gone!

"You will not always have Me!" There is a time for forming friendships--but it does not stay always. Miss it, and tomorrow you cannot find it. There is a time for making a beautiful home life--but soon the time is gone if it is not improved. Impatience, fretfulness, selfishness, irritability, nagging--you know how the beauty is marred, the brightness dimmed, the sweetness embittered by these! When two young people marry and begin to make a home--they have almost infinite possibilities before them. But the vision must be seized at once, and not a moment must be lost. "You will not always have ME!" the opportunity says to the home-builders. Some years after, they find that they have failed, that the vision has faded, and that they cannot get it back again!

To every young person, there comes in the bright days--the opportunity of living a beautiful life--but it comes only once and it stays only for a little while! The vision will not wait. "You will not always have ME!" it says.

There are some things we can do any time--but this is not true of following Christ. We think it is--that we can accept him and take the blessings of his love, when we will--but it is not true. Delay dulls and hardens our hearts. Delay uses up the moments of his waiting--and eats up our opportunity. "At my convenience" we say, "I will take him now." We turn--and He is gone!

All the best things are transient.

As we gather about our home table--let us remember we may not all be there again, and let us make the meal one of sweetness and joy. Let us be patient with one another, kind and thoughtful, gentle--while we may. Soon we shall not have each other!

### The Glory of the Common Life

It was only a scrubby bush, which Moses saw in the desert, and yet it gleamed with splendor, as if it were burning. No wonder the old shepherd turned aside to look at the strange sight! He wanted to solve the mystery. But a voice halted him. God was in the bush!

Mrs. Browning, referring to this singular incident says:

"Earth 's crammed with heaven,

And every common bush afire with God;

But only he who sees--takes off his shoes;

The rest sit round and pluck blackberries!"

The poet's thought is that the glory of God is in everything, in every tree, in every flower, in every lowly bush, and that almost nobody sees the glory! Most people see only the bush or the plant. Only now and then--one sees the flame, the splendor of God, and takes off his shoes!

To many people, life is all a dreary commonplace. Some see nothing beautiful in nature. They will walk through the loveliest gardens--and see nothing to admire. They will move among Christian people--and never observe in them, any glimpses of immortality, any revealings of the divine nature. They will go through all the years and never see God in anything! It would give us a radiant world in nature--if our eyes were opened to see the splendor that is in every tree, plant, and flower!

An artist was painting a picture which he hoped might be honored at the Academy. It was of a woman, struggling up a street, on a wild, stormy night, carrying her baby in her arms. Doors were shut in her face. Nowhere was there warmth, sympathy or love for her. The artist called the picture, "Homeless." As he was painting it, imagination filled his soul with divine pity. "Why do I not go to lost people themselves, to try to save them, instead of merely painting pictures of them?" he began to ask. The common bush burned with fire. Under the impulse of the new feeling, he gave himself to Christ and to the Christian ministry. He went to Africa as a missionary, devoting his life to the saving of the lowest lost! If we had eyes touched by divine anointing, we would see in every outcast, in every most depraved life--the gleaming of every possible glory.

Many of the best people in the world are lowly and obscure. They have no shining qualities, no brilliant gifts. Yet if we could see them as they really are--we would find the thorn bush burning with fire. They are full of God. Christ lives in them!

There is a story of an Italian Christian who works with pick and shovel, walking two miles every morning to his task. He lives on the plainest food. Yet he is the happiest man in all his neighborhood. He has a secret which keeps him happy in all his toil and pinching. Away in Italy, he has a wife and two children, and he is working and saving to bring them to America, where he is building a home for them. This lowly thorn bush of hardness and poverty--is aflame with the fire of love.

God is usually found in most unlikely places. When the shepherds went to seek for the Holy Child, they did not go to fine mansions, to the homes of the great or rich, to earthly palaces--they found the Babe in a stable, sleeping in a feeding trough!

Lowell's legend is a story for all days and all places. As the knight rode out from his castle gate at the beginning of his quest for the holy grail, he tossed a coin to the leper who sat by the wayside begging. Through all lands he rode in a vain search for the sacred cup. At length, old, broken, and disappointed--but chastened, he returned home. There sat the leper as before, by the castle gate. The knight has learned love's lesson. He shares his last crust with the leper. He breaks the ice on the stream near by, brings water in his wooden bowl, and gives the beggar a drink. Then the leper is revealed as the Christ--and the bowl as the holy cup.

Ofttimes it is in lowliest ways--that God is found, after men have sought long for him in vain, in ways of splendor. A disciple asked the Master to show him the Father. He thought the revealing would come in some heavenly splendor. Jesus said that he had been showing the Father in all the years he had been with the disciples. He referred to his everyday life of love and kindness. You say you never have seen

God, and that you wish you could see him. You could believe in him more easily, if you could see him sometimes. That is what the disciples thought and said, "Show us the Father, and it is enough," was their pleading. Yet, they really had been seeing the Father the whole three years!

So it is that Christ comes to us continually in plain garb, in lowly ways, without any apparent brightness. We decline tasks and duties that are assigned to us, thinking they are not worthy of our fine hands--not knowing that they are holy ministries which angels would eagerly perform! Not one of the disciples that last night, would take the basin and the towel and wash the feet of the others and of the Master. Washing feet was the lowliest of all tasks--the lowest slave in the household did it. But while these proud men scoffed and shrank from the service--Jesus himself did it! Then they saw that washing the feet of others in love--is divine in its splendor. The thorn bush burned with fire!

Some of the happiest people in the world--are doing the plainest tasks, are living in the plainest way, have the fewest luxuries, and scarcely ever have an hour for rest or play. They are happy because they are contented. They love God. They follow Christ. They have learned to love their work and do it with delight, with eagerness, with enthusiasm.

A pastor tells of visiting a family in one of the smallest houses in his great parish. There is a widow who goes out to work all day, and a girl of twenty who also works. There is a boy of ten or twelve who is at school. It would not have been surprising if a tone of discontent had been found in the little home, or if there had been complaints about their hard condition. But the pastor heard no word that was not glad. The three people in the little house had learned to see brightness in their humble circumstances. All the dreariness--was touched with a heavenly gleam! The rough thorn bush burned with fire!

God finds much of earth's truest happiness--in most unlikely places. Many of the sweetest Christians in the world--are those who have least of earthly gladness. Their joy is the joy of the Lord; a joy which is transmuted sorrow. Many of the songs which are fullest of praise--are sung in chambers of pain. Paul had learned to rejoice in tribulation. Many of the most radiant experiences of Christian life are born of pain. Jesus gave a beatitude for sorrow, "Blessed are those who mourn--for they shall be comforted."

The North American Indians have a strange and beautiful legend. They say that as the flowers fade, their beauty is not lost--but is gathered up into the rainbow, and thus the flowers live again in even richer colors than before. Just so, the blessings that are taken out of our hands on earth--are only gathered into heavenly blessedness, where they shall be ours forever! The rough thorn bush of sorrow is made by faith to appear in unfading glory, to glow in the radiance of God's eternal love!

There are certain lives which we are accustomed to look upon and think of with pity. Their condition is always one of suffering. One person is blind and helpless; another is crippled so as never to be able to leave her room; another is paralyzed and cannot use her hands or feet; another is a hopeless invalid. We pity these people, and think their case is forlorn. Yes--but nowhere do you find such trust, such patience, such joy--as in their lives. The thorn bushes burn with fire--and are not consumed!

Many people never have learned to see God in their everyday life. It seems to them, that their life is not worthy of them, that its splendor is lost in their commonplace tasks.

In a little book published a few years ago, there was a story of a young minister visiting among his people. One day he called on an old shoemaker. He began to talk to the old man, and inadvertently spoke of his occupation as 'lowly'. The shoemaker was pained by the minister's word.

"Do not call my occupation lowly! It is no more lowly than yours! When I stand before God in judgment, he will ask about my work, and will ask what kind of shoes I made down here, and then he will want me to show him a specimen. And He will ask you what kind of sermons you preached to your people, and will have you show him one. And if my shoes are better than your sermons, then I shall have fuller approval than you will have!"

The old shoemaker was not offended, he was only impressed with the honor of his own calling, as God saw it. He was right, too! No occupation is in itself lowly--the commonest kind of work is radiant--if it is done for God! We shall each be judged indeed by the way we have done the work of our profession, our trade, or our calling. What we do for Christ is glorious, however lowly it is in itself!

There is a customary thought, that the calling of a minister is more sacred than that of the carpenter, the shoemaker, or the merchant. But the old man was right when he said that his calling was as honorable as his minister's. They do not have an ordination service for the painter or the grocer; but why not? There really is a splendor, a radiance, in each one's peculiar occupation, however plain it may seem!

Paul said to the Corinthians, "Let each man, as responsible to God, should remain in the situation God called him to." The slave was to continue a slave--with God. The tradesman was to continue in his trade--with God. We should not feel humiliated by our lowly earthly condition; we should glorify it. The angels, as they go about, do not recognize rank in people's occupations--some graded low, some high. We are ranked by the degree of diligence or faithfulness that we put into our tasks.

The bright, cheery, good-hearted bootblack, who "shines 'em up," is far above the useless millionaire who never thinks of God or man. You can live a noble, divine life anywhere with God. Your humblest thorn bush burns with fire!

One whose life seems lowly writes: "Some of my friends pity me for having to work in a factory--but I feel honored that God should call me to work at something like my Master's earthly calling--and I do not feel that polishing and packing watch crystals, is my real mission in this world--any more than carpentering was His." The thorn bush burns with fire!

We go to far-off lands to see the splendors there. Italy is glorious. Switzerland is glorious. But there is glory also in every common blade of grass, in every tiny flower, in every bud, in every leaf, in every butterfly!

You read biographies of great men and are charmed by what they did, by the noble qualities you find in their character. That is well. But just where you are--there are glories too. In your own life there are divine possibilities. You have not yet begun to find them all, or realize them.

Perhaps you have been thinking rather discouragingly about yourself. You feel that you have hardly a fair share of comfort, of opportunities, of privileges. You have been almost fretting because you are not getting on or getting up--as fast as you want to. You have been discontented, depressed. Ask God to open your eyes--and you will see your thorn bush burning with fire. Your everyday life is full of splendor! There is not a single hour in your commonest day--that is uneventful.

You are thinking that there are no miracles any more. But there really are as many miracles any week--as there were in the life of any Bible saint. Or, you have been thinking of your troubles, that you have more than your share of them. The work of the lace weavers seems to the observer, to be a great tangle, a

strange puzzle. But out of it all, there comes marvelous beauty. Life seems a tangle, a puzzle, to us--as we look at its events, its circumstances, its sorrows and joys. But in the end--we shall see that not one thread was ever weaved into the wrong place in the web. God is in all our life!

### Seeds of Light

In one of the Psalms, we are told that, "Light is sown for the righteous, and gladness for the upright in heart." There is nothing remarkable in the assurance of light and gladness for the faithful--that is the teaching of the whole Bible. The remarkable thing in the promise, is the way the light and gladness are said to come. "Light is sown for the righteous." The figure of sowing is striking--light coming in seeds, planted like wheat, to grow up for us out of the soil. Our blessings are sown for us--and grow in fields and gardens, and we gather them as we reap the harvests or pluck lovely flowers.

This means that the good things of our lives, do not come to us full-grown--but as seeds. We know what a seed is. It contains only in germ form--the plant, the tree, or the flower which is to be. In this way all earthly life begins. When God wants to give an oak tree to the forest, he does not set out a great tree; he plants an acorn. When he would have a harvest of golden wheat waving on the field, he does not work a miracle and have it spring up over-night; he puts into the farmer's hands a bushel of wheat grains to scatter in the furrows.

The same law holds in the moral and spiritual life. "The kingdom of heaven is like unto a grain of mustard seed, which a man took, and sowed in his field; which . . . becomes a tree." So a noble life begins in a little seed, a mere point of life. It is at first only a thought, a suggestion, a desire--then a decision, a holy purpose.

God sows light and gladness for us. He gives us blessings as seeds, which he buries in the furrows of our lives, or hides in the soil--so that they may grow and in due time develop into beauty and fruitfulness. When you look at a seed, you do not see all the splendor which will unfold from it at length. All you see is a little brown and unsightly hull, which gives no hint of the beauty which will spring from it--when it is planted and dies--and then grows up.

Just so, many of the beams of light--comfort, strength, joy, and good, that now are so prominent in your life, came to you at first as unwelcome things. They did not shine as beams of radiant light. They were not glad things. They may have been burdens, disappointments, sufferings, losses--but they were seeds with life in them. God was sowing light and gladness for you, in these experiences which were so unwelcome, so hard to endure.

There are many ways in which God has sown light in the past. Think of the seeds of light sown in the creation and preparation of the earth to be our home. In the account of creation, we have a wonderful glimpse of the divine heart and of God's love for man, his child. The building of the earth was no accident. It did not spring into being and develop into beauty--without thought and purpose. There was divine design in it. From the beginning, God meant the earth to be the home of his children, and so we find love-thoughts everywhere. God looked forward and put in provisions, planned conveniences, stored blessings that would make the earth ages afterward, a happy home for his children, lacking nothing.

We have it in the Genesis story. There was only chaos. "The earth was waste and void; and darkness was upon the face of the deep." A marginal reading is, "The Spirit of God was brooding upon the face of the waters." The picture which the words suggest, is that of a hen sitting on her nest, covering her eggs with

her wings, brooding over them. So God brooded over the chaos of the world which he was preparing, thinking in love of his children to be aeons hence, and planning for their happiness and good.

Through all the great ages of world-building, we find evidences of this divine brooding and forethought. Think of all the beauty put into the earth which was to be man's home, of all the good and useful things stored in nature for man's comfort--ages before there was a man on the earth. Think, for instance, of the vast beds of coal laid up among earth's strata, that our homes might be warm and bright in these late centuries. Think of the minerals piled away in the rocks, of electricity stored in exhaustless measures and kept hidden until these modern days, to be of such incalculable service to mankind. Look at the springs of water opened on every hillside; note the provision in every climate and zone--for man's food and clothing. All this marvelous preparation was made ages before man's creation! It was God sowing seeds of light and gladness, that in due time they might grow and fill the world with good!

Or think of the way Jesus Christ sowed light and gladness for his people in his incarnation. What was he doing in those beautiful years of his, those days of sharp temptation, those hours of suffering? He was sowing seeds of light and gladness, the blessings of whose brightness we are receiving now. Or think of the divine promises as seeds of light, seeds of gladness, sown in the fields of the holy Word. Wherever they grow--they yield joy and beauty. Deserts are made to blossom as the rose, wherever the sower goes forth to sow.

God's sowing was not all in the past, in forethought. He is sowing light and gladness for us every day.

Every duty given to us--is a seed of light, sown for us. We may not see the shining in it--as it first presents itself. Many of us do not like the duties which God has given us. We prefer to follow our own inclinations. A good woman, speaking of something someone was urging her to do and which she was trying to evade, said, "I suppose it must be my duty--but I hate it so!" Ofttimes our duties at first seem distasteful, even repulsive. They have no attraction for us. But when we accept them and do them--they are transformed. We then begin to see good in them, blessing to ourselves, help to others.

Seeds are sometimes dark and rough as we look at them--but when they are planted--there emerges a beautiful tree or a lovely flower. Just so, disagreeable tasks when done--appear bright and glad.

One tells of a homely picture which would hearten humdrum life. It shows a poor, discouraged-looking horse in a treadmill. Round and round he tramps in the hot, dusty ring, not weary only, we might say, of the toil--but also of its endlessness and its futility. Yet there is more of the picture. The horse is harnessed to a beam from which a rope reaches down the hill to the river's edge, and there it is seen that the animal is hoisting stones to build a great bridge, on which by and by trains will run, carrying a wealth of human life and commerce. This transforms the horse's treadmill tramping, into something worth while. It is not fruitless. Good comes out of it.

There are men and women in workshops, in homes, in trades, in the professions, in Christian life's service, who sometimes grow weary of the drudgery, the routine, the self-denials, the endlessness of their tasks--with never a word of praise or commendation to cheer them. But if we could see to what these unhonored toils and self-denials reach, what they accomplish, the blessings they carry to others, the bridges they help to build on which others cross to better things--the picture would be transformed! It is in these commonplace tasks, these lowly ministries, that we find life's true beauty and glory.

Every duty, however unwelcome, is a seed of light! To evade it or neglect it--is to miss a blessing; to do it--is to have the rough seed burst into beauty in the heart and life of the doer! We are continually coming up to stern and severe things, and often we are tempted to decline doing them. If we yield to such temptations, we shall reap no joy from God's sowing of light for us; but if we take up the hard task, whatever it is, and do it cheerfully, we shall find the blessing. Our duties are seeds of light.

God sows his seeds of light and gladness also, in the providences of our lives. They do not always seem bright and good at the time. Sometimes, indeed, we cannot see anything beautiful in them, or anything good. For example, Joseph's kidnaping and carrying into Egypt. No one supposes that the boy saw anything happy or radiant in the things which befell him at the hands of his brothers. There could scarcely have been the slightest gladness in his heart--as he found himself hopelessly in the hands of his enemies. Yet that strange experience in the boy's life--was really a seed of light. It was only a seed, however, at the time. It seemed then the utmost cruelty in the men who did it.

Some people ask about such a murderous piece of inhumanity, "How can God be kind--and permit such wickedness?" Still it was a seed of light and gladness. God used that terrible crime--to enfold in itself a great blessing. Twenty years or so afterwards, the seed had grown into a fruitful plant of blessing.

Some of the providences in all our lives come to us first--in alarming and forbidding form. They are seeds of light which God has sown--but the light is not apparent. They come to us in losses, sufferings, disappointments. Yet they are seeds of light--and in due time the light will break out! At first they seem only destructive--but afterward blessing appears in them. We dread adversity--but when its work is finished, we find that we are enriched in heart and life! We are reluctant to accept painful providences; afterward we learn that our disappointments are divine appointments!

God is ever bringing good to us, never evil. He goes before us and scatters the furrows full of seeds, seeds of light. It is not visible light that he scatters--but dull seeds, carrying hidden in them the secret of light. Then by and by, as we come after him, the light in the seeds breaks forth, just at the right time--and our way is made bright. There is not a single dark spot in all our path, if only we are living righteously. There are places which seem dark as we approach them. We are afraid, and ask, "How can I ever get through that point of gloom?" But when we come to it--the light shines out and it is radiant as day.

According to the old legend, our first parent was in great dread as the first evening of his life approached. The sun was about to set. He trembled at the thought of the disaster which would follow. But the sun went down silently, and lo! ten thousand stars flashed out. The darkness revealed--more than it hid. So, for every darkness in our life, God has stars of light ready to shine!

We need never dread hardness, for it is in the hard experiences that the seeds of light are hidden. The best things never are the easiest things. The best men are not grown in luxury and self-indulgence. We dread crosses--but it is only in cross-bearing that we find life's real treasures. In every cross, God hides his seeds of radiant light. Accept the cross, take it up, and the light will shine out!

God wants us to go forth every day--as sowers of light and gladness. Whether we mean it so, or not, we are sowers, everyone of us, every day of our life, every step of our way. The question is, What kinds of seeds do we sow?

The Master, in one of his little stories, tells us of an enemy who, after the farmer had scattered good seed over his field, came stealthily and secretly sowed tares among the wheat. What seed did you sow

yesterday? Did you plant only pure thoughts, good thoughts, holy thoughts, white, clean thoughts, gentle, loving thoughts--in the gardens of people's lives where you sowed? It is a pitiful thing for anyone to put an evil thought into the mind of another.

God wants us to sow only good seeds. Seeds of light! He wants us to make this world brighter. Seeds of gladness! He wants us to make the world happier. Some people do neither. They sow gloom and discouragement, wherever they go. They sow sadness, pain and grief. If we are this kind of sower, we are missing our mission, we are disappointing God, we are making the world less bright and less happy.

But think of one who, wherever he goes, sows only seeds of light and gladness. His life is pure, for only pure hands can sow seeds of light. He is a sincere lover of men, as his Master was. He never thinks of himself. He never spares himself--when any other needs his service. He is anxious only to do good to others, to make them better, to make them gladder. Let us be sowers of light and of gladness--always and everywhere. Thus shall we help Christ to change deserts into rose gardens--and to fill the world with light and love!

#### He Calls Us Friends

When Jesus called his disciples his friends--he meant that he was also their friend. Then he intimates something of the meaning of his friendship for them, when he says that he called them no longer his slaves--but his friends. There is a vast difference in the two. The slave does not have the master's confidence. He is only a piece of property. He has no rights, no privileges, is never consulted about anything, has no share in the matters considered, no liberty of opinion even regarding his own work. A friend, however, is taken into equality, into comradeship, then into confidence. He is conferred with, is a partner in his friend's affairs.

Friendship with Christ gives thus the highest exaltation possible to any man. How commonplace are the loftiest elevations of earth, compared with the privilege of being a friend of Christ!

But is Christ the friend of his followers in these days? Is it possible for the Christian to establish a personal friendship with Jesus Christ, like that which John and Peter had with him? Yes! he died, then rose again and ever lives, walking with us on the earth--as our companion, our friend. There is no other one who can be to us the one thousandth part in closeness, in intimacy, in fellowship, that Christ can be. He is the realest friend any of us can have.

Think what Jesus was as a friend to the poor people to whose door he came in the days of his flesh. Perhaps he did not seem to do much for them. He did not build them any larger or better houses, nor give them richer food, nor make softer beds for them to sleep on, nor weave for them finer, warmer garments to wear. He was not what men call a 'philanthropist'. He endowed no institutions of charity.

The friendship of Jesus to the common people, was not shown in what he did in material ways; nor in what he took away of the common burdens, the hardness, the wrongs they suffered--but in his sympathy for them, in the cheer and courage he put into their hearts, in the peace within which he imparted, which made them better able to go on in their lives of toil and struggle.

So it is that today the friendship of Christ is at work among people, making them braver to bear their burdens. Nothing does so much to help those who suffer--as to know that somebody cares. The most that even Christian teaching can do oftentimes, is to assure the struggling world that Christ feels and

sympathizes.

Think what the friendship of Jesus did for his disciples. They were not great men, wise, or cultured. "He spent his wealth of intellect upon inferior people--fishermen and the like, who did not comprehend one tenth of what he said." This means that his personality was the chief power of attraction in him--that his gentleness, faith, and goodness were more influential than even his gracious words. The apostles were drawn and influenced, no doubt, more by the man himself than by the greatness of his words. Men who could not understand his wonderful teachings were blessed, comforted, cheered, uplifted by the power of his personality. It was wonderful how they were transformed, made great, by their companionship with this "Man from Galilee."

Take Peter. When he was first brought to him, Jesus saw a man full of faults--crude, undisciplined, unlettered, rash, impetuous. Nobody dreamed of the rough, blustering old fisherman, as having any promise of good, of beauty, or of greatness in him. Nobody thought he would be one of earth's strongest men in future years, with influence reaching all over the world. But the moment Jesus saw him he said, "You are Simon--you shall be called Peter."

He saw in this man of the fishing-boat, possibilities of large-heartedness, of noble leadership, of power and influence, of sublime apostleship. We know what Simon was in his crude beginnings, and what he became through Christ's making of him. Had Jesus not found him and become his friend--he would have lived and died as a rough, uncultured fisherman, for a few years casting his nets into the Sea of Galilee, then dying unhonored, and being buried in an unmarked grave beside the lake. His name never would have been known in the world. All that Peter is today--is the fruit of the friendship of Christ for him.

Or think what the friendship of Jesus was to John. He was one of the first two who came to Jesus. Several hours were spent in an interview one afternoon. What took place in that blessed experience, we do not know--but we are sure that John received impressions and impulses that day, which changed all his life. It seems that John was originally intolerant, fiery, resentful. But all his fierceness was cured by the gentle and softening friendship of Jesus, which lay about him continually like an atmosphere of summer. John's influence in the world has been marvelous. It has been like a holy fragrance, breathing everywhere, sweetening the air, softening human hardness, making men gentler.

The friendship of Jesus was not always soft and easy. Sometimes it seemed stern and severe. "Do not think," he said, "that I came to send peace on the earth! I came not to send peace--but a sword!" This word appears to break like a false note in a Gospel, whose keynote was peace. Yet there is work for the sword even in love's ministry. Human friendships sometimes err in over-gentleness. Faithful friendship is sometimes required, to speak the word of rebuke, though it should always be in love. Christ loves us too well, not to smite the evil he sees in us. His holiness is the enemy of everything in our life--which is not beautiful and good. For whatever then there is in us that is wrong, he brings the sword. We are not perfect, and cannot be perfect until every evil element is thrust out. Christ would not be our truest friend--if he sent peace to our hearts--when they were cherishing pride, self-conceit, and selfishness. Love must come then, first as a sword.

There is much mystery in the friendship of Christ. Perhaps no question is asked more frequently than, "Why does Christ send us suffering or pain?" In one of the Gospels, there is an illustration of the dealing of Christ's friendship, which may help us to see love in the pain and sorrow.

It is in the story of the Bethany family. The brother fell sick. Jesus was absent. A messenger was sent to tell him, "the one whom you love--is sick!" We would say he would start at once and travel in haste to get to his friend as soon as possible. But the record reads strangely indeed, "Yet when he heard that Lazarus was sick--he stayed where he was two more days." That is, because he loved Martha, Mary, and Lazarus--he waited two whole days after hearing of his friend's illness, before he started to go to him. It was not accidental that he did not get to Bethany in time. It was not neglect in his love. It was not lack of interest in his friends. The delay was part of his friendship. Nothing went wrong, therefore, with his love---when he did not come for four days--and Lazarus died. Nothing went wrong in your home when your prayer was not answered at once--and your friend died. It was all love.

We know much about friendship in this world--far more than we think we know. Our friends mean more to us by far than we dream they do. Our friends make us strong. In fear and danger--they are a refuge to us. In suffering--they comfort us, perhaps, not by what they say to us or do for us--but just by what they are. Ofttimes our friend is a hiding-place for us, and this is one of the offices of Christ as our Friend--we may hide in him. Christ's companionship is a refuge in which we may find shelter in loneliness.

You are in some great sorrow. The words of the people who are trying to console you--seem only empty echoes. Then one comes in who has been with you in deep experiences of trial in the past, one who knows you and loves you, and whom you love. There is sympathy in his eye, there is comfort in his words. You have found a refuge, and hide away in your friend's presence. So Christ is a hiding place for us in whatever experiences of trouble, loneliness, or sorrow we may ever find ourselves.

An old prophet gives a picture of a glorious sheltering: "A Man shall be as a hiding-place from the wind, and a covert from the tempest, as streams of water in a dry place, as the shade of a great rock in a weary land." There are some men who are indeed all this in a measure to their fellows. Nearly everyone of us knows someone who is a hiding place to us from the fierce winds of life, a covert to us from the wild tear pest, like the shadow of a great rock in a weary land, like a well of water in a place of thirst.

But this wonderful picture is realized in full measure--in only one Man who ever lived. We thank God for the human friends who mean so much to us, in whose strong friendship we may hide ourselves in all the bitter hours of life, and who never fail us. But we thank God most of all for the Man Jesus Christ, in whose friendship we find fullness of sympathy, of strength, of tenderness.

What a fearful thing sin is! How it imperils our lives! We may hide our secret sins from our human friends. We would not want to have our hearts photographed, with all their spots and evils, their jealousies, envies, meannesses, suspicions, bad motives--all our secret life--and then have the photograph held up before the eyes of our neighbors! We would not dare trust even our nearest loved ones to see all this--and be sure that they would still be our friends. But Christ sees this picture all the while, sees all the evil that is hidden in us--sees all, knows all--and is still our Friend! We do not need to try to hide our weaknesses, our failures, from him. Oh, the comfort, the inexpressible comfort of feeling safe, absolutely safe, with Christ, from whose love nothing can separate!

### Not Counting God

Men do not have the last word in this world's affairs. The human hand is not omnipotent.

Forty men had bound themselves in a conspiracy to kill Paul and they were sure their plot could not fail. But a boy heard of the conspiracy, and the apostle was rescued. By nine o'clock that night, he was on his

way to Caesarea, under strong military protection. The forty men had everything in their favor, but they had not thought about God. If it had not been for God, their plot would have succeeded.

Not to take account of God in our plans--is folly! A minister tells of a conversation he had with a well-known manufacturer during a journey to Europe. They were talking of missions, and reference was made to India. The businessman said, "Why, it will be ten thousand years before India becomes Christian." "Do you not think you are drawing a hard line on God?" asked the minister. "Oh, I forgot about him," was the reply. "Then," said the minister, "you can make it ten million years--if you leave God out."

That is what men are doing all the time. They forget about God in making their plans and calculations. These forty men never thought of God's interfering in their conspiracy. They forgot all about him. There are people today who laugh at our belief in God. They tell us that the hopes we cherish never can be realized, that we are only believing dreams. What they say would be true--if there were no God. Human skill, wisdom, or power never could bring these glorious things to pass. If there were no God--not one hope of our Christian faith could find its fulfillment. But there is a God--a God of love, of power--and he is the hearer of prayer.

In this incident in Paul's life, we see God working silently and invisibly. The night before the plot was made, the Lord appeared to Paul, in his prison, in the darkness, and said to him, "Be of good cheer! For as you have testified for me at Jerusalem, so must you bear witness also at Rome." This was assurance that he could not be killed by the forty men who had conspired to assault him the next day. When Christ has work for a man somewhere next year--no man can kill him this year. "Every man is immortal, until his work is done."

We do not know how Paul's sister's son, came to be at Jerusalem just at that time. God always finds ways of doing what he wants to have done. His hand is on all events. All things serve him. We say it chanced that the young man was in Jerusalem that day; it chanced that he learned in some way of the plot. We use the word 'chance' because we have no better word to use. It was only 'chance'--so far as men knew--but we know that God was in it all. The young man became God's agent in the matter. When he heard of the plot, he hastened to his uncle and in great alarm told him of it. Paul sent him to the Roman officer. The officer chanced to be a kindly man, and gave the boy courteous attention. At once he set in motion the machinery to get this prisoner away from the city. If it had not been for God--Paul would have been killed. But since there is a God, whose plans go on through all human plots and schemes, he was delivered and set one step farther on his way toward Rome, where he was to witness for his Lord.

Earlier in the Acts, we have the story of Herod's attempt to destroy the apostles. To begin with, he killed James. He then had Peter also arrested and cast into prison, meaning to have him beheaded after the Passover. The record says, "Peter therefore was kept in the prison: but prayer was made earnestly by the church unto God for him." Everything in Herod's schedule seemed sure. The prison was strong, a double guard watched the prisoner inside the dungeon. Guards also stood before the door. Peter could not possibly escape, Herod supposed; but he had not thought about God.

Some time during the night an angel came, unheard and unseen, into the prison. Peter was sleeping between his two guards. The angel touched him, awoke him, and bade him arise. As he did so, the chains fell off. "Follow me," said the angel; and as he did so, the doors and gates opened silently--the guards sleeping on--and soon Peter was outside and among his friends. He would have been killed in the morning--had it not been for God. But when God had other plans for his servant--no prison walls, no

chains, no double guard of soldiers could keep him, and no tyrant's sword could touch his life!

We believe these Scripture narratives of deliverance. But somehow we get the impression that the times then were special, somehow different from our times, and that the men who were thus delivered were God's servants in a peculiar sense. We cannot quite realize that it is the same in these times, that God is as active now in human affairs as he was then. But there are just as many miracles of protection and deliverance in your life--as there were in the lives of Christ's friends in those days. You do not know from what dangers you are sheltered every day. You do not know how often you would be harmed in some way--if it were not for God.

It will do us good to get anew into our hearts--this fact of God in all our life. Some people are always afraid of the dangers around them. They are afraid of sickness, of trouble, of pain, of the darkness, of accidents, of death. But there really never is any reason for fear--if we have God. When evil is plotting against you and the plot is closing, and you are about to be destroyed--God comes in and you are delivered.

What, then, is the true way of living? It is to go quietly on in obedience, in faithfulness, in trust, asking no questions, having no fears, letting God care for us in his own way. This does not mean that we shall never suffer; that pain, sorrow, or death shall never touch us. Not all believers in the New Testament days were delivered from the plots of enemies. James was killed, while Peter was led by an angel out of the prison, and lived for many years. Stephen was not rescued from martyrdom--but was left to die. Paul himself, saved many times from death, at last was beheaded. While a Christian's work is still unfinished, there is no power that can strike him down. Back of all men's plots and schemes stands God, and no human hatred can beat down any one of his people--until he wills it. Jesus told Pilate that he could have no power to crucify him--unless it were given to him from God.

When a true Christian is allowed to suffer, it is because God permits it, because it is God's will, and then it is a blessing. When a faithful follower of Christ meets accident, when in some catastrophe he loses his life, or when he is suddenly taken away, nothing has gone wrong with God's plans. God is not surprised or shocked as we are. No break in his plan has occurred. The man's death leaves nothing unfinished that it was meant he should do. Our plans are broken continually by life's changes, accidents, interruptions, and vicissitudes--but God's great plan is never broken.

Never leave God out--in making your plans. Never be discouraged, when you are faithfully following Christ, though all things seem to be against you. In the darkest hour--be of good cheer. God's plan for your life includes these very things which so discourage you, takes them in as part of his thought, and not one of them can mar the perfectness or the beauty of your life, when it is finished. Let us meet all the hard things--as parts of God's plan. Plots against us--shall fail to harm us. This is our Father's world, and there is no power in it which ever gets out of his hand. Everywhere stands God within the shadow, keeping watch above his own.

His assassins thought they were absolutely sure of Paul's death the next morning--but they had not thought about God. The business man said that India could not be made Christian in ten thousand years--but he had not thought about God. You are dreading something today--the passing of some dream that is most dear, the losing of some joy that appears to be slipping away from you--but you have not thought about God! You have left him out, forgetting his might, his love, his wisdom, his power. He can protect you from the danger you are dreading. He can keep for you the joy you fear losing--if this is his purpose for you. He can do for you the things you long to have done. In the silence, unseen--stands God.

You are facing some duty which you feel you ought to do--but when you think of it, it seems so stupendous, so difficult, to require such ability, such wisdom, such self-sacrifice, that you say: "I cannot do it. It is impossible for me! I have not the strength for it. I am not wise enough." You are forgetting about God. With him nothing is impossible.

You are facing a costly sacrifice. It is a question of loyalty to truth and right. Perhaps it is something which concerns your occupation by which you make a living for your family. If you do right, you will give this up. If it were for yourself alone, you would not hesitate an instant--but the bread for your wife and children also depends on what you do. Yet you need not question. God is with you.

You are not yet a Christian. You say you never can be a Christian. You hear it said that a Christian is one who loves--loves his fellow-men. You think of what it is to love. "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." As you think of the high ideal of Christian life which Christ sets, you grow alarmed. "I never can reach that sort of life!" you say. "I never can love people that way. I never can be forgiving to those who wrong me. There is no use trying--I cannot be a Christian." But you are not thinking of God. You have left him out in trying to solve the problem. Of course you cannot change your own heart, you cannot transform your own life, you cannot make yourself sweet, gentle, patient, beautiful; you cannot make the ugly things in your disposition, in your temper, in your heart, Christlike. Oh, no; but do not forget about God! He can make your character lovely with his own loveliness. Do not leave God out!

You are standing before some great question, some question which seems to you to involve your heart's happiness for all the future. You are vexing yourself over it. You are torn by conflicting emotions about it. Are you forgetting about God and leaving him out of this problem? He knows what will be best for you. He has a plan for your life, a plan which includes this very matter. Do not try to answer the question yourself. Wait. Nothing is settled right--until it is settled in God's wise and best way.

How safe we are from all evil, since God has our lives and our interests in his hands, in his wisdom and love! What peace it gives us in sorrow, suffering, and wrong, and in the enduring of injustice--to know that our times are in God's hands! What comfort we have when we realize that God is in all our lives, in all events, in all our circumstances, that daily Providence is simply God working with us and for us, making all things to work together for good to all who love him. We need never leave God out of anything.

Why can we not make God more real in our lives? We have him in our creeds, in our hymns, in our prayers, in our talk. We say that God is our Father. We say that he will care for us. We say that we trust him. But sometimes in the face of danger, need, loss, or sorrow--we forget that he is with us. We cry out in our distress. We think all is lost.

Let us train ourselves to make God real in our lives, to practice his presence. He stands unseen, close beside us. Why should we ever be afraid? We get discouraged when we see chaos about us--old beliefs disbelieved, agnosticism lifting up its voice, anarchy prating and making its assaults. Yes--but do not get discouraged. Do not leave God out. He holds the winds in his fists, and the waters in the hollow of his hand. The clamor and turbulence of men--are nothing in his omnipotent hand. We are safe even in the most troublesome times.

"The lark's on the wing,

The morning's at seven,

The hillside's dew-pearled,

God's in his heaven--

All's right with the world!"

Perfection in Loving

Jesus taught that Christian perfection is perfection in loving. He said we are to love our enemies and pray for those who persecute us,

that we may be sons of our Father, who is in heaven. Then he added, "You therefore shall be perfect." He also gave some specific suggestions of the working of this law of love, showing what it includes.

It was the teaching of the times that people should treat others--as others treated them. "An eye for an eye--and a tooth for a tooth," was the way it was put. But Jesus said, "That is not the meaning of love. But I tell you, Do not resist an evil person. If someone strikes you on the right cheek, turn to him the other also." People say that of course he did not mean he would do this literally. If not, just what did he mean? If someone were to smite you on the right cheek, what ought you to do? What would Jesus himself do? It is not in civilized countries in our times, that one actually strikes another in the face; but what kind of treatment does face-smiting stand for?

It may be regarded as a type of anything of the nature of personal insult, wrong, or indignity. If we would know just what Jesus would do in a case like this--we have an actual illustration in his own life. When he was on his trial, an officer smote him on the cheek with his hand. Did Jesus literally turn the other cheek? No; he asked the officer why he had smitten him. There was no anger in the question--it was not a hot word that he spoke. He did not return the blow. He showed no temper. He bore the insult without resentment, without bitterness, only challenging its justice.

When we study Christ's conduct in all his life, and note what he did when he was wronged or insulted, when they spit in his face and buffeted him--we find that he was always most gentle and patient in return. He did not resist him who was evil. He did not contend for his rights. He endured wrongs without complaining. When he was reviled, he reviled not again. When he suffered cruelty or injustice, he threatened not.

There are certain trees which, when struck, bathe with fragrant sap--the axe that cuts into them. Thus it was with Jesus when he was hurt--it only brought out in him more tenderness, more sweetness of love. When they drove nails into his hands and feet--the blood that flowed became the blood of redemption!

In all this manifesting, Jesus was God, showing how God loves. "He who has seen me--has seen the Father." We are to love--as Christ loved.

Thus Christ by his example of patience and love--teaches us not to take revenge. He makes it no longer a dishonor to bear an indignity patiently, without anger or retaliation--but the highest honor, rather, a mark of godlikeness. That is the way God himself does.

We can find no place in the world, where personal wrongs and injuries cannot reach us. People will not always deal fairly with us. There will be someone who is not gentle, someone who will speak words which

are bitter and unjust, who slights or cuts us, who wrongs or insults us, who, as it were, slaps us on the cheek. As Christians, what should we do? We know what the world's men do in such experiences. Shall we act differently? Men of the world think that meekness, patience in enduring wrong, the spirit of forgiveness, are marks of weakness. Oh, no; they are distinctly marks of strength. Revenge is characteristic of the world's people--but to be a Christian is to endure wrongs. We are to give love for hate, to return good for evil. Thus only can we be the sons of our Father, and become perfect as he is perfect.

Another duty set down among the laws of the kingdom is, loving our enemies. "I say unto you, Love your enemies." How many of us, who call ourselves Christians, habitually do this? How many of us pray for those who persecute us? Yet that is what we must do if we would be perfect--as our heavenly Father is perfect. It is easy enough to love certain people and be kind to them. It is easy in your evening prayer to ask God to bless those who have been kind to you that day, who have spoken affectionate words to you, who have helped you over the hard places, whose love has brightened the way for you. But here is one who was unjust to you, who treated you rudely, who spoke to you or of you bitterly, falsely, who tried in some way to injure you. Is it easy, when you make your evening prayer, to ask God to bless this person and to forgive him, to do him good? Yet that is what he requires. "Pray for those who persecute you."

When we have learned to pray really in this way--for those who wrong us, treat us injuriously, hate us--we are Christians. That is the way God loves. If we love as he loves, we shall be perfect. "Love is the fulfillment of the law." "God is love," and to be like God--is to love. Wesley said, "Pure love alone, reigning in the heart and life--this is the whole of Christian Perfection."

The word perfection frightens some people. They say they never can reach it. It seems an inaccessible mountain summit. But Christ never commands an impossibility. When he says, "Be perfect," he means to give grace and ability to reach the high attainment. He means here especially perfection in loving, a

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