

The Best Things in Life - Part 2

by J.R. Miller

Living a holy life requires recognizing God's presence in all aspects of life and striving to live up to the high standard of character set by Christ.

Scripture: 1 Corinthians 10:31, Philippians 4:13, James 1:2

Topics: "Holiness in Daily Life", "Faith and Overcoming Challenges"

Description

J.R. Miller emphasizes that every aspect of life, from mundane tasks to sacred rituals, can be an act of worship when done in the name of the Lord. He encourages believers to recognize the holiness in their daily activities and to live with integrity, ensuring that their actions reflect their faith both in public and at home. Miller also discusses the importance of faith in overcoming challenges, asserting that with God, nothing is impossible, and that trials are opportunities for growth. He concludes by reminding us that our crosses, whether self-made or God-given, should be borne with grace, as they can lead to blessings for ourselves and others.

Transcript

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Chapter 8. Christ in Our Every Days

One of the later Old Testament prophets predicts a coming golden age when the bells of the horses shall be as sacred as the garments of the high priest, and the common cooking utensils in the people's homes as holy as the vessels of the temple. Paul teaches this lesson when he says, "Whatever you do, in word or in deed, do all in the name of the Lord Jesus." This covers all our acts and all our words. It applies to our Bible reading--but not less to our other reading. We must read our morning newspaper, our Tennyson, our school text books--in the name of the Lord, so as to honor him, and to get knowledge that will add to the beauty and the strength of our life. We are to pray in the name of the Lord Jesus--but we are also to go to our business in the same blessed name. We regard the Lord's house as holy, and say that we should do nothing in it but that which is reverent, which yields honor and praise to God. True; but the house we live in is sacred also, and nothing ever should take place in it which would not be fitting and proper to do in the presence of Christ himself.

We think of certain acts as worship, and as we enter upon them we hear a voice saying, "Take off your shoes from your feet, for the place whereon you stand is holy ground." But where is God not present? Where shall we go any common day that it is not holy ground? There may be no burning bush--but God is there as really as he was when Moses came suddenly upon the symbol of his presence in the desert. We believe that we are doing good work when we are teaching a Sunday school class; but are those doing God's work any less truly, who on weekdays teach classes of little children or young people in public or private schools? We consider it a most sacred duty to sit down at the Lord's Table, at the service of the Holy Communion; but have you ever thought that there is also a sacredness scarcely less holy--in sitting down together at our family meals? In the ideal religion, the bells on the horses' bridles are holy unto the Lord, as well as the high priest's garments; and the pots used in the people's houses are as sacred as the vessels used in the temple.

When we learn this lesson, Christian life will have its true meaning and glory for us. Nothing will then appear common-place. We never think of our occupation as lowly--for the lowliest work, if it is God's will for us for the hour, will be heavenly in its splendor, because it is what we are commanded by our Master to do. Our God is not only the God of the sanctuary and the solemn worship--he is just as much the God of the workshop, the factory, the sewing room, and the kitchen. We please him just as well when we live sweetly, and do our work faithfully in the lowly place, amid temptation, care, and weariness--as we do when we honor and worship him at the communion.

We think we are in this world to attend to a certain business, to perform certain professional duties, to look after certain household affairs--to be a carpenter, a stonemason, a painter, a teacher, a housekeeper--we call these our vocations. But as God thinks of us, we are in these occupations to grow into noble and worthy character. While we are making things--God is making men. With him a carpenter shop is not merely a place for making doors, sashes, and banisters, and to plane boards--it is a place to build character, to make men. A home is not merely a place for doing beautiful housekeeping--it is a place to develop fine womanhood.

Dr. R. F. Horton, of London, has suggested that the names of the days should be changed, since they are all called by ancient heathen names. He would have them renamed after great and good Christian men. It may not be possible to do anything of this kind--but it ought to be possible for every Christian to write the name of Christ at the head of every day. Some people seem to think that if they keep the Lord's Day holy in a fashion, they may stain Monday and the other weekdays with all manner of evil. But we are learning that Monday belongs to God, just as truly as Sunday. The ancient commandment reads, "Remember the Sabbath day, to keep it holy." The new commandment, however, reads, "Therefore, whether you eat or drink, or whatever you do, do everything for God's glory!" 1 Corinthians 10:31

True Christian consecration, will make all business holy. It has been said that the application of the Ten Commandments to business and to politics, is only an gleaming dream, something entirely impossible. Nevertheless, there the commandments stand, given not for Sundays only--but for weekdays as well; not for the quiet life of the home alone--but just as truly for the marts of trade, for the mill, the factory, the shop, the business meeting. "Do not trouble yourself too much," said Michael Angelo to a young sculptor who was anxious about the light for the proper exhibition of his piece of statuary, "do not trouble yourself too much about the light on your statue; the light of the public square will test its value." It would be easy in the studio to pose the marble so as to bring out its fine qualities and conceal its faults; but the statue will have to be set up on the street by and by, and there no posing, no arrangement of light and shade, will hide its defects. It is not enough that in the church on Sunday, that men appear good, true, honest, and devout.

Our Christian profession must stand the light of the street, of the public square. We must have our honesty tested in our business transactions, our truthfulness tried and proved in our common fellowship with men, our devoutness of manner subjected to the sneers and profanities of ungodly people.

Jesus himself gave as the rule of his life, "I always do those things which please my Father." Every friend of Christ, should be able to say the same things. All who bear Christ's name, should live so carefully in their business affairs, that no reproach ever shall come back to the name of the church from anything any of them may do during the week, in their common work. It never should be said of nay of them, "He is an enthusiastic Christian on Sunday--but on Monday he drives hard bargains, he takes advantage of others, he does not pay his debts, he is not honest, he oppressed the poor, he does not live a clean, pure life." Ruskin found on a church in Venice these words engraved, "Round this temple let the merchant's weights be true, his judgments just, his contracts honest." This is a good motto for all Christian men in their business affairs.

Even the play and the amusement of a Christian, are part of his Christian life. They must be as holy as his devotions. We need not wear long faces. Nor need we condemn pleasure. The Master did not. His first public act after his baptism and temptation, was to attend a wedding feast, and we know he cast no shadow over the gladness and festivity of that occasion. He smiled on the children's play--they never were afraid of him, nor did not run and hide when they saw him coming, as some children used to do when they saw the minister riding up to their house. He was not like the Pharisees who posed as saintly, and made their religion unbeautiful and unwinsome. He wants us to be happy, to have his joy fulfilled in us. But our pleasure, our amusement, must always be pure, holy, unselfish--as sacred as our worship.

Someone gives this singular definition: "Temperament--an excuse for character." A man is gloomy and pessimistic, and he blames it on his temperament--he was born that way. One person always finds faults and disagreeable things in people and in circumstances, and excuses himself for this unhappy characteristic on the ground of temperament. Another man has a fiery temper, which flares up at the slightest provocation. He received the Holy Communion on Sunday and then on Monday was seen in a terrible rage. "It is my temperament," he says, "I can't help it."

All of this is pure fiction! Temperament is no excuse for faulty character, for un-Christian disposition, or for ungoverned temper. Because we are Christ's, we must see that we never dishonor his name by such outbursts. He is always with us, and is grieved when we fail to keep our lives holy. What did you do yesterday, when you were out among people? How did you treat those with whom you work? What beauty of Christ did you show in your conduct, in your disposition, in your behavior? What patience did you exercise? What thoughtfulness did you manifest? What unkindness did you endure quietly? What rising anger did you restrain? Was your day full of words, acts, and dispositions which were as holy as a prayer?

One asks: "Do we want to know ourselves? Then let us ask everyday: 'How have I met the drudgery of my regular work? How have I treated those who work beside me or who have claims upon me? How have I kept my temper over little worries? How often have I looked to God and toward high ideals? What thoughts have been my companions?' Here are the real, accurate tests of character. They do not give us an easy time of it. But they are true. According as the answers to them are satisfactory or not, we are growing or weakening in character and becoming fit--or unfit--for the revealing crisis when it comes."

Home tests us. It ought not to be so--but perhaps no other place tests our Christian consecration more accurately, than our home. Its very sweetness seems to free us from the restraint we feel in the presence

of strangers. Those who do not love us--would not endure the words and acts, which we sometimes compel our dearest relatives to bear from us. It is pitiful to think how often those who stand for Christ in his church, and who elsewhere witness a good confession for him--in their own homes seem to feel themselves absolved from all the courtesies and amenities of love, and even of good manners!

It ought not to be hard to love our own, and to show our love to them in all sweet and gentle ways. Surely we ought to love our own family best. Yet Christians, those bearing the name of Christ, have been known to go right from the Holy Communion to their own homes--and instantly to break out in bitter words, in carping and criticism, in blame and fault finding, in ill temper, and disgraceful accusations. If there is any place in this world which should be sacred to us, which should be like the very house of God to us, as sacred as the Lord's Supper, and which should call out our deepest reverence, our warmest love--it is our own home. If we are Christians anywhere in this world--let it be in our own home, where we are so loved and trusted. If we must be sullen, bitter, gloomy, selfish, and sour, somewhere--let it not be where our loved ones wait for us, and where their hearts cry out for tenderness!

One of the most pathetic sentences George Eliot ever wrote is this: "Oh, the anguish of the thought that we can never atone to our dead, for the stinted affection we gave them, for the little reverence we showed to that sacred human soul that lived so close to us, and was the divinest thing God had given us to know." Let us not fail to make our home life sacred and holy. If even on the bells of the horses we write, "Holy unto the Lord," let us not neglect to make the home in which we dwell, pray, live, and love--a fit place for Christ to tarry in, a sweet and gentle place for our dear ones to grow up in.

Chapter 9. Doing Impossible Things

We too easily set limits to our own ability. We do not know our own potential. We face a difficulty and think we cannot master it--so do not try. Any of us might accomplish a great deal more than we do. Jesus said, "All things are possible with God." The preposition "with" is the key to the meaning of this saying. Many people take the words to mean only that God can do everything, that nothing is impossible to him. But what Jesus says is that a man with God can do impossible things. We know that God is omnipotent. Job said, "I know that you can do all things, and that no purpose of yours can be restrained." It gives us confidence, in the midst of dangers, in the face of enemies, or when troubles are about us--to know that God is stronger than the strongest. "If God is for us--who can be against us?" When we have some duty to do which is too hard for us with our little power, it gives us immeasurable comfort to know that God can do it. Yet God does not do our duty for us.

But we are co-workers with God. We cannot do our hard tasks ourselves, neither will God do them for us--God and we must do them. Nothing is impossible to one who works with God. So we may not indolently roll the responsibility of hard tasks and duties off our shoulders, even upon God. Whatever is given to us to do, we must accept and must accomplish. We have nothing to do, however, with the question of ability. Back of us--is all the strength of the Mighty God; and with this we can do the impossible--if it is God's will for us.

Many of the miracles of Christ are illustrations of this truth. He did not do for anyone by divine power, what the person could do with his own strength. He did not himself, by an act of his own, change the young ruler's heart; he bade him voluntarily to give up his money, which he loved, and follow him. If he had done this Christ would have entered his heart and changed it. When Jesus healed the man with a withered arm, he did not put life into the arm as it hung helpless by the man's side. He bade him stretch it forth, requiring

him to use his own power of will. When he did this, the arm became strong. To the man himself the restoring of the arm was impossible; but to the man with God, it became easily possible.

It was impossible for the disciples to feed the hungry multitude on the hillside. Yet Jesus said, "Give them something to eat." It was an impossible duty, therefore, to which he set them. Yet they set about to obey his commandment, as if it had been some easiest thing to do. They did not say, "Master, we cannot do it." They simply began to do what he told them to do. Then, as they began to carry the bread to the people, it increased and continued to increase, until all the five thousand were satisfied.

Thus are we co-workers with God in all our life--in all our duties, in all our struggles. We cannot do these things by ourselves. "With men it is impossible." But, on the other hand, God does not do the things for us. "All things are possible with God." That is, all things are possible for us, with God. This is a most practical teaching. To each of us, the Master gives a work which is altogether our own. No one can evade his own personal responsibility. Neither can anyone say, "I cannot do anything." You cannot alone--but with God, which is working with God--there is nothing that is impossible to you. This is not your work, it is not God's--it is yours and God's.

It is by faith that we thus become co-workers with God. While Jesus and three of his disciples were on the Transfiguration Mount, a story of pitiful failure was being enacted at the foot of the mountain. A father had brought his epileptic son to the disciples during the night, asking them to cure him. The disciples tried--but could not do it. When Jesus came down in the morning, the father brought the son to him. "If you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us," cried the father, in his distress. The "if" revealed the weakness of the man's faith. Nothing could be done for the boy while this "if" remained in the father's heart. Even Jesus, with his divine power, was balked in healing, by the "if." "If you can!" Jesus replied. "All things are possible to him who believes." Jesus could not do anything for the boy, but through the father, and before the father could do anything the doubt must be taken out of his heart.

This incident has serious teaching for parents. Something is wrong with your child. It may be sickness, or it may be evil in some form. You bring the child to Christ, while your faith is small. You tell him your heart's burden of distress or anxiety, and then you say, "O Master, if you can do anything, have compassion on us and help us." But your "if" tells of faltering faith. The blessing is within your reach--but it cannot yet come to our child because of your lack of faith. "If you can believe!" the Master answers in yearning love. "All things are possible to him who believes." The healing, the helping, waits for your faith.

There is more of this story. Jesus healed the boy. Then when the disciples were alone with him, they asked him, "How is it that we could not cast it out?" Jesus answered, "Because of your little faith." Think of the impotence of these nine men! They tried to cast out the demon--but it defied them. Yet they need not have failed. They ought to have been able to cast it out. They had received Jesus as the Messiah. They loved him, they believed on him. But their faith was weak. Look at the case. Nine friends of Christ, disciples, too, ordained to do great things, baffled now, balked, failing to do a work of mercy--because their faith was too little! Blessing, healing, kept from a poor distressed boy--because a company of Christ's friends had not enough faith!

There is something startling in this, when we begin to apply it to ourselves. We are Christ's, we love Christ, we follow him, and we profess to believe on him, we are banded together for his service. About us are many who do not know their Lord, who has had no experience of his goodness. If these are to receive the blessing of Christ's love and grace, it must be through us. Do we ever stand in the presence of great

human needs, as the disciples did that night at the foot of the mountain? Do we ever fail to give help, to cure, to restore, to comfort--because of our little faith? Is there danger that Christ himself shall not be able to do mighty works of blessing in our community, because of our unbelief? He will not do the mighty works, the gracious works, without us.

We need not go to him in prayer when we come upon some great need--a man in the grip of temptation, a woman in deep sorrow, a child in distress, a soul unsaved--and ask him to do the work of love and grace. He says at once to us, "Go and do it--and I will work with you." We must do the work--he will not do it without us, and if we do not do it, Christ's work in that case will fail, and the responsibility will be ours. At Nazareth it was said--that Jesus could not do many mighty works because of the unbelief of the people. The suffering in the town went uncomforted and unrelieved, because of the unbelief of the rulers. Is anybody going unhelped, uncomforted, unsaved about you, because your faith is so small, because there is no hand the Master can use?

What is the faith that has such power? It is the faith that so enters into Christ--that it takes up into itself all the life of Christ, all that he is. It makes us one with him, so that where we are he is, his Spirit flowing through us. "Because I live, you shall live also," said the Master. Paul puts it in a wonderfully vivid way when he says, "It is not I who live--but Christ living in me." This faith makes Christ and his friend not two--but one. It is this which enables him who believes to do impossible things. Paul says, "I can do all things--in him who strengthens me."

The standard of character which our Master sets for his followers, is full of impossibilities. Did you ever seriously try to live the Sermon on the Mount for a week, or even for a day? Did you ever try to live the Beatitudes? If you did, you know how impossible these holy standards reach. But when Christ enters into us and begins to live in us--we find that it is possible to begin to live out these impossible things.

Impossible things are expected of a Christian, just because he is a Christian. Anybody can do possible things. Possible things are the things of the ordinary natural life. It requires no heavenly grace, no divine strength, and no superhuman skill--to do possible things. But the Christian should do impossible things, should live a life of truth, purity, and holiness, as far above the world's standard and reach--as the sky is above the mountains. He should live a life of love, so patient, so thoughtful, so self denying, that it shall prove in the eyes of all who see it immeasurably above this world's ideals of life. But we are satisfied with too low standards of Christian life. We are not as holy as we ought to be. We are not as holy as we might be. We are not doing the impossible things, which our Master expects of us.

Sometimes we read of heroisms wrought on mission fields. The careers of many missionaries are sublime in their faith, in their devotion, in their courage, in their readiness to lay down their lives for Christ. Our hearts are thrilled when we read the story of these faithful witnesses. They do impossible things, such things as none but Christians can do, because Christ is in them. He said, "Go, make disciples of all nations, and lo, I am with you."

When Raphael was asked the secret of his marvelous work, he imagined, "I feel the spirit of my mother bending over me when I paint." In reality, when we ask why a Christian can do impossible things, it is because the Spirit of Christ is bending over him. A Christian in himself is only a man of common mold. He has no more wisdom, strength, or goodness than any other man. He has all the frailties, the infirmities, the imperfections, and faults of other men. But a Christian is a common man--plus Jesus Christ. Christ has added himself to him--his strength, his goodness, his love, his divine life. A Christian is a man with God.

In the later days of Grecian art, a prize was offered for the best statue of one of the goddesses. A youth in the country who loved this goddess set to work to compete for the prize. But he lacked the artist's gift and experience, and his statue was crude and clumsy, far from beautiful. It seemed to have no chance at all for winning the prize. But the goddess, so the heathen legend runs, knowing of the sincere devotion of this youth to her and his love for her, when the time came for the display of the statues in the competition, entered herself into the crude stone, and at once it glowed with divine beauty, by far the most beautiful of all the statues, winning the prize.

In similar manner, we are called to show the world the beauty of Christ, to reproduce the glory of his life, not in cold marble--but in Christian character, in Christian spirit, in Christian service. In our weakness and faultiness, it may seem to us that we cannot do anything, that our life and work are unworthy of the holy name which we bear. Our best seems most unlovely, crude, faulty, and imperfect; but if we truly love Christ, if we truly believe on him, and if at his command we strive to do that which seems impossible, Christ himself, knowing our love, and seeing our striving--will enter into our life and fill it with himself. Then our poor efforts will become radiant and divine in their beauty. Able to do nothing worthy in ourselves, when Christ adds his own blessed life to ours--we shall have power to do the things that are impossible.

Chapter 10. Crosses

"If all the skies were sunshine,

Our faces would be fain

To feel once more upon them

The cooling splash of rain.

"If all the world were music,

Our hearts would often long

For one sweet strain of silence

To break the endless song.

"If life were always merry,

Our souls would seek relief

And rest from weary laughter

In the quiet arms of grief."

Jesus said, "If any man would come after me, let him take up his cross daily, and follow me." Many people misread these words. They suppose Jesus refers to his own cross, telling us that if we would be his followers, that we must bear his cross. That is true in a sense. The Christian Church is an army of cross bearers. But the meaning here is that every Christian has a cross of his own which he must take up and carry loyally after his Master.

There are crosses which we make for ourselves. A child could not understand what a cross in life is, and the father explained it in this way. A cross is composed of two pieces of wood, one longer, one shorter.

The shorter piece represents our will, and the longer piece represents God's will. Lay the pieces side by side and no cross is formed. But lay the shorter piece across the longer piece, and there is a cross. Whenever our will falls athwart God's will we have a cross. We make a cross for ourselves--when we refuse to take God's way, to accept his will, or when we chafe or fret at anything which God sends us. When, however, we quickly accept what God gives, and yield in sweet acquiescence to the divine will--we have no crosses to carry.

Yet there are many people who fill their lives with self-made crosses, by refusing to let God have his way with them. Much physical illness and pain are produced by violation of healthy habits--and the suffering endured in consequence, is self-inflicted. Much of the trouble in people's lives--they bring upon themselves by their indiscretions, follies, and evil habits. Then there are those who make crosses for themselves by magnifying their common ills, by dwelling on their troubles, by brooding over imaginary evils until their moderate share of human troubles, grows into a seeming mountain of calamities. If all the crosses we make for ourselves were taken out of our lives--we would not have many left. Far more than we realize--are we the authors of our own troubles.

We make many crosses for each other. We do not know what it costs other people to live with us. There is a great deal of selfishness in the world, even in the best Christians, and selfishness makes life hard for others. There is much thoughtlessness in even the best human love, and thoughtlessness continually makes suffering in gentle hearts. Marriage is the most sacred and holy of all human relationships--but there are few even among those most congenially and most happily wedded, who do not make many crosses for each other. They do not mean to do it--they love each other, and it is in their hearts always to give cheer, happiness, and comfort. But unconsciously, they say and do things continually which give pain and make crosses.

Or it may be in what they do not do, in neglect of love's duties. With most good people, it is in the lack of kindnesses--rather than in words or deeds of unkindness, that unlovingness is chiefly wrought.

"So many tender words and true

I meant to say, dear love, to you

So many things I meant to do-

But I forgot."

There are parents who lay crosses on their children. There is no love more unselfish, than a father's and a mother's--yet there are children in some homes that starve for love's daily bread. Someone says that children are not aware of the fire under the snow, in the reticent nature of their parents. Yes--but the fire of parental love never should be buried under any snow of conventionality, of pride, of coldness, of reserve. The parent lays a heavy cross on the life of a child, when he withholds love's warmth and affectionateness.

In all life's relations, there is a great deal of cross making for others. A man who pledges his troth to a woman at the marriage altar, promising "in all love and honor, in all faith and tenderness," to cherish her in the wedded bond--should be most watchful never to lay a rough cross on her gentle heart. A woman who makes a like covenant with a man, as his wife--should be most careful never to lay a cross on his faithful love, to make his burden harder. There are children, too, who make heavy crosses which their parents

have to carry.

In all relations of friendship, this cross making is going on all the time. We think we are ideal friends--but in thoughtless moments we cause bitter pain to those we love most truly. Some of us are exacting and unreasonable in our demands upon our friends. We make the standard not ministering to--but to be ministered unto. We are envious or jealous. We have our petty whims and caprices. We give way to temper and rash speech. A great many Christian people are quite ready to confess that their temper is their besetting sin--but frequently there is little sincerity in such confession. Somehow, giving way to bad temper is such a common sin--that few are ashamed of it. No one can well reprove another for what he does himself continually. Yet it is only just that we should think of the crosses we make for others by our miserable outbreaks of temper.

In business relations, too, and in social life, we are cross makers. We are not easy to get along with. We are domineering and inconsiderate. We drive hard bargains. We disappoint people who trust us. We borrow--and do not repay. We promise--and do not keep our promises. We pledge friendship--and do not prove loyal. We accept confidential communications, and then violate honor by repeating them. We receive favors--and then return unkindness. We are helped over hard places and through difficulties, perhaps at great cost to our friends--and then forget our benefactors.

We need to remind ourselves--how much harder some of us make life for others--by crosses we lay on them, whether in what we say or do, or in what we fail to say or do. One of Mr. Lincoln's sayings was, "Die when I may, I want it said of me by those who know me best--that I always plucked a thistle and planted a flower--where I thought a flower would grow." One of the most sad words of Charles Lamb, is a wish he uttered, as he thought of the way he had so often laid a cross on his mother's heart, "What would I not give," he said, "to call my mother back to earth for one day, to ask her pardon, on my knees, for all those acts by which I gave her gentle spirit pain!" Everyone has a cross of his own to carry--but ours should never be the hand that shapes the load that shall weigh down another life!

Then, there are crosses which God gives us to bear. Jesus spoke of his cross, as a cup which the Father had put into his hand. Into every life, come experiences clearly sent by God. The human and divine are so mingled in many of the events of our days that we cannot tell where the human ends--and the divine begins. We need not try, however, to separate the threads--for God uses human events, even men's sins--in working out his purposes.

Yet there are crosses which God lays upon us. When death comes into your home, and one you love more than life, lies still and silent among the flowers, you say that God did it. There are many events in our lives, for which we can find no human cause. There is immeasurable comfort, however, in the truth that this is God's world, and that nothing ever gets out of our Father's hand and control. We need never be afraid of the crosses which God lays upon us.

The cross of Jesus was terrible in its torture--but we know what came of it. It was his way to his glory, and the way of redemption for the world. What was true in such an infinite way of the cross of the Son of God--is true in lesser way--but no less truly of every cross which God lays on any of his children. The beautiful legend tells us that the crown of thorns, when found, lay through Passion Week in all its cruel aspect--but Easter morning appeared changed, every thorn a glorious rose. The legend is true in a spiritual sense, of any crown of thorns which our Father permits us to wear. They will blossom into garlands of flowers on our head. That is the way with all the painful things which God sends into our

lives--in the end they will be transformed. We need never be afraid of God's crosses!

Jesus bids us take up our cross, whatever it is, and follow him. No matter how the cross comes to be ours, if only it is a real cross, we are to lift it and bear it. We must not drag it--but take it up. That means that we are to accept it cheerfully. Jesus endured his cross and its shame--with joy. He sang a hymn of praise as he left the upper room. The world never saw such a cross as his. It was like a dark mountain, as it rested down upon him--but he did not falter as he took it up. We are to take up our crosses in the same glad, cheerful spirit.

We are bidden to take up our cross daily. There are some of Christ's friends, who have to carry their cross day after day through years. It is never lifted off. "Let him take up his cross daily." There will come no days, when we can lay it down and get a little rest from its weight. A young woman who was lamed by the carelessness of another was told the other day, that she can never hope to be cured, that she must always be a sufferer, and must always be a cripple. It is not easy to accept such a burden--and to be cheerful under it. But that is the cross which in some form or other, many have to take up daily.

One comfort in such an experience is that our cross has to be carried only one day at a time. It is a fine secret to be able to live by the day. When we think of a lifelong cross that we have to carry until we die, the burden seems unendurable. But we can bear any pain or suffering--for a day.

"And so,

God lays a little on us every day

And never, I believe, on all the way,

Will burdens bear so deep

Or pathways lie so steep,

But we can go, if by God's power

We only bear the burden of the hour."

Someone says, "I could bear my cross with joy if it was one which God gave to me--but my cross is not from God. Human hands put it on me. Human hands make it a daily cross of injustice, unfairness, wrong, cruel suffering." No doubt it is a hundred times harder to bear such a cross made for us by human hatred or brutality--than it is to take up a cross of pain or sorrow or loneliness, which comes from our heavenly Father. There is a sacredness about something which God gives us--which makes it easier for us to accept it. We know there is his love in it. But, however our cross may come to us, whether directly from God, through some providence; or indirectly, through some human unkindness, the Master's bidding is that we take it up daily and continue following him. It is our cross, whether God or man lays it on our shoulder.

The cross which Jesus bore, was made by human hands. Men persecuted him, men wove the crown of thorns for his head, and men nailed his hands to the cruel wood. Did he resist his cross because human cruelty made it for him? No! he accepted it without a murmur, without a word of resentment. He kept love in his heart through all the terrible hours. That is the way he would have us take up our cross, whatever it may be--never bitterly or resentfully, never sullenly or despairingly.

Jesus did not talk about his cross--and he would have us bear our silently. Some people seem to want to carry their cross--so that everyone will see it! But that is not the way the Master would have us do. His voice was not heard in the street. He made no complaint, no outcry. He never called attention to his suffering. He is pleased with the silent cross bearing in his friends. He wants them to rejoice, even in pain. We should never take up our cross vaingloriously.

There is blessing in our cross--first, for ourselves, and then for others. Christ's cross lifted him to glory. Our crosses will also lift us to higher things. If we suffer with Christ--we shall also reign with him. Our crosses are also meant also to be blessings to others. A writer has a strange fancy of a woman who carried a sword in her heart. She kept it concealed under her garments and went bravely on with her work. One day she met a blind woman who was groping along, with no staff to support her, and she gave the woman her sword. "Oh, this is a good staff," said the blind woman; "now I shall get on well." The woman looked, and lo! Her sword had become a staff indeed in the blind woman's hand. The cross of Jesus was to him a cruel and terrible instrument of torture, a sword piercing through his heart. Now to men and women everywhere it is a staff to lean on, a guiding hand to lead them, a shelter from the storm, and a refuge from the heat.

We may so bear our crosses that they shall become blessing to all about us. A godly woman was telling how a great grief which it seemed she could not possibly endure, had enabled her to be a comforter of those in sorrow, through her sympathy with them, and that in giving love and help--her own burden had been lightened, her sorrow turned to joy.

Thus it is that the crosses we take up obediently and cheerfully, and bear in faith and love, become wings to lift us, and then blessings to those to whom we minister. The cross of Christ is saving the world. Just so far as we take up our cross in the spirit of our Master--will we become blessing to the world. Selfishness never made any spot holier, or any life better. Accept your cross, take it up and bear it victoriously, and there will be a new song in your own heart, and you will start songs in the hearts of many others!

Chapter 11. Power of Christ's Friendship

Perhaps we are paying too dearly for some of the boasted gains of our modern life. In our swift, intense life, we are losing some things that people used to enjoy in their more leisurely days. Friendship is one of these. There is no time for it now, for friendship takes time. We touch each other only lightly and superficially, in our crowded days. We have many acquaintances, and we may give and receive help and inspiration even our hurried contacts. But in quieter, slower days, the people had time to live together, and enter into intimate relations in which they impressed each other's life, and did much in shaping and coloring each other's character.

The art of friendship is one we cannot afford to lose. Friendship means a great deal to us, not only as a source of pleasure and happiness--but in practical ways. We never can know what we owe to our friends, what they have done for us, how they have helped us, what they have done in the building of our character. Our lives are like buildings going up, and everyone who comes to us, whether for a prolonged stay, or only for a few moments--puts something into the walls or into the adornment. Our friends, if they are worthy, exert a measureless influence over us.

The thought that one who is noble, true, and worthy is our friend--gives us a sense of companionship, even in loneliness. Such a consciousness is like a holy presence in which we cannot do anything unworthy. Such a friendship transforms us, enriches our character, sweetens our spirits, and inspires in us--all higher aspirations.

The thought of these influences and ministrations of human friendship, helps us to understand a little better what the friendship of Christ may be to us, and what it may do for us and in us. For one of the ways in which Christ offers himself to us--is as our Friend. Perhaps we do not think enough of this phase of his life. We speak of him as our Savior, our Master, our Helper--but do we think of him often enough as our Friend? Friendship implies intimacy. We love to be with a friend. We love to talk with him about all the sacred things of our life. Do we have any such intimacy with Christ?

The other day one complained that he could scarcely get time any more to pray, he had so much to do. Life is indeed strenuous for many of us, full of duties which seem to forbid leisure. If our modern life is robbing us of the privileges of human friendship, is there not danger that it shall make close, intimate friendship with our Master also almost impossible? We read of someone spending a whole hour every morning with Christ, and we say, "That is impossible in my crowded life." But even if we can get no long hours alone with our Master, we can cultivate a friendship with him that will go on unbroken through the longest, busiest hours. Those who were close to great missionary, said that in the time of his most intense occupation, he would often be heard saying in whispers, "Jesus! Jesus! Jesus!" He lived all the time with his Master.

This is not an impossible attainment for any sincere and earnest Christian. We cannot always be on our knees in the formal attitude of prayer. We have our duties, and we may not neglect them even for acts of devotion. This would not please our Master. We can conceive of occasions when prayer would not be the duty, when we ought to even to leave our private devotions, and attend to some service of love which needs us. But we may always pray while we work. Our hearts may be in communion with God--even when our hands are busiest in activities. We may talk with Christ, even while we are serving him. In whatever we do--we may have Christ with us--and we may do all we do in his name. We do not have to leave our tasks, in order to be with Christ. We may cultivate friendship with him in our busiest days.

If we would find the best that is in Christ, we must know him as a personal Friend. We are in danger of thinking that nothing counts in the Christian life, but the activities; we must always be doing something, talking to somebody, holding meetings, making garments for the poor, relieving distress. But there is a better way. The disciples thought Mary had wasted her ointment when she had broken the vase and poured the precious ointment on her Master's head and feet. It had not done anybody any good. It had fed no hungry one, paid no one's rent, put bread in no hungry mouth, and clothed no shivering child. They thought that using it only to honor a friend was a waste. But the truth is, that never before nor since, in the history of the world, was so much value put to more blessed use. Think how Mary's loving deed comforted the Master, warmed his heart, and strengthened him for going to the cross. Then think how the telling of the story of her love has filled the world with sweet inspirations and gentle influences through all these centuries. Countless thousands have received impulses to lovely things--through the story of Mary's deed of affection. Thus the fragrant act of this quiet woman has started inspirations of love wherever the story has been told throughout the world.

Of course, it is worth while to build churches, found hospitals, and help the poor--but it is worth while also to cultivate friendship with Christ. The Chinese have a saying, "If you have two loaves of bread--sell one and buy a lily." Some people toil only for loaves, never thinking of lilies. But bread is not all that people need. There are days when you are not hungry for food--but are longing for sympathy, for a word of kindness, for encouragement, for appreciation, for friendship. There are hours when you have everything you could crave of earthly comfort and blessing and of human affection and interest--but need the touch of the hand of Christ, some revealing of divine interest and affection. Sell a loaf and buy a lily--for the lily will

mean more to you than the bread.

Of all the blessing within your reach, nothing will mean so much to you as the friendship of Christ. If you have it--you will not miss anything else that you do not have. This friendship, close, constant, confidential, satisfying, will leave nothing else to be desired.

Think, too, what the friendship of Christ will do for us in the way of spiritual culture. It was the friendship of Jesus that was the chief influence in the making of John. He was not always the apostle of love that we know in the fourth gospel and the epistles. These were written when John was an old man. At first he was hasty in temper and speech, resentful, ambitious for place, not sweet and loving. But he accepted the friendship of Christ, allowing its holy blessedness to pour into his heart like sunshine. And it transformed him.

It is related that a friend once said to Lord Tennyson, "Tell me what Jesus Christ is to you, personally." They were walking in the garden, and close by was a rose bush full of wonderful roses. Pointing to this miracle of nature, Lord Tennyson answered, "What the sun is to this rose bush--Jesus Christ is to me." The sun had wooed out from the bare, briery bush of the spring days--all that marvelous beauty of roses. And whatever was lovely, winsome, and divine in the life of the great poet--had been wooed out of his natural self by the warmth of Christ's love. So the John we know in later years--was the John that the friendship of Christ had made. Paul tells us that the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, long suffering, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, meekness, self control. These are the roses which grow on the thorny stem of human nature--when the warmth of the love of Christ has been falling upon it.

Then the friendship of Christ makes our Christian work a thousand times more beautiful. Love has a strange power in calling out the best that is in us. They discovered the reason for the young soldier's splendid courage in the battle, after he had fallen, in the picture of a fair face that he carried in his shirt pocket, over his heart. Love inspired his bravery. If the secrets of life were all known, it would be seen that the world's best work in every field--is done through love's inspiration.

The love of Christ transfigures the poorest, plainest things we do. We may be discouraged over the things we have been trying to do for Christ. A young Sunday school teacher spoke with disheartenment of what seemed to her, a failure in her efforts to do her pupils good. We all feel so, of ourselves and our work. We cannot think that God will use anything so poor, so inadequate, so unworthy, as even our best. But let us remember that if the friendship of Christ is in our hearts, it is not we alone--but Christ and we, who do the work. Inspired by this friendship, even the smallest things we do, if they are the best we can do--will be beautiful in God's sight, and will be accepted.

Chapter 12. Why Not Be Troubled?

Next to the little twenty third Psalm, the fourteenth chapter of John's Gospel is, no doubt, the best known and best loved portion of the Bible. It is a chapter of comfort. The sick love it, for there is a music in it which soothes pain and suffering. The dying love it, for it has its revealing of the life into which they are passing. The bereft love it, for it opens windows into heaven, and gives them glimpses of the blessed life of those who have gone to be at home in the Father's house.

Christ's friends were in great sorrow--sorrow which seemed inconsolable. Yet their Master's first word to them was, "Let not your heart be troubled." This seemed a strange word to say to them that night. How could they help being troubled in such experiences as theirs? Think of all Jesus had grown to be to them.

For three years they had been members of his personal family, enjoying the most intimate relations with him. How much a friend can be to us in our life, depends on the friend. If he has a rich nature, a noble personality, power to love deeply, capacity for friendship, the spirit of unselfish helpfulness; if he is able to inspire us to heroism and to worthy living--what he can be to us, is simply immeasurable. Think of what the best, strongest, richest hearted human friend is to you in the way of cheer, inspiration, guidance, courage, and uplifting. Think what Jesus, with his marvelous personality, must have been as a friend to his disciples. Then you can understand something of what his going from them, meant to them.

Then he was more than a friend to them. They had believed in him as their Messiah, who was to redeem their nation and to lead them to honor and power. Great hopes rested in him. His death, as it seemed to them, would be the failure of all these hopes. The announcement swept away, as they now thought, all that made life worth while to them. There are human friends whose death seems to leave only desolation in the hearts and lives of those who have loved them and leaned on them. But the death of Christ was to his personal friends and followers--the blotting out of every star of hope and promise. Their sorrow was overwhelming. Yet Jesus looked into their faces and said, "Let not your heart be troubled." Jesus is always an encourager, a minister of cheer. Some people come to us in trial, thinking to comfort us--but their words fail to give any strength. They weep with us, they sympathize with us--but they do not make us any braver, any more able to endure. If we would be comforters like our Master, we must inspire others to endurance. We must bring them something which will make them stronger. Mere condolence will not do it. We must have something to give, which will impart strength and courage.

What is there in the gospel of Christ, which gives us authority to say, "Let not your heart be troubled"? The first thing Jesus bade his disciples do was to believe, "Believe in God, believe also in me." Thus far they had believed. Jesus had taught them a new name for God. They were to call him Father. He used almost no other name for God. The word "father" is a great treasure-house of love thoughts. It told the disciples of the minute thought and care of God, which extended to the smallest events of their lives. It told them of goodness, which never failed. It was a great lesson they had been learning--to think of God as their Father. In the shock of the last terrible days, however, there was danger that they would lose their faith. Yet Jesus said that dark hour: "Believe in God. Let nothing take away from you your faith in God as your Father."

Then he said further, "Believe also in me." They had accepted Jesus as their Messiah. They believed that he had come to be the world's Redeemer. Now at the announcement that he was to die at the hands of his enemies, there was danger that they should lose their faith in him. If he died in defeat, what would become of his claim and their hope that he would redeem his people? To save them from their loss of faith, he exhorted them to continue to believe. "Believe in God, believe also in me."

We are always in danger of losing our faith, in times of trouble. Many people are heard asking such questions as "How can God be a God of love, and allow me to be so bereft, so stripped of all that is good? Where now are the promises of blessing which are made so constantly in the Scriptures? Has God forgotten to be gracious?" To such questions the answer is, "Believe in God, believe also in me." Let nothing disturb your faith. Though it seems that love has failed, that God has forgotten you, that Christ is no longer your friend--still believe; believe in God, believe also in Jesus Christ.

Sorrow is full of mystery. Every way we turn we hear people ask, "Why?" "This is not love," we say. "This is not goodness. This is not divine care." We cannot understand. But how could we, with our narrow vision and our partial knowledge, understand the infinite purposes of God?

Remember--God does not want to give us an easy life--he wants to make something of us, and oftentimes the only way to do this is to give us pain, loss, or suffering. A writer tells of keeping for nearly a year the finely shaped cocoon of an emperor moth. A narrow opening is left in the neck of the cocoon, through which the insect slowly forces its way. The opening is so small, that it seems impossible for the moth to pass through it. This writer watched the efforts of the imprisoned moth to escape. It did not appear to make any progress. At last he grew impatient. He pitied the little creature and resolved to assist it. Taking his scissors, he snipped the confining threads to make the struggle easier. In a moment the moth was free, dragging out a great swollen body and little shriveled wings. He watched to see the beauty unfold--but he watched in vain. It never was anything but a stunted abortion, crawling painfully about, instead of flying through the air on rainbow wings. Nature's way, God's way with moths, is the only true way, although it is a way of pain, struggle, and suffering. Human pity may make it easier--but the end will be destruction.

Divine love never makes this mistake, either in nature or in dealing with human lives. God lets us suffer, for by suffering we shall best grow into perfect beauty. When the mystery of pain or hardness comes into our life--let us not doubt. The disciples thought all their hopes had perished--but in the end they learned that every hope was fulfilled. Good came out of what seemed irretrievable disaster. "Believe in God, believe also in me," is always the word of faith and comfort. We cannot understand--but our Master understands, and that is enough.

Jesus told his disciples that he was going to his Father's house. The words give us a beautiful revealing of heaven. Heaven is home. On this earth--there is no place so sweet, so sacred, so heart satisfying, as a true home. It is a place of love--the truest, gentlest, most unselfish love. It is a place of confidence. We are always sure of being loved at home. We do not have to be on our guard when we enter our home doors. We do not have to wear masks there, hiding or disguising our real selves. Home is a refuge to which we flee from the danger, the enmity, the unkindness, the injustice of the world. Home is the place where hungry hearts feed on love's bread. Mrs. Craik, in one of her books, has this fine picture:

"Oh, conceive the happiness to know someone person dearer to you than your own self--some heart into which you can pour ever thought, every grief, every joy; one person, who, if all the rest of the world were to calumniate or forsake you--would never wrong you by a harsh thought or an unjust word; who would cling to you the closer in sickness, in poverty, in troublous times; who would sacrifice all; from whom, except by death, night or day, you never can be divided; whose smile is ever at your hearth; who has no tears while you are well and happy--and your love the same."

This is a glimpse of what a true home is. The picture is sometimes realized on the earth--there are homes here which are well near perfect. But it will be fully realized in heaven. No other description of heaven, given in the Bible, means so much to our hearts as that which our Master gives in these three words, "My Father's house"--Home.

Jesus told his disciples further, that he was going to prepare a place for them. He was going away--for their sakes. They thought they could not spare him--but he said he was going to continue his work on their behalf. Then he added, "If I go and prepare a place for you, I will come again, and will receive you unto myself." There was no accident, therefore, in the dying of Jesus. His going away was part of God's plan and purpose for his life.

The comfort for us in all our sorrows--is that nothing has gone wrong, that God's purpose is going on even in what seems the wrecking of our human hopes. Your Christian friend passed away the other night. You thought he would have been with you for many years to come. You had plans covering a long future of happiness. You were appalled when the doctor said that he could not live until morning. Life to you would be most dreary, lonely, and empty, without this one who had become so dear to you. Is there any comfort to you in this experience? Christ says, "Let not your heart be troubled." There is no reason why you should be troubled. If you could see all things as God sees them--you would not be dismayed. If the disciples had known just what the death of their Master would mean--to him, to them, to the divine glory, to the world--they would not have been troubled. Death to your friend, was the completion of the earthly portion of his life; the passing of the spirit to the heavenly home, to enter anew into the service of the Master. Is there no comfort in this? Is there no comfort in the truth of immortality, that he who lives and believes on Christ--shall never die? Is there no comfort in knowing that your friend who has passed from the earthly home--is safe in the Father's house?

We need not be anxious about the beloved one we have sent out of our home--and into the Father's house. You say, "Yes--but my friend stayed so brief a time! I could almost wish that I had not let my heart fasten its tendrils about him, since so soon he was torn away from me." Say it not. It is worth while to love, and to let the heart pour out all its sweetness in loving, though it be but for a day, and then to have the bliss give way to grief. Richard Watson Gilder in a little poem touches this element of human grief.

"Because the rose must fade

Shall I not love the rose?"

It is sweet to have your friend, if only for one day. You will really have him always after that. For two people to love each other at all--actually, deeply, worthily--is to have their lives knit together into one, indissoluble, two souls blended in one, inseparable. Death will not tear them apart. It is blessed to love--though we stay together but the briefest while. A baby comes and looks into the young mother's eyes, and in an hour is gone. Was that brief stay in vain? No; the mother always has a baby after that. The love for that sweet life will never die in her heart. She will always have on her soul, the impression made by that short stay.

Chapter 13. The Problem of Temptation

The petition in our Lord's Prayer regarding temptation, perplexes some good people. It reads in the Revised Version, "Bring us not into temptation." Does God then ever bring us into temptation? Does he want us to be tempted? We think of temptation as incitement or persuasion to sin. We know that God never tempts us in this way. "Let no man say when he is tempted--I am tempted by God." But the word temptation means also trial, testing. So we have this in James, "Blessed is the man who endures temptation (trial); for when he has been approved, he shall receive the crown of life." In the same epistle we have also this: "Count it all joy, my brethren, when you fall into manifold temptations; knowing that the proving of your faith works patience." The reference here is to trials, disciplines, sufferings, rather than to incitements to sin.

We are to be glad when we have such experiences, because in them we shall grow strong. It is a real misfortune never to have anything to put our character to the test--or to bring out its undeveloped qualities. Thus we are helped to understand the meaning of temptation--from the divine side. When Jesus was led, driven, by the Holy Spirit, into the waste places to be tempted of the devil, God's thought was not

to cause him to sin; rather, it was to give him the opportunity to be tested and proved, that he might come again with the light of victory on his face, ready to be the Friend, Helper, and Deliverer of countless other men. So when God brings us into a place in which we must meet temptation, it is never his purpose to lead us to sin. That is Satan's purpose--but God's is that we may meet the temptation and be victorious in it. Temptations, therefore, are opportunities that God puts within our reach, by which we are to become strong and rich in experience.

We are not, therefore, to pray that we shall never have any temptations. Imagine a soldier praying that he may never have to fight any battles. What is the business of a soldier--but to fight? Only on battlefields can he learn courage or train himself to be a soldier. What battles are to a soldier, temptations are to a Christian. He never can become of much worth as a man--if he never faces struggles and learns to overcome. Soldiers are made on battlefields, character is grown, and men are made, in trial.

God does then bring us into temptation, or trials. At least, he allows us to meet temptation, not that we may fall--but that we may have the struggle and come out of it stronger, ready for nobler and worthier life and service. The Master's cheering word to every follower of him as he enters any struggle is, "He who overcomes, I will give to him to sit down with me in my throne." The day of temptation is dangerous to every struggler.

There is a place on the great mountain divide in the west--where the destiny of a dewdrop, trembling on a leaf, is decided by the direction of the breeze that is blowing. If the wind is from the west, the dewdrop will fall to the eastward of an invisible line and will be carried into the Mississippi, and to the Atlantic Ocean. But if there is even the gentlest breeze from the east, the drop of dew will fall to the west of the divide, and will start on its way to the Pacific. So in experiences of temptation, human lives tremble on the divide of the eternities. We know not the momentousness of our decisions, even in what seem most trivial matters.

We understand now the meaning of temptation and the importance of its issue. It is the part of true life, to make it a blessing. Some tell us that the petition in the Lord's Prayer is cowardly, "Bring us not into temptation." If nobler character lies beyond the struggle, why should we shrink from the struggle? Why not seek it and welcome it? Yet we dare not rush recklessly into peril. Our Master never bids us put ourselves needlessly in the way of danger. We are to ask for guidance and then go where he wants us to go, not thinking of the peril. Christ did not pray that his disciples should be taken out of the world, that is, away from its enmity and danger; his prayer rather was that they should never fail in any duty, and should then be protected from the world's evil, that is from sin; that in their battles and struggles--they should be kept unspotted.

The prayer, "Bring us not into temptation," is never to be a request to be spared perilous duty, or that trial, coming in the path of duty, shall be avoided. We should never be afraid of anything in the divine will. George Macdonald describes thus what he calls a sane, wholesome, practical working faith: "First, that it is a man's business to do the will of God; second, that God takes on himself the special care of that man; and third, that therefore that man ought never to be afraid of anything." If you go into any way of temptation or danger unaided, unled of God, you go without God's protection and have no promise of shelter or deliverance. But if, after your morning prayer, "Bring us not into temptation today," you find yourself facing the fiercest struggle, you need have no fear. Christ is with you--and no harm can touch you.

The problem of Christian living then, is not to escape struggle, to avoid meeting danger--but in any peril in the line of duty to be preserved from harm. Temptation is not sin. Sin begins when temptation is listened to, parleyed with, and yielded to. There is no sin in the feeling of resentment or anger which rises in us when we are insulted, when injury is done to us. We cannot prevent the momentary feeling of wrong; that is not sin if we gain a victory over it, if we turn the rising bitter feeling into a prayer, and the impulse to resentment into a deed of kindness. But when the bitterness is allowed to nest in our heart--we have sinned.

Safety in temptation requires that we solemnly and resolutely reject every impulse to do anything which is wrong. We must watch the smallest beginnings of departure from right. We have our weak points, and must keep a double guard at these places. We must watch our companionships. We had better sacrifice a friendship that has brought us much pleasure, than by retaining it, allow contamination or defiling. The influence of the world is most subtle. It is easy to drift unconsciously into its atmosphere, and to have our lives hurt by its spirit.

In one of Maartens' novels, one of the characters is a pure hearted girl who might be judged to have no consciousness of sin. She, however, leaves her quiet home and with friends visits Paris and Monte Carlo. At the close of one day she receives a black edged letter, telling her of the death of her old pastor. He had sent his love to her just before he died. The event recalls the good man's birthday message to her some time before, which she had overlooked. The message was, "Keep yourself unspotted from the world." The words now jumped from the page with painful vividness.

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