

The Cost of Reaching the Best

by J.R. Miller

To reach our best, we must be willing to go through pain and cost, and make sacrifices for the greater good.

Scripture: Romans 5:3

Topics: "Sacrifice", "Personal Growth"

Description

J.R. Miller emphasizes the transformative journey of individuals, comparing it to the refining of iron, which increases in value through rigorous processes. He illustrates that true growth and character development require self-discipline, sacrifice, and enduring hardships, much like the oak tree that becomes useful only after being cut down. Miller argues that the struggles faced in life are opportunities for growth, and that even Jesus was perfected through suffering. He highlights the story of Harriet Newell, whose life, though short, became a powerful inspiration through her sacrifice for missionary work. Ultimately, Miller concludes that reaching our best selves often comes at a significant cost.

Transcript

Someone has been making a little calculation which is interesting. A bar of iron of a certain size, in its rough state, is worth five dollars. If it be made into horseshoes, it is worth twelve dollars. When it has been put through certain processes and then made into needles, instead of horseshoes, its value is increased to three hundred and fifty dollars. The same piece of iron, however, made into knife blades, becomes worth three thousand dollars; and made into balance springs for watches, is increased in value to the enormous sum of two hundred and fifty thousand dollars. These figures are not perfect, but it is no doubt true, that a bar of iron is capable of becoming worth a great deal more than in its rough state which it would bring in the market.

The iron reaches its higher values, through certain processes. It has to be put into the fire, and has to be hammered, rolled, pressed, cut, and polished. The more it is worth in the end, the longer and severer processes must it pass through in preparation. It requires more heating and workmanship to make it into watch-springs than into horseshoes or knife blades.

There is an illustration here of the way in which the best that is in human lives can be brought out. It can be done only by the processes of education and self-discipline, and these processes are not easy. The boy who would live up to the best that is in him -- cannot spend the greater part of his time on the playground, nor can he slip along through school and college with minimum efforts. He must dig out his lesson with sweat and toil. The girl who would live up to the best that is in her, must deny herself many

tempting and attractive diversions and good times -- and must devote herself sedulously to study, reading, work. We are disposed to sympathize with and pity young people who are called to endure hardship, self-denial, pinching economy, disappointment, defeat, and trial. But we should rather commiserate those who have no hardness, no self-denial, no necessity for economy, no struggles. These are apt to remain all their lives, only like the bar of common iron; while those who must endure the severe discipline, are the only ones whose lives grow into nobleness, strength, usefulness, and Christlikeness.

Even of Jesus it is said that he "was made perfect through suffering." We can save our life -- only by losing it. We can bring out the better nature -- only by the crucifying of the worst. We can develop our character, our true life -- only by the denying of ourselves in those things that belong to the lower phases of life. We must keep our body under control, if we would attain the best possibilities of our higher nature. Many people dread the hindrances and obstacles which lie in their way; but, rightly seen, these are opportunities for making something of our life.

The law of sacrifice lies at the heart of all beautiful living. Everywhere we find illustrations of this. A great oak stands in the forest. It is beautiful in its majesty. It is ornamental. It casts a pleasant shade. Beneath its branches, the children play. Among its boughs, the squirrels frolic and the birds sing. The woodsman comes one day with his axe, and the tree quivers in all its branches, under his sturdy blows. "I am being destroyed!" cries the oak. So it seems, as the great tree crashes down to the ground. The children are sad because they can play no more under the broad branches. The birds grieve because they can no more nest amid the summer foliage. But let us follow the tree's history: It is cut into boards and beams, and built into a beautiful cottage, and now human hearts have their home and nest there. Or it is used in some church where God is worshiped. Or it goes into the sides of a great ship which speeds over the seas. The losing of its life -- was the saving of it. It died -- that it might become deeply and truly useful.

The plates, cups, and vases we use in our homes lay once as clay in the earth, quiet and restful. Then men came with picks, and the clay was crudely torn out and beaten and ground in the mill, and pressed under weights, then shaped by the potter's hand, then put into the furnace and burned, at last coming forth in beauty -- to begin a history of usefulness. If the clay could speak, it might cry out, but the end proves that what seemed destruction -- was its making into beauty and value.

These are simple illustrations of the law which applies also in human life. We must die to be a blessing. People said Harriet Newell's life was wasted, when she gave it to missions and then died and was buried with her babe, far from home and friends -- bride, missionary, mother, martyr, and saint, all in one short year -- without having told one heathen of the Savior. But was that beautiful, gentle life really wasted? No! For a hundred years, her name has been a mighty inspiration to missionary work, and her influence has brooded everywhere, touching thousands of hearts of gentle women and strong men, as her story has been told. Had Harriet Newell lived a thousand years of quiet, sweet life in her own home, she could not have done the work that she did by giving her young life in what seemed unavailing sacrifice. She lost her life -- that she might save it. She died -- that she might live. She offered herself a sacrifice -- that she might become useful. We can reach our best -- only through pain and cost.

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