

The Building of Character

by J.R. Miller

Building a strong character is the most important business of life, and it requires a strong foundation of truth, purity, and love, built through effort and God's grace.

Scripture: Psalm 51:10, Proverbs 4:23, Isaiah 61:3, Matthew 5:8, Romans 12:2, 2 Corinthians 5:17, Ephesians 4:15, Philippians 4:8, Colossians 3:2, 1 Peter 1:22

Topics: "Divine Purpose", "Character Building"

Description

J.R. Miller emphasizes that the building of character is the most crucial aspect of life, asserting that true success is measured by the development of one's inner self rather than external achievements. He outlines that character must be constructed according to divine patterns found in Scripture, highlighting the importance of foundational principles such as truth, purity, and love. Miller encourages individuals to actively participate in their character-building journey, recognizing that while others may influence us, we are ultimately responsible for our own lives. He reassures that even from brokenness and past failures, one can create a beautiful character through God's grace. The sermon concludes with the reminder that it is never too late to start anew and build a life of nobility and purpose.

Transcript

The building of character is the most important business of life. It matters little what works a man may leave in the world; his real success is measured by what he has wrought along the years in his own being.

True character must be built after divine patterns. Every man's life is a plan of God. There is a divine purpose concerning it which we should realize. In the Scriptures we find the patterns for all the parts of the character, not only for its great and prominent elements--but also for its most minute features--the delicate lines and shadings of its ornamentation. The commandments, the beatitudes, all Christ's precepts, the ethical teachings of the apostles--all show us the pattern after which we are to fashion our character.

It is a great thing for us to have a lofty thought of life, and ever to seek to reach it. Said Michael Angelo: "Nothing makes the soul so pure, so religious, as the endeavor to create something perfect; for God is perfection, and whoever strives for it, strives for something that is godlike." The seeking itself, makes us nobler, holier, purer, stronger. We grow ever toward that for which we long. Many searches are unrewarded. Men seek for gold--and do not find it. They try to attain happiness--but the vision ever recedes as they press toward it. The quest for true nobleness, is one that is rewarded. "Blessed are those who hunger and thirst after righteousness--for they shall be filled," is our Lord's own word. Longing for

spiritual good shall never be in vain. And unceasing longing, with earnest reaching after the good, lifts the life into the permanent realization of that which is thus persistently sought.

There are certain things essential in all building. Every structure requires a good foundation. Without this, it never can rise into real strength and grandeur. The most beautiful building reared on sand, is insecure and must fall. There is only one foundation for Christian character. We must build on the rock; that is, we must have, as the basis of our character, great, eternal principles.

One of these principles is TRUTH. Ruskin tells us, that in a famous Italian cathedral there are a number of colossal figures high up among the heavy timbers, which support the roof. From the pavement, these statues have appearance of great beauty. Curious to examine them--Ruskin says he climbed one day to the roof, and stood close beside them. Bitter was his disappointment to find that only the parts of the figures which could be seen from the pavement were carefully finished. The hidden side was rough and unfinished.

It is not enough to make our lives true--only so far as men can see them. We have but scorn for men who profess truth, and then in their secret life--harbor falsehood, deception, insincerity. There must be truth through and through, in the really noble and worthy building. A little flaw, made by a bubble of air in the casting, has been the cause of the breaking of the great beam years afterward, and the falling of the immense bridge whose weight rested upon it. Truth must be in the character--absolute truth. The least falsehood mars the beauty of the life.

Another of these essential principles is PURITY. "Whatever things are pure," says the apostle, in the same breath with whatever things are true, and just, and honorable. It is a principle of Scripture, that a man who lives badly, can never build up a really beautiful character. Only he who has a pure heart can see God, to know what life's ideal is. Only he whose hands are clean, can build after the perfect pattern.

LOVE is another quality which must be wrought into this foundation. Love is the reverse of selfishness. It is the holding of all the life as Christ's--to be used to bless others. "So long as I have been here," said President Lincoln, after his second election, "I have not willingly planted a thorn in any man's bosom." That is one phase of love--never needlessly to give pain or do hurt to a fellow-being. The other part is the positive--to live to do the greatest good to every other being, whenever opportunity offers.

Truth, purity, love--these are the immutable principles which must be built into the foundation of the temple of character. We never can have a noble structure, without a strong and secure foundation.

On the foundation thus laid, the character must be build. No magnificent building ever grew up by miracle. Stone by stone it rose, each block laid in its place by toil and effort. "You cannot dream yourself into a godly character," says a writer; "you must hammer and forge yourself one." Even with the best foundation, there must be faithful, patient building unto the end.

Each one must build his own character. No one can do it for him. No one but yourself, can make your life beautiful. No one can be true, pure, honorable, and loving--for you. A mother's prayers and teachings, cannot give you strength of soul and grandeur of spirit. We are taught to edify one another, and we do, indeed, help to build up each other's life-temple. Consciously or unconsciously, we are continually leaving touches on the souls of others--touches of beauty--or of marring. In every book we read, the author lays something new on the wall of our life. Every hour's companionship with another gives either a touch of beauty--or a stain to our spirit. Every song that is sung in our ear--enters into our heart and becomes part

of our being. Even the natural scenery amid which we dwell--leaves its impression upon us. Thus others, thus all things about us--do indeed have their place as builders of our character.

But we are ourselves the real builders. Others may lift the blocks into place--but we must lay them on the wall. Our own hands give the touches of beauty--or of blemish, whatever hands of others hold the brushes or mix the colors for us. If the building is marred or unsightly when it is finished--we cannot say it was some other one's fault. Others may have sinned--and the inheritance of the sin is yours. Others may have sorely wronged you--and the hurt yet stays in your life. You never can be the same in this world that you might have been, but for the wounding. You are not responsible for these marrings of your character which were wrought by others' hands. Still you are the builder--you and God.

Even the broken fragments of what seems a ruin--you can take, and with them, through God's grace, you can make a noble fabric. It is strange how many of earth's most beautiful lives, have grown up out of what seemed defeat and failure. Indeed, God seems to love to build spiritual loveliness out of the castaway fragments of lives, even out of sin's debris. In a great cathedral there is said to be a window, made by an apprentice out of the bits of stained glass that were thrown away as refuse and worthless waste, when the other windows were made--and this is the most beautiful window of all. You can build a noble character for yourself--in spite of all the hurts and injuries done to you, wittingly or unwittingly, by others--with the fragments of the broken hopes and joys, and the lost opportunities which lie strewn about your feet. No others by their worst work of hurt of marring--can prevent your building a beautiful character for yourself!

When the ancient temple of Solomon was reared, the whole world was sought through, and its most costly and beautiful things were gathered and put into the sacred house. Likewise, we should search everywhere for whatever things are true, whatever things are lovely, whatever things are pure--to build into our life. All that we can learn from books, from music, from art, from friends; all that we can gather from the Bible and receive from the hand of Christ himself--we should take and build into our character, to make it worthy. But in order to discover the things which are lovely, we must have the loveliness in our own soul. "Though we travel the world over to find the beautiful," says one, "we must carry it in our own heart, or, go where we may, we shall not find it!" Only a pure, true, loving heart--can discover the things which are true, pure, and loving to build in the character. We must have Christ in us, and then we shall find Christly things everywhere, and gather them into our own life.

There are some people who, in the discouragement of defeat and failure--feel that it is then too late for them to make their character beautiful. They have lost their last opportunity, it seems to them. But this is never true, for the people for whom Christ died. A poet tells of walking in his garden and seeing a birds' nest lying on the ground. The storm had swept through the tree and ruined the nest. While he mused sadly over the wreck of the birds' home, he looked up, and there he saw them building a new one amid the branches. The birds teach us immortals a lesson. Though all seems lost, let us not sit down and weep in despair--but let us arise and begin to build again. No one can undo a wrong past. No one can repair the ruins of years that are gone. We cannot live our life over again. But, at our Father's feet--we can begin anew as little children, and make all our life new.

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