

The Glory of the Commonplace

by J.R. Miller

J.R. Miller's sermon highlights the beauty and significance of everyday acts of love and the importance of nurturing a deep relationship with God.

Scripture: Psalm 23:2-3, Psalm 119:67, Isaiah 48:10, Matthew 20:28, Romans 8:28, Galatians 5:13, Philippians 4:4, Colossians 3:12, 1 John 2:6, Revelation 2:10

Topics: "The Beauty of Everyday Life", "Service and Kindness"

Description

J.R. Miller emphasizes the beauty and significance of the commonplace in Christian life, illustrating how ordinary acts of kindness and service can reflect God's glory. He encourages believers to find joy in daily tasks and to cultivate a heart of love and service, reminding them that true Christian living is not just about grand gestures but also about the small, loving actions that impact others. Miller highlights the importance of maintaining a close relationship with God, suggesting that our works should stem from a place of love and devotion rather than mere duty. He also reflects on the transformative power of suffering and how it can lead to spiritual growth and deeper faith.

Transcript

Parables and Illustrations from the Books of J.R. Miller, 1913

FOREWORD

How was Dr. Miller able to write so as to reach the hearts of the hundreds of thousands who bought his books? The question has been asked many times by those who have noted the fact that the sales of these most helpful volumes have totaled more than two million copies. Perhaps one of the best answers was made by one who said, "He knew how to glorify the commonplace." He said ordinary things about ordinary people, in most unusual ways. He illuminated every chapter by apt and striking illustrations from the everyday life of people around him. He had a wonderful faculty for taking familiar incidents and giving to them new applications. He used as illustrations, things that no one else would have thought of, and the reader could only wonder why he had never seen the application himself.

In 1893 a volume of selected illustrations was used under the title, "Glimpses through Life's Windows." Since that time, readers have urged the publication of a similar volume made up from later writings. With his usual modesty Dr. Miller was accustomed to reply that there would be no demand for such a book. However, he finally decided to give his readers what they sought. During the closing years of his life, he

thought of the book as one of the things he hoped to do, but he never found time to make the selections. As his associate in editorial work, I learned of his plans, and have attempted to carry them out.

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Nothing is more helpful and practical in Christian living -- than the habit of getting a verse or phrase of Scripture into the mind and heart in the morning. Its influence stays through the day, weaving itself into all the day's thoughts and words and experiences.

Every verse in the Bible is meant to help us to live -- and a good devotional book opens up the precious teachings which are folded up in its words.

A devotional book which takes a Scripture text, and so opens it for us in the morning, that all day long it helps us to live, becoming a true lamp to our feet, and a staff to lean upon when the way is rough -- is the very best devotional help we can possibly have. What we need in a devotional book which will bless our lives, is the application of the great teachings of Scripture to common, daily, practical life.

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The divinest ministries

"The Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give His life as a ransom for many."
Matthew 20:28

We must not make the mistake of thinking that Christian service consists merely in prayers, devotions, and acts of worship.

The divinest ministries of each day are the small services of love which God sends across our way. The half-hour the busy man takes from his business . . .

to comfort a sorrow,

to help a discouraged brother to start again,

to lift up one who has fainted by the way,

to visit a sick neighbor and minister consolation, or

to give a young person needed counsel --

is the half-hour of the day that will shine the most brightly when the records of life are unrolled before God.

The secret of abundant helpfulness, is found in the desire to be a help, a blessing, to all whom we meet. We begin to be like Christ only when we begin to wish to be helpful. Where this desire is ever dominant, the life is an unceasing benediction. Rivers of water are pouring out from it continually to bless the world.

"Serve one another in love." Galatians 5:13

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It is not your work that He wants most -- it is you!

"Arise, My darling, My beautiful one, and come with Me!" Song of Songs 2:10

"He said to them, "Come with Me by yourselves to a quiet place" Mark 6:31

G. Campbell Morgan tells of a friend of his who had a little daughter that he dearly loved. They were great friends, the father and daughter, and were always together. But there seemed to come an estrangement on the child's part. The father could not get her company as formerly. She seemed to shun him. If he wanted her to walk with him, she always had something else to do. The father was grieved and could not understand what the trouble was.

His birthday came and in the morning his daughter came to his room, her face radiant with love, and handed him a present. Opening the parcel, he found a pair of exquisitely made slippers.

The father said, "My child, it was very good of you to buy me such lovely slippers."

"O father," she said, "I did not buy them -- I made them for you!"

Looking at her he said, "I think I understand now, what long has been a mystery to me. Is this what you have been doing for the last three months?"

"Yes," she said, "but how did you know how long I have been at work on them?"

He said, "Because for three months I have missed your company and your love. I have wanted you with me -- but you have been too busy. These are beautiful slippers -- but next time buy your present, and let me have you all the days. I would rather have my child herself, than anything she could make for me."

Just so, we are in danger of being so busy in the Lord's work that we cannot be enough with the Lord in love's fellowship. He may say to us, "I like your works, your toils, your service -- but I miss the love you gave Me at first."

There is real danger that we get so busy in striving to be active Christians, so absorbed in our tasks and duties, our efforts to bring others into the church -- that Christ Himself shall be less loved, and shall miss our communing with Him.

Loyalty to Christ means first of all devotion. Has Christ really the highest place in your heart? It is not your work that He wants most -- it is you! It is beautiful to do things for Him -- it is still more beautiful to make a home for Him in your heart.

A young man, at great cost, brought from many countries the most beautiful materials he could find, and built an exquisite little chapel as a memorial to his dead wife. Only a few men could do anything so rare, so lovely. But the poorest of us can enthrone Jesus in our hearts -- making a little sanctuary in our hearts for Him.

"Yet I hold this against you: You have forsaken your first love!" Revelation 2:4

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A mother's prayers

We do not realize what the daily home-life means in the future of the children. A consistent and godly example is most important.

A Christian man tells of what happened in his own childhood home over and over again. As he lay quietly at night in his little room before sleep came on, there would be gentle footsteps on the stairs, the door would open noiselessly, and in a moment the well-known form, softly gliding through the darkness, would appear at his bedside.

First, there would be a few gentle and affectionate inquiries, gradually deepening into words of counsel. Then kneeling, her head touching his, the mother would begin in gentle words to pray for her boy, pouring forth her whole soul in desires and supplications. Mothers will know how her pleadings would run, and how the tears would mingle with the words. "I seem to feel the tears still," he writes in advanced years, "where sometimes they fell on my face.

Rising, then, with a good-night kiss, she was gone. The prayers often passed out of thought in slumber, and did not come to mind again for years -- but they were not lost. They were safely kept in some most sacred place of memory, for they reappear now with a beauty brighter than ever. I truly believe that my mother's prayers secretly preserved me while I moved carelessly amid numberless temptations, and walked on the brink of vice and crime."

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Another says of his mother: "My mother's habit was, every day, immediately after breakfast, to withdraw for an hour to her own room, and to spend that hour in reading the Bible, in meditation and in prayer. From that hour, as from a pure fountain, she drew the strength and the sweetness which enabled her to fulfill all her duties, and to remain unruffled by all the worries and pettinesses which are so often an intolerable trial in a home with many children. As I think of her life, and of all that it had to bear, I see the absolute triumph of Christian grace in the lovely ideal of a Christian mother. I never saw her temper disturbed; I never heard her speak one word of anger, or of complaint, or of idle gossip. I never observed in her any sign of a single sentiment unfitting to a soul which had drank of the river of the water of life, and which had fed upon manna in the barren wilderness."

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A Christian man said that the evening family worship had saved his home and its affection. The days were full of little frictions and irritations. He was a man of quick temper and hasty speech, and often was the home music jangled and unhappy. But the evening prayer set all things right again. The father and mother knelt, side by side, with their little children, and as they prayed, "Forgive us our sins, as we forgive those who sin against us," they were drawn close together again in love. The little strifes were healed, and their domestic joy was saved. The sun was not allowed to go down upon their differences. This is one of the blessings of family prayer. Christ comes to us beside the sacred home altar, diffuses His love, and speaks His word of peace.

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God's ideal for His children

"Rejoice in the Lord always. I will say it again: Rejoice!" Philippians 4:4

For most of us it is not easy to be always joyful; yet we should learn our lesson so well that whether amid circumstances of sorrow or of gladness -- our song shall never be interrupted.

Joy is God's ideal for His children. He means for them to be sunny-faced and happy-hearted. He does not wish them to be heavy-hearted and sad. He has made the world full of beauty and full of music. The mission of the gospel is to start songs wherever it goes. Its keynote is joy -- good tidings of great joy to all people. We are commanded to rejoice always.

This does not mean that the Christian's life is exempt from trouble, pain, and sorrow. The gospel does not give us a new set of conditions with the hard things left out. The Christian's home is not sheltered from life's storms -- any more than the worldly man's home is. Sickness enters the circle where the voice of prayer is heard, with its hot breath -- as well as the home where no heart adores and no knee bends before God. In the holiest home sanctuary, the loving group gathers about the bed of death, and there is sorrow of bereavement.

Nor is grief less poignant in the believer's case, than in that of the man who knows not Christ. Grace does not make . . .

love less tender,

the pang of affliction less sharp,

the sense of loss less keen, or

the feeling of loneliness less deep.

God does not give joy to His children by making them incapable of suffering. Divine grace makes the heart all the more tender, and the capacity for loving all the deeper; hence it increases rather than lessens the measure of sorrow when afflictions come.

But the joy of the Christian is something which lies too deep to be disturbed by the waves and tides of earthly trouble. It has its source in the very heart of God. Sorrow is not prevented by grace, but is swallowed up in the floods of heavenly joy. That was what Jesus meant when He talked to His disciples of joy just as He was about to go out to Gethsemane. He said their sorrow would be turned into joy, and that they would have a joy which the world could not take from them; that is, a joy which earth's deepest darkness could not put out. God's joy is not the absence of sorrow, but divine comfort overcoming sorrow -- sunshine striking through the black clouds, transfiguring them!

"You will be sorrowful, but your sorrow will be turned into joy!" John 16:20

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Only the eternal is important

"Set your minds on things above -- not on earthly things." Colossians 3:2

Over the doorway of a church is the inscription: "Only the eternal is important".

There are a great many things which are not worth our while to do. Some of us spend our days in poor trivialities which bless no one, and which will add no luster to our crown.

Waste no opportunity.

Despise no privilege.

Squander no moment.

One hour lost will leave a flaw.

There is just enough time for you to live your life well -- if you spend every moment of it in earnest, faithful duty. A life thus lived in unbroken diligence and faithfulness, will have no regrets when the end comes. Its work will be completed.

"So we fix our eyes not on what is seen, but on what is unseen. For what is seen is temporary, but what is unseen is eternal." 2 Corinthians 4:18

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Spiritual Greatness -- sanctified character, beauty of soul, the likeness of Jesus upon our lives and hearts -- shall endure forever. God wants to train every one of us into this true spiritual greatness.

Many Christians grow sadly disheartened, because they seem never to become any better. Year after year, the struggle goes on with the old bad habits and ugly dispositions, the old selfishness, pride, and hatefulness -- and they appear never to be growing victorious.

Yet Christ is a most patient teacher. He never wearies of our slowness and dullness as learners. He will teach the same lesson over and over, until we have learned it. If we only persevere, He will never tire of us, and His gentleness will make us great.

"Thus says the LORD, your Redeemer, the Holy One of Israel: I am the LORD your God, Who teaches you to profit, who leads you by the way you should go." Isaiah 48:17

"I will instruct you and teach you in the way you should go; I will guide you with My eye." Psalm 32:8

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What shall we ask God to do?

"We do not know what we should pray for as we ought" Romans 8:26

A minister sat with a father and mother by the bed of a child, who was hovering between life and death. He was about to pray for the little sufferer, and turning to the parents he asked, "What shall we ask God to do?" After some moments the father answered, with deep emotion: "I would not dare to choose. Leave it to God."

Would it not be better always to leave the decision to God, letting Him choose what it is best for Him to do for us or to give to us? We are not in the world to have ease and pleasure, to succeed in business, to do great things -- we are here to grow into strength and beauty of life and character, to accomplish the will of God and to have that will wrought out in our own life. Ofttimes . . .

the present must be sacrificed for the future,

the earthly given up to gain the Heavenly, and

pain endured for the sake of spiritual refining and enriching.

Christ does not seek to take away the burden -- rather, He would make us strong and brave to bear it.

If we are willing to let God choose for us, and accept what He gives, we shall never fail to receive the best -- perhaps not what the world would call the best -- but always God's best. We do not know what we should pray for as we ought, and we would better leave it to God.

We should be content to leave the guidance and choices of our lives in His hands. Think how wise He is -- knowing all things, knowing how to choose the best for us. Who does not know that this is better, safer, wiser than if we were to choose the way for ourselves?

The truest prayer is oftentimes that in which we creep into the bosom of God and rest there in silence. We do not know what to ask, and we dare not say even a word, lest it might be the wrong word, hence we simply wait before God in quietness and confidence. We know that what is best, our Father will do, and we trust Him to do what He will.

We are sure that God could relieve us of the things that are so hard for us to bear -- could, if He desired to. This is God's world, and nothing can get out of His hands. All we have to do is to lay our need before the throne of mercy, and to let God answer us as He will.

A beautiful story is told of a devout home in which were twin boys who were greatly beloved. In the absence of the father, both boys suddenly died. When the father returned, not knowing of the sorrow in his home, the mother met him at the door and said, "I have had a strange visitor since you went away."

"Who was it?" asked the father, not suspecting her meaning.

"Five years ago," his wife answered, "a friend lent me two precious jewels. Yesterday he came and asked me to return them to him. What shall I do?"

"Are they his?" asked the father, not dreaming of her meaning.

"Yes, they belong to him and were only lent to me."

"If they are his, he must have them again, if he desires."

Leading her husband to the boys' room, the wife drew down the sheet, uncovering the lovely forms, as white as marble. "These are my jewels," said the mother. "Five years ago God lent them to me, and yesterday He came and asked them again."

"Going a little farther, He fell with his face to the ground and prayed: My Father, if it is possible, may this cup be taken from me. Yet not as I will, but as You will." Matthew 26:39

"O My Father, if this cup cannot pass away from Me unless I drink it, may Your will be done." Matthew 26:42

"The Lord's will be done!" Acts 21:14

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Puckered sewing

There is a rich home which I visit, in which the most sacred and precious household treasure is a piece of puckered sewing. A little child one day picked up the mother's sewing -- some simple thing she had been working on -- and after half an hour's quiet work, brought it to her and gave it to her, saying, "Mother, I's been helping you, 'cause I love you so."

The stitches were long and the sewing was puckered -- but the mother saw only beauty in it all, for it told of her child's love and eagerness to please her. That night the little one sickened, and in a few hours was dead. No wonder the mother keeps that piece of puckered sewing among her rarest treasures. Nothing that the most skillful hands have wrought, among all her household possessions -- means to her half so much as that handkerchief with the child's unskilled work on it.

Just so, the things we do out of love to God, though they may be marred and imperfect, are precious to Him.

And whoever gives to one of these little ones even a cup of cold water because he is My disciple, surely I declare to you, he shall not lose his reward!" Matthew 10:42

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Martin Luther's favorite preacher

"Therefore I tell you, do not worry about your life, what you will eat or drink; or about your body, what you will wear. Is not life more important than food, and the body more important than clothes? Look at the birds of the air; they do not sow or reap or store away in barns, and yet your heavenly Father feeds them. Are you not much more valuable than they?" Matthew 6:25-26

Martin Luther, referring to the sin of worrying, says: "I have one preacher that I love better than any other on earth; it is my little tame robin, who preaches to me daily. I put some crumbs upon my window sill, especially at night. He hops onto the window sill when he wants his supply, and takes as much as he desires to satisfy his need. From thence he always hops to a little tree close by, lifts up his voice to God and sings his carol of praise and gratitude, then tucks his little head under his wing, goes fast to sleep, and leaves tomorrow to care for itself. He is the best preacher that I have on earth!"

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The stone was a diamond!

One of the great diamond fields in South Africa was discovered in this interesting way: One day a traveler entered the valley, and paused before a settler's door where a boy was amusing himself by throwing stones. One of the stones fell at the feet of the visitor; and he picked it up, and was about to return it to the boy when he saw a flash of light from it which arrested his attention, and made his heart beat with eager surprise. The stone was a diamond! The boy had no thought of its value; to him it was only a plaything. But to the eye of the man of knowledge, a gem of surprising value was unfolded in the rough covering.

So it is that many of the events of Divine Providence appear to ordinary eyes as uninteresting, without meaning, oftentimes as even unkindly, adverse. Yet in each event, there is wrapped up a divine treasure of good and blessing for the child of God! We need only eyes of Christian faith to find in every painful experience, a helper to our spiritual lives. Precious gems of rarest blessing are enclosed in the rough crusts of hardship, care, loss, and trial, which we are constantly coming upon in our life's way. We shall

find when we get to our Heavenly home, that many of the things from which we have shrunk as evils, have been the bearers to us of our richest treasures of good!

"And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose!" Romans 8:28

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In every tear, a rainbow sleeps!

A little story tells of a shepherd boy leading his sheep through a valley when a stranger, meeting him, and looking closely at his flock, said, "I see you have more white sheep than black."

"Yes," answered the boy; "it is always so."

It is always so with sheep; there are more white ones than black in every flock. But we may take a wider view, and we shall find that everywhere in life, there is more white than black.

It is so in nature. There are some desert spots on the earth; but these are few, and their extent is small in comparison with the broad, fertile fields which spread everywhere. There are cloudy days in every year; but there are more days of sunshine and blue skies.

There are some sad people in every community; but the number is far exceeded by those who are happy. There always are sick and crippled and blind and suffering ones; but they make only a small proportion of the whole population of any place -- the great majority being well, active, and strong.

In any life, too, there is more white than black. Some people are not willing to confess that this is true. They imagine that the evil days are more in number than the good, that there is more cloud than blue sky in their life, that they have more sorrow than joy. But this is never true. There may be days when the darkness swallows up the light -- but at evening time it shall be light. Really the list of mercies in any life, if added up through the years, would make a measureless record -- while the sad and painful things, if added up, would show an almost inappreciable list. The trouble with too many people, is that one little spot of darkness grows so in their vision that it hides a whole Heaven full of stars. One sorrow blots out the memory of a thousand joys. One disappointment makes them forget years of fulfilled hopes. Many people have a strangely perverted faculty of exaggerating their molehills of trouble into mountains, and looking at their blessings through diminishing lenses.

It would minister greatly to our gladness if we had a firm faith in the goodness of God's providence that rules in all the affairs of our life. There is infinitely more mercy than misery in the world, more pleasure than pain, more white than black. Then, even the things that seem adverse, have hidden in them a secret of blessing. In every tear, a rainbow sleeps!

"And we know that God causes all things to work together for good to those who love God, to those who are called according to His purpose!" Romans 8:28

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What we may do with the hard things in our life

A man brought a large, beautiful onyx stone to an artist, and said: "See how clear, pure, and transparent this stone is. What a fine one for your skill, were it not for this one fatal blemish!" Then he showed the artist an underlying tinge of iron-rust at one point, which, he said, made the stone almost worthless.

But the artist took it, and with matchless skill and delicacy wrought upon the stone, carving on it the graceful figure of a lovely woman. By most ingenious and patient use of his engraving tool, he fashioned it so that what had seemed an irreparable blemish, actually enhanced the beauty of the cameo.

This illustrates what we may do with the hard things in our life -- what God would have us do with them. We think we can never make anything good and worthy of our life, with our many discouraging faults and blemishes, and the obstinate hindrances there are in our lot. Really, however, we can make our life all the nobler, richer, holier, stronger, worthier -- by means of the very things which we think ruin our opportunities.

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How are things going in your church?

The question was asked of two church officers, "How are things going in your church?" The first spoke discouragingly. The church to which he belonged seemed dead, he said. The attendance was not large. The Sunday school had fallen off. The prayer meetings were only a handful. The men in the membership appeared indifferent. Even the pastor did not seem as enthusiastic as he used to be. The whole tone of the man's talk was pessimistic. There was not a glad, cheerful, thankful word in all he said.

The other man, to the same question, answered with enthusiasm. The meetings were full. The pastor was working with earnestness and hope. Everybody was eager to work. A tone of thanksgiving ran through all his words.

A church with such sunshiny people will have twice the success and blessing that a church can have whose people are gloomy, disheartened, and hopeless.

But it is not in religious life and work only, that there is so much lack of cheer and hope. In all lines of life, one finds the same spirit. In many homes there is almost an entire absence of the thanksgiving spirit. A shadow rests on all the life. There is an immense amount of whining heard. Nothing is quite satisfactory. There is little singing. The quest seems to be for faults and mistakes, something to blame and condemn.

How much better it would be, how much more of Heaven we would get into our homes if we would train ourselves to find the beautiful things and good things in each other, and in all our experiences and circumstances! Anybody can find fault -- it takes no genius to do this. Genius is far better shown in finding something to praise and commend in imperfect people, in hard conditions.

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Creep into our Heavenly Father's bosom

A beautiful story is told of Rudyard Kipling during a serious illness a few years ago. The nurse was sitting at his bedside on one of the anxious nights when the sick man's condition was most critical. She was watching him intently and noticed that his lips began to move. She bent over him, thinking he wished to say something to her. She heard him whisper very softly the words of the old familiar prayer of childhood,

"Now I lay me down to sleep, I pray the Lord my soul to keep. If I shall die before I wake,

I pray the Lord my soul to take." The nurse, realizing that her patient did not require her services, and that he was praying, said in apology for having intruded upon him, "I beg your pardon, Mr. Kipling; I thought you needed something." "I do," faintly replied the sick man; "I need my Heavenly Father. He alone can care for me now."

In his great weakness there was nothing that human help could do, and he turned to God and crept into his bosom, seeking the blessing and the care which none but God can give. That is what we need to do in every time of danger, of trial, of sorrow -- when the gentlest human love can do nothing -- creep into our Heavenly Father's bosom, saying, "Now I lay me down to sleep." That is the way to peace. Earth has no shelter in which it can be found -- but in God, the feeblest may find it.

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This was not the pleasant life which they dreamed of on their wedding day

There are many crucial lessons which Christians cannot learning the sunshine of prosperity. So the great Teacher calls us apart and shuts the doors, to keep out the light and exclude the world's noises -- and then He teaches us the songs of peace, of joy, of trust, of love. Thus the painful things of life have their place in the divine training of our lives.

Many of the things our Master calls us to do or to endure, do not seem to our eyes at the time the best things. Much of our life is disappointment. Sorrow comes oftentimes with its hot tears, its emptyings of the heart, its pain and bitterness.

We do not know when we set out on any bright, sunny path, into what experiences we shall be led. A noble young man married a sweet, beautiful girl. They were very happy. Life began for them in a garden of roses. Only three bright years had passed, however, when the young wife broke down in health. Then she became an invalid, much of the time unable to leave her room. The burden has been a very heavy one for the husband, requiring continual self-denial and sacrifice, besides the grief and anxiety it has brought.

This was not the pleasant life which they dreamed of on their wedding day. They thought only of gladness and prosperity. It never occurred to them that adversity or any trouble could break into their sweet paradise. But the Master has made no mistake. To those who have watched their lives and noted the fruit of the suffering in them, it is becoming apparent that love and holiness are written in all the painful lines of the long story. The young man has been growing all the years in strength, in gentleness, in purity of spirit, in self-control, in the peace of God, and in all manly virtues. It seemed a strange place to make him cast his nets -- into the deep waters of affliction and disappointment -- but he is now drawing them full of rich and noble blessing.

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The poet's child died

One writes of a poet whose pen was eloquent, who wrote many brilliant lines. The world listened and was charmed but not helped, not inspired to better things. The poet's child died, and then he dipped his pen in his heart's blood and wrote, and the world paused and listened and was blessed and quickened to more beautiful life.

Just so, before we can do anything that is really worth while in helping our fellow-men, we must pass through a training of suffering, in which alone we can learn the lessons that will fit us for this holier service.

"I have refined you, but not as silver is refined. Rather, I have refined you in the furnace of suffering!"
Isaiah 48:10

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"He makes me lie down in fresh, tender, green pastures. He leads me beside the still and restful waters. He refreshes and restores my soul" Psalm 23:2-3

A pastor who had ministered hard and long, and had rarely been absent from his church, was broken down with a severe sickness, and for months could not come to his accustomed place. During his long absence he wrote to the church words like these: "I understand that when I am physically unable to do the work I would be doing gladly if I could -- it is not my work at all. It would have been mine if I were well -- but now my only duty is to be quiet and still. Christian duty is not all activity; sometimes it is to sweetly wait on the Lord' timing. My ministry is not broken or even interrupted by this experience. My work for my Master has not been stopped -- its form only has been changed."

No doubt this pastor was doing as much for his people those quiet days away from them, as he had ever done in his active days in their midst.

We dare not take comfort from this teaching, if we are not called from our duty in some providential way. Some of us are too easily taken from our work. Small excuses are allowed to draw us away. Obstacles are not always meant to interrupt our efforts -- oftentimes they are meant to be overcome, making us more earnest and persistent. There is altogether too much lazy resignation in some Christians. Their resignation may be indolence. We must be sure the Good Shepherd calls us to "lie down in green pastures" before we stop in our service. But if lying down is our duty, then we must do it as joyfully as ever we listened to a call to move strenuously forward.

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A mother and her child sat side by side. Both love Christ and are following Him.

The teenage girl is sweet, beautiful, a picture of grace. She never has known a struggle, has scarcely ever been called to make a sacrifice, has never found it hard to do right. Her face is unblemished, without a line.

The mother has had cares, struggles, and fights with evil, has endured wrongs, has carried burdens, has suffered, has had bitter sorrows, has been misunderstood, has poured out her life in love's sacrifices.

One would say that the child is the more beautiful, the fairer and lovelier in her life. But as the two appear in the eyes of Christ, while both are beautiful, the mother wears the holier loveliness. She has learned in the furnace of suffering. She has grown stronger through her enduring of struggle. The lines of her face, which seem to be blemishes on her fair beauty, are the marks of Jesus Christ.

"I have refined you, but not as silver is refined. Rather, I have refined you in the furnace of suffering!"
Isaiah 48:10

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As we grow older

"Even to your old age and gray hairs I am He, I am He who will sustain you. I have made you and I will carry you; I will sustain you and I will rescue you!" Isaiah 46:4

As we grow older, there should be a constant gaining, never a losing in our spiritual life. Every year should find us living on a higher plane than the year before. Old age should always be the best of life, not marked by emptiness and decay -- but by nobler fruitfulness and more gracious beauty. Paul was growing old, when he spoke of forgetting things behind, and reaching forth to things before. His best was yet to be attained. So it should always be with Christian old age. We must ever be turning heavenward, toward nobler life and holier beauty. This can be the story of our experience only if our life is hid with Christ in God. Torn away from Christ, no life can keep its zest or its radiance.

"The righteous will flourish like a palm tree, they will grow like a cedar of Lebanon; planted in the house of the LORD, they will flourish in the courts of our God. They will still bear fruit in old age, they will stay fresh and green!" Psalm 92:12-14

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A place of spiritual refreshment

A young Christian who had been for many weeks in a hospital, undergoing a painful operation and then slowly recovering, wrote me in the days of her convalescence, "I have found my little white bed here in the hospital a bit of God's green pasture." Not only had it proved a place of rest and peace to her -- but also a place of spiritual refreshment.

The hard things are not meant to mar our life -- they are meant to make it all the braver, the worthier, the nobler. Adversities and misfortunes are meant to sweeten our spirits, not to make them sour and bitter.

"Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep Your word." Psalm 119:67

"It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I may learn Your statutes." Psalm 119:71

"I know, O LORD, that Your judgments are righteous, and that in faithfulness You have afflicted me." Psalm 119:75

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Nothing noble is attained easily

"These in white robes -- who are they, and where did they come from?"

"These are those who have come out of the great tribulation!" Revelation 7:13-14

In John's vision the noble saints, shining in white garments and bearing the symbols of battle and victory, had come, not out of ease and soft circumstances; not out of experiences of luxury, from covey homes, from favored spots and genial conditions. Rather they had won their nobleness in hard circumstances, in fierce struggle, in sharp temptation, in bitter sorrow, in keen suffering.

Some of us grow impatient of our difficulties and hardships. We brood over them and come to think that we have not been fairly dealt with. Some of us resent our trials and think that God has not been kind or

just with us.

A young man told of his hard trials and losses, his sore bereavements and sorrows, his severe disappointments and struggles, and of the wrongs and injustices he had suffered from those who ought to have been his friends. But all that had seemed so hard, meant an opportunity for this young man to grow into manly strength and heroic character.

Those who have the battles and the trials, and overcome in them, shall wear white robes and carry palm branches. They shall be among the victors at the last. Nothing noble is attained easily. The crowns of life can be won only on the fields of struggle.

"Do not be afraid of what you are about to suffer. I tell you, the devil will put some of you in prison to test you, and you will suffer persecution for ten days. Be faithful, even to the point of death, and I will give you the crown of life!" Revelation 2:10

"All who overcome will inherit all these blessings, and I will be their God, and they will be My children!" Revelation 21:7

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"My poor child, you are so ugly that no one will ever love you!"

The story is told of a distinguished woman, that when she was a girl she was so homely that even her mother said to her one day: "My poor child, you are so ugly that no one will ever love you!" The cruel words fell into the child's heart -- but instead of making her bitter, they had just the opposite effect. She determined that if her face was homely, she would make her life so beautiful that people would love her. She began to be kind to everybody, to be loving, thoughtful, gentle, and helpful. She never became lovely in features -- but she did become the good angel of the community in which she lived. It was love in her heart which transformed her life and saved her from utter disheartenment.

Just so, there are those whose lives have been hurt in some way, and who seem doomed to carry their marring or wounding through all their days -- but whom the love of Christ can yet restore to beauty and strength. There is no ruined life, which He cannot build up again into loveliness. There is no defect, which He cannot turn into usefulness. To know that Christ on His throne of glory sympathizes with our weaknesses and our infirmities -- puts into the heart a new secret of joy which will transform the dreariest life into Heavenly gladness.

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His crippled leg God's gift!

A Christian physician, whose career has been full of faith and noble ministry, gives this experience. He was a poor boy, and a cripple! One day he was watching some boys on the ball-field. They were active, strong and wealthy. As he looked on, his heart grew bitter with envy.

A young man who stood beside him noted the discontent on his face, and said to him, "You wish you were in those boys' place, don't you?"

"Yes, I do," was the answer.

"I reckon God gave them money, education and health," continued the young man, "to help them to be of some account in the world. Did it ever strike you," he continued, after a moment's pause, "that He gave you your lame leg for the same reason -- to make a man of you?"

The boy gave no answer, and turned away. He was angry -- but he did not forget the words. His crippled leg God's gift! To teach him patience, courage, perseverance! To make a man of him! He thought of the words until he saw their meaning. They kindled hope and cheer, and he determined to conquer his hindrance. He grew heroic. He soon learned that what was true of his lame leg, was true also of all the difficulties, hindrances, and hard conditions of his life -- they were all God's gifts to him to help him to be of some account in the world -- to make a man of him!

"Before I was afflicted I went astray, but now I keep Your word." Psalm 119:67

"It is good for me that I was afflicted, that I may learn Your statutes." Psalm 119:71

"I know, O LORD, that Your judgments are righteous, and that in faithfulness You have afflicted me." Psalm 119:75

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The suffering of a child transformed all the household

It is one of the blessings of pain or suffering, that it softens hearts, and woos out gentleness and kindness.

There was once a whole family in the slums which was completely changed through the influence of a deformed child who became the angel of the home. The father was a drudge; the lads were coarse and crude; and the mother, overworked and far from strong, had fallen into untidy habits.

But a crippled child was born into that home, and it was the means of drawing out the sympathy, love and tenderness of the whole family. The father nursed and petted his child in the evenings; the boys made playthings for her, and showed their affection in all sorts of pleasant ways; the mother kept the window clean, that her child, pillowed on the table, might look out on the court. Thus a large and blessed ministry of kindness, was inspired by what seemed a misfortune. The suffering of a child transformed all the household, making each heart gentler, more thoughtful, more unselfish.

It is often so. Many a sweet home owes most of its sweetness to a quiet, patient sufferer, whose pain has been the messenger of God to soften hearts and enrich common lives with love and tenderness.

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Unconscious kindness

A young woman who had passed through deep sorrows said to a friend one day, in speaking of the comfort certain people had given her unconsciously, "I wish some people knew just how much their faces can comfort one! I often ride down in the same streetcar with your father, and it has been such a help to me to sit next to him. There is something so uplifting and kind and strong about him, that it has been a comfort just to feel he was beside me. Sometimes, when I have been utterly depressed and discouraged, he has seemed somehow to know just the right word to say to me; but if he didn't talk, why, I just looked at his face, and that helped me. He probably has not the least idea of it, either, for I know him so slightly, and I don't suppose people half realize, anyway, how much they are helping or hindering others!"

There is a great deal of this unconscious kindness in the world. Moses knew not that his face shone. The best people are not aware of their goodness. Kindness that is aware of itself, has lost much of its charm. Kindnesses that are done unconsciously, mean the most.

"Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience. Bear with each other and forgive whatever grievances you may have against one another. Forgive as the Lord forgave you. And over all these virtues put on love, which binds them all together in perfect unity." Colossians 3:12-14

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Eighty years of plain, simple, lowly, Christlike goodness

Not long ago, an aged Christian woman closed her earthly life. She had lived always in very plain circumstances. She had very little education. She had no peculiar gift for any distinct form of Christian activity. She had never taught a Sunday-school class, nor led a woman's prayer meeting, nor taken part in a missionary society, nor been connected with any sort of Christian association.

But for sixty of her eighty years she had been a true, earnest and sincere Christian. She had been a faithful wife, and a loving, self-denying mother. She had brought up her family in the fear of the Lord. She had lived a quiet, patient, gentle life.

Around her coffin there sat a large circle of her descendants -- her own children and grandchildren. Her life-story was a record, not of any great deeds, nor of any fine things done -- but of eighty years of plain, simple, lowly, Christlike goodness. Yet it never can be known until the Judgment Day, when the books shall be opened, what blessings that humble life left at its close in the world. Its silent, unconscious influence poured out through all the long years into other lives, making them better, happier, holier, sweeter.

Such a ministry of goodness is within the reach of every Christian. It requires no brilliant gifts, and no great wealth. It is a ministry which the plainest and the lowliest may fulfill. Its influence is incalculable!

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The only true ideal of all Christian life

Jenny Lind (known as "the Swedish Nightingale") once said to another, in accounting for the motive and spirit of her wonderful singing, "I sing to God!" She meant that she looked into God's face, as it were, and consciously sang to Him. She did not sing to the vast audience that hung on her words and was held spellbound by them. She was scarcely conscious of any face before her, but God's. She thought of no listening ear, but God's.

We may not all be able to enter into such perfect relation with God as did this marvelous singer -- but this is the only true ideal of all Christian life. We should do each piece of work for God.

The business man should do all his business for God.

The artist should paint his picture for God.

The writer should write his book for God.

The farmer should cultivate his ground for God.

This means that we are always engaged in the Father's business, and must do it all in a way that He will approve.

Jesus was a carpenter, for many years working at the carpenter's bench. We are sure that He did each piece of work for His Father's eye. He did it skillfully, conscientiously, beautifully. He did not skimp it nor hurry through it, so as to get away from the shop earlier.

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Prove it!

It is related that the French artist Gustave Dore was once wandering in the mountains of Switzerland, when some officials met him and demanded his passport. "I do not have it with me," he replied, "but my name is Gustave Dore." "Prove it, if you are," replied the officers, knowing who Dore was -- but not believing that this was he. Taking a piece of paper the artist hastily sketched a group of peasants who were standing near, and did it with such grace and skill that the officials exclaimed, "Enough, you are Dore!"

The world cares little for a mere profession. We say we are Christians, and the challenge is, "Prove it!" If we are of Christ, then we must do the works of Christ, live the life of Christ, and show the spirit of Christ. The artist's skillful drawing proved his identity. Just so, we must prove that we are the followers of our Master by the love, the grace, the beauty, the holiness of our life.

Religion is not merely a matter of creed and profession, or of church-going and public worship; it is far more a matter of daily life. It is not how we behave on Sundays, nor the kind of creed we hold, nor the devoutness of our worship; it is the way we act at home, in school, in business, in society, in our associations with men. It is vitally important that all who profess Christ -- shall manifest Christ's beauty in their life and character. It is not enough to preach the gospel in words; the gospel that honors Christ truly, is the gospel men read in our daily life.

"Whoever says he abides in Christ ought to walk and conduct himself in the same way in which He walked and conducted Himself." 1 John 2:6

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We may follow Christ very imperfectly, stumbling at every step

A mother found her boy trying to draw. His attempts were very crude -- but to her quick eye and eager heart, the drawings were beautiful. They had in them the prophecies of the child's future, and the mother stooped and kissed him in her gladness, praising his work. Compared with the artist's masterpiece when the boy had reached his prime -- these rough sketches had no loveliness whatever. But they were beautiful in their time as the boy's first efforts.

The same is true of all faithful efforts to learn how to live Christly. We may follow Christ very imperfectly, stumbling at every step, realizing but in the smallest measure the qualities of ideal discipleship. Yet if we are doing our best, and are continually striving toward those things are Christlike -- our efforts and attainments are beautiful in the eye of the Master, and pleasing to Him.

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God make me beautiful within

The ideal Christian life is one that is beautiful both within and without. In the description of the King's daughter, the Bible says that she is "all glorious within; her clothing is woven with gold." The splendor of her heart within, is matched by her outer clothing.

One day a thoughtful girl was reading in an old Christian book. It was time-worn -- but on its pages were golden words which enshrined the wisdom of an ancient age. As the girl read, her eyes lingered on one rare sentence, which seemed to have a special message for her that day. As she pondered it, it took fast hold of her thought until she began to breathe it as her own. It was a prayer, "God make me beautiful within."

It was the beginning of a new life for the sincere girl. God had found her and touched her heart. She was hearing a voice which called her to an experience that she had not known before.

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The sweetener and beautifier

A Missionary in Tokyo tells of a Japanese woman who came to speak about having her daughter received into the school for girls which the teacher was conducting. She asked if only beautiful girls were admitted.

"No," was the reply; "we take any girl who desires to come."

"But," continued the woman, "all your girls that I have seen are very beautiful."

The teacher replied, "We tell them of Christ, and He transforms their hearts, and this makes their lives and faces lovely."

Christ is the sweetener and beautifier of the lives and the very faces of those who become His faithful followers. He gives them peace -- and peace brightens and transforms their features. He teaches them love, and love makes them beautiful.

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The things which hurt and scar our lives

"Get rid of all bitterness, rage and anger, brawling and slander, along with every form of malice. Be kind and compassionate to one another, forgiving each other, just as in Christ God forgave you." Ephesians 4:31-32

The things which hurt and scar our lives are resentment, unforgiveness, bitter feelings, and desire for revenge. Men may beat us until our bones are broken -- but if love fails not in our hearts meanwhile, we have come through the experience unharmed, with no marks of injury upon us.

One writing of a friend who was dreadfully hurt by another, says that the woman will be probably scarred for life, and then goes on to speak of the wondrous patience in her sufferings, and of the peace of God which failed not in her heart for a moment. The world may hurt our bodies -- but if we suffer as Christ suffered, there will be no trace of scarring or wounding in our inner life.

We may learn from our Master how to endure wrong so as not to be hurt by it. "When He suffered, He threatened not; but committed Himself to Him that judges righteously." He did not take the righting of His wrongs into His own hands. He had power and could have summoned legions of angels to fight for Him -- but He did not lift a finger in His own defense.

God could build a wall of granite about us, if He desired, so that no enemy can touch us. He could shield us so that no power on earth can do us any hurt. He could deliver us from every enemy. We should remember when we are suffering injury or injustice at the hands of others -- that God could have prevented it. He could have held back the hand, that it should not touch us. He could have so ordered it, that no harm would be done to us, that we would suffer no injury.

This wrong that you are suffering, whatever it is, is therefore from God, something He permits to come to you. It is not an accident, a lawless occurrence, something that has broken away from the divine control, something that God could not prevent breaking into your life. He reigns everywhere, in things small and great.

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What would Jesus do?

A little girl, applying for membership in a church, when asked by the pastor what it is for her to be a Christian, replied: "I suppose it is to do what Jesus would do, and to behave as Jesus would behave -- if He were a little girl and lived at our house."

There could be no better definition of a consecrated life. We are always to ask, "What would Jesus do?" and then try to do the same. A Christian is always a Christian, wherever he may go. He is never off duty. He always represents Christ. He must always strive to be what Jesus would be, and do what Jesus would do in his place.

"Leaving you an example, that you should follow in His steps." 1 Peter 2:21

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The secret

Soon after Judson reached Burma, he one day met a native woman. He could not speak a word of the language -- but touching the woman's hand he looked up and pointed upward. She went home and told her friends that she had met an angel. His very face seemed transfigured.

Just so, every soul writes its story more or less distinctly on the face -- which is the index of the inner life. Discontent soon shows its fevered spirit in fretted features. Anger soon reveals its unlovableness in the sinister lines it stamps on the brow. Lust in time blots the delicate marks of purity and innocence from the countenance, and leaves instead the tarnished marrings wrought by its own vileness. There is no secret cherished sin which does not work up out of the heart, however deeply it is hidden there, and reveal itself in some way in the face.

Men think their unhallowed secret sin is not known -- but oftentimes they are mistaken; the thing they suppose hidden from all eyes but their own -- all eyes see in telltale signs which no art can obscure.

In like manner, godliness in the heart works its way up into the face, and prints its own beauty there. Love in the life, softens the features and gives them a warmth like the gentle beauty of spring flowers. Peace in the heart, soon gives a quiet calm to the countenance. Purity in the soul, shows itself in the upward look and the thoughtful reverence which tells of communion with God. Benevolence writes its autograph on brow and cheek. Thus in a sense, even the physical features share in the transfiguration of the life of faith and holiness.

Drummond tells of a young girl who became wondrously beautiful in her life, growing into a rare Christlikeness. Her friends wondered what the secret could be. She wore upon her bosom a little locket which she always kept closed, refusing to allow anyone to see within it. Once, however, when she was very ill, a friend was permitted to open it, and found there only a little piece of paper, bearing the words, "Whom not having seen, I love." This told the whole story. Her love for the unseen Christ was the secret of that beautiful life which had so impressed itself upon her friends.

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What the person IS, mars the value of what he DOES!

A pastor was commending religion to a boy, expressing the hope that he would trust in God in his youth. "Religion is a continual joy," he said. "Look at your sister, Sarah. How much that dear girl enjoys her religion!"

"Yes," drawled the boy, with frank candor, "Sadie may enjoy her religion -- but nobody else in the house enjoys it!"

There are professing Christians of whom it is true that their families do not enjoy their religion. It is not sweet. It is not a comfort to people. It is critical, rasping, censorious, exacting. It was a serious condemnation of this girl's religion, that her family did not enjoy it.

A keen observer has said, "Many a woman spoils her testimony in the church, by her tongue in the kitchen." Another has said, "There are people who lead us Heavenward -- but stick pins in us all the way!" In a conversation overheard on a railway train, one reports catching this fragment of talk: "Yes, I suppose she's a Christian -- but she isn't pleasant to live with!"

A Christian who isn't pleasant to live with, is not the kind that is most needed in this world. We may do all our duties faithfully, conscientiously, bearing our share of the burdens and cares -- and yet, if we are not pleasant to live with, we fail in the most essential quality of love. An unlovely spirit, frowns and chilling looks, sharp impatient words -- overbalance the painstaking Christian service that does so much to help in practical ways. What the person IS, mars the value of what he DOES!

"Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience." Colossians 3:12

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A sweetbrier life

One writes of a sweetbrier life. A little group of girls were together one rainy afternoon. One of them said to the others, "Do you smell the sweetbrier down by the gate? It is always fragrant -- but never so fragrant as

in the rain."

One of the girls said impulsively that this reminded her of her godly aunt. When asked to explain, she said, "Why, you see, there are ever so many roses that are fragrant -- the roses themselves, I mean -- but the sweetbrier is the only one whose leaves also are fragrant. That is why it makes me think of my aunt, because everything about her, everything she does, not the large things only -- but all the common, every-day things -- the leaves as well as the blossoms -- have something beautiful in them. There is something in her spirit, a gentleness, a thoughtfulness, a kindness, a graciousness -- which goes out in everything she does, in every word she speaks, in every influence that breathes from her life."

Just so, the first thing the love of Christ does when He saves a person, is to sweeten all the life, the disposition, the spirit, the temper, the manners.

"Therefore, as God's chosen people, holy and dearly loved, clothe yourselves with compassion, kindness, humility, gentleness and patience." Colossians 3:12

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The Great Stone Face!

One of Hawthorne's short stories tells of the Great Stone Face. The rocks on a mountain were so grouped that, looked at from a certain point, there was the appearance of a human face. There was a tradition among the people, that some day a man would come to the valley with the same gracious features which this stone face bore, a man who would have the noble character and personality represented by these features.

A boy, Ernest, listened one evening to this tradition from his mother's lips, and the tradition sank into the boy's heart and stayed there. He would look up at the noble stone face and wonder when the man would come who should fulfill the old prophecy.

Through days and years, while the boy grew to manhood, and the man into old age -- he continued to look at the stone face, pondering its noble beauty and unconsciously growing himself all the while into the beauty which his soul had idealized in that image on the mountain. He grew into wisdom and strength, and became a friend of the people and their teacher. By and by a poet, listening one day to Ernest's words as he spoke to his neighbors, discovered the resemblance and exclaimed, "Why, Ernest himself is like the great stone face!" Looking at that gracious face all the years, pondering its features -- he had been transformed into its image!

Just so, those who look intently at the face of Christ, entering into the spirit of His life, walking in daily fellowship with Him, bearing His cross, loving Him and doing His will -- take His image upon their own lives, grow like Him, until neighbors and friends begin to see the resemblance and say, "Why, they are like the blessed Lord Jesus Christ!"

"But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord -- are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory!" 2 Corinthians 3:18

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The ability to see ourselves as others see us

A young woman writes that on three successive Sundays she heard three different preachers, and that each one of them spoke very earnestly on the importance of self-control. This persistent recurrence of the same lesson had set her to thinking of the subject, and she wrote with some alarm regarding her own lack of self-mastery. She saw that she had been allowing herself to fall into certain habits which are very improper, which are marring the sweetness of her disposition and making her disagreeable.

She has been living in a boarding-house, and she began to see that she had been behaving herself in a very selfish way toward others. She had permitted herself to become exacting and critical, finding fault with everything. She had been acting like a peevish, fretful child, losing her temper and giving way to her feelings in a most incorrect fashion.

It does not take long for one to get a reputation as a discontented person, as unreasonable, as hard to get along with, as disagreeable, or as a gossip, or a meddler in other people's matters. We need to keep it in our prayers continually that we may have the ability to see ourselves as others see us.

It would be a good thing if we all were to read the thirteenth chapter of First Corinthians at least once a week all through our life. It would be like looking into a mirror which would expose the unattractive things in our behavior, that we might cure them.

"Love is patient, love is kind. It does not envy, it does not boast, it is not proud. It is not rude, it is not self-seeking, it is not easily angered, it keeps no record of wrongs. Love does not delight in evil but rejoices with the truth. It always protects, always trusts, always hopes, always perseveres." 1 Corinthians 13:4-7

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That will do

Someone says that the sentence, "That will do," has done more harm than any other sentence in the English language. It indicates the acceptance of a standard below the highest. A person has done something which is not his best. He recognizes the fact; but he is too indolent to do it over again, or he is impatient to get the matter off his hands, and decides to let it go as it is.

"That will do," is a confession of unworthiness in what is done, and of indolence in the person who does it. He knows he could do better -- but decides to let it pass.

Many catastrophes come in later years from doing imperfect or careless work in youth. When digging for the foundation of a great building, the workmen came upon a piece of old wall. "That will do," they said; and they left it in the new wall, building around it. The great structure went up, and was filled with business. One day there was a crash. The fragment of old wall had given way, and the whole building fell in ruin!

Continually young people are leaving a fault, a wrong habit, a weakness, a flaw -- in the foundation walls of their character. It would be hard to dig it out. It is easier just to build over it and around it, and so they let it stay. "That will do," they say apologetically. Then afterwards, in some great stress or strain, the character fails and falls into ruins; it is seen then, that that careless piece of foundation-building was the cause of it all.

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You can't rub it out

A moment after we have done a wrong thing, we may bitterly repent it. We may be willing to give all we have in the world to undo it, to make it as though it never had been. But in vain. A deed done takes its place in the universe as a fact, and never can be recalled.

"Don't write there, sir!" said a boy to a young man in the waiting-room of a railway station, as he saw him take off his ring and begin with a diamond to scratch some words on the window. "Don't write there, sir!"

"Why not?" asked the young man.

"Because you can't rub it out." We should be sure before we speak a word or do an act, that we shall be willing to have it stand forever.

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The secret of a beautiful Christlike life

There is a story of a young woman who was spending the day with a party of friends in the country, rambling through the woods and among the hills. Early in the morning she picked up a branch of sweetbrier and put it in

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