

The Joy of Service

by J.R. Miller

The sermon emphasizes that true and abiding joy is found in serving others out of love, reflecting the character of Christ.

Scripture: Nehemiah 8:10, John 12:28, Philippians 4:4

Topics: "Joy in Service", "Christian Duty"

Description

J.R. Miller emphasizes the profound joy found in serving others, asserting that true happiness stems from a life dedicated to service and love. He explains that while many seek joy in various pursuits, the ultimate source of joy is in selfless acts of service, reflecting the character of Christ, who exemplified this through His life and sacrifice. Miller encourages Christians to embrace their duty to rejoice and to actively engage in serving others, as this not only uplifts the spirit but also glorifies God. He warns against the dangers of idleness and self-centeredness, which can lead to despair, and highlights the importance of maintaining a joyful disposition as a testament to one's faith. Ultimately, he calls for a life that mirrors Christ's love and service, promising that such a life will yield the deepest and most abiding joy.

Transcript

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J. R. Miller, 1902

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The Joy of SERVICE

There are many sources of joy. All men are in quest of happiness, and upon a thousand paths, the shoe-prints of the seekers are found. There is nothing available in all the world, nothing which holds the slightest promise or hope of happiness, which has not been tried by someone eager to find the magic secret.

We are accustomed to say that the only true, deep, unending joy--is that which we may find in God. The bible has many promises of happiness--but they all point to spiritual and eternal sources. We read of the joy of the Lord, of rejoicing in God; Christ promises His own joy to His followers. Joy, therefore, is the inheritance of the Christian--he alone has a right to claim it. Yet not all Christians are happy. Many whose faith in Christ is unmistakable, have joy only in the quiet lulls of life. They are easily disturbed. The song of today--is choked with tears tomorrow.

It is worth our while to try to find the secret of true and abiding Christian joy. We often hear it said that trust in God yields joy, or that a blameless life produces happiness. There is one kind of living, however, which more than any other, contains the master secret of joy. It is a life of service. It begins in consecration to Christ: we must, first of all, be His servants. It includes trust--reposing upon God. But there can be no continued quiet confidence, if there be no activity in Christian life. Still water stagnates. Even trust without action, soon loses its restfulness.

Work itself is always a helper of happiness. Indolence is never truly happy. The happiest man--is the busy man. Even physical health depends largely upon regular occupation. No man, able for duty, who is not busy, can be truly or deeply happy. The idle man may be living a life of pleasure--but it is not a life of real happiness. Work is a condition of joy.

It is a blessing that most people, when sorrow comes, dare not pause to indulge their grief. Their duties are waiting for them, waiting so clamorously, that they cannot linger even for the tender sentiment of sorrow. There is scarcely time to wait for the funeral to be over, after a bereavement, before imperative tasks must receive attention. It is well that it is so. The necessary activity keeps the heart from breaking, and preserves the life from the morbidity which so often sorrow produces when the hands lie folded.

Work is therefore a secret of happiness. It saves the heart from being overcharged. The emotions which otherwise would lie pent up, to the hurt of the life, find vent and are wrought out in activities which bless others, while they produce health and wholesomeness in him who performs them. No worse mistake can be made by one in grief--than to drop life's duties and tasks out of the hands, and cut one's self off from the common duties and ministries of life. God's comfort is not found in this way. Joy does not come to the one who nourishes his sorrow in idle brooding; it is found only in the earnest and faithful doing of every duty. Work has saved many a life from despair in time of great grief.

But there is something higher and diviner yet, than even work alone. Work may be selfish. It may be solely for the advancement of one's own interests, without any thought of another's benefit or comfort. Even then there is blessing in it; for it fills the hands and occupies the thoughts--there is good in occupation itself. But if we add to work--the element of serving, with love and thought of others--we have one of the noblest of all the secrets of joy!

Serving comes from loving; it is love's expression. Serving that is not inspired by love--yields no joy. Love that does not serve--is not love at all. The measure of self-denial that one is ready to suffer--is the measure of the love that is in one's heart. Love that will not sacrifice is only a sentiment, a fair blossom from which no fruit comes. Love is ready always for serving.

Wherever we see life in its best forms and developments, it has in it, the element of service. In every glimpse of heavenly life shown to us in the Bible--we find service as the highest expression of the life's spirit. The angels, who appear, coming and going between heaven and earth, are always engaged in service for some of God's children. Their mission is described in one sentence: "Are they not all ministering spirits, sent forth to minister for those who shall be heirs of salvation?" They come to earth expressly to serve. We know that the angels possess the secret of joy; they are represented as praising God continually. It is the joy of service that fills their hearts. Never a thought of SELF poisons their pure gladness!

The greatest and highest of all beings, is God Himself. His is the life which had no beginning, and shall have no ending. All other life--all angel life, all human life--flows from the one great fountain. Yet God lives not for Himself. God is love, and the very essence of love is always service. He is ever giving out blessing and good to men. Every revealing of God, shows Him to us as a God who serves His creatures. He thinks ever of their good. He works continually in providence, in most thoughtful, gentle serving. The highest reach of the Divine serving was in the incarnation, when God so loved the world that He gave His only begotten Son.

Then, in the story of the life of Christ, where we have the revealing of the Divine character in all its beauty--we find the most wonderful serving. Never did any other man live for his friends--as Jesus lived for His. He kept nothing back from them. On the last night of His life, as if to express His love in a way that never could be forgotten, we see Him clad as a servant, washing His disciples' feet. No picture of Jesus in all the Gospels is truer to the very heart of His life than this. He came not to be ministered unto--but to minister. He took on Him the form of a servant--to show the Divine spirit. A little later He actually gave His life in his matchless service of love. Thus this divinest of all ideals of life--is seen serving even unto the uttermost.

We know that in this serving--Jesus found deep and holy joy. It used to be taught that He was a sad man. There was a tradition that He never smiled. But this conception of Jesus could not have been true. He was indeed a man of sorrows--but there was in His heart a deep joy which even His sorrows could not quench. He spoke distinctly and repeatedly of His joy and of His peace. One of the New Testament writers tells us, that it was for the joy set before Him that He endured the cross, despising the shame.

We can readily think of many sources in the joy of Christ. His fellowship with His Father was never broken, nor even most faintly shadowed for a moment. He was sinless; there was never in His heart the least trace of that sorrow which mars the sweetest human joy, the consciousness of having done evil. His perfect faith made all spiritual things--eternal realities to Him, more real than the rocks and hills and trees and paths of earth. He never groped in the darkness of doubt and fear, as at times the holiest saints on earth must do when faith's vision grows dim. He saw the ultimate meaning of all sorrow, and looked to the end and final harvest of all sacrifice and loss. He was never discouraged; He knew that His work would not fail. He had full confidence in the future of His ministry, and in the ultimate triumph of His kingdom.

Yet it is evident, that the richest of all the sources of the joy of Christ--was in His love and service. It was the joy of doing good, of giving comfort, of saving the lost--that meant the most to Him. The travail of His soul was forgotten, in the knowledge that His people would be redeemed by His blood.

This joy of service Christ bequeathed also to His followers, "that My joy may be in you." There are other sources, too, of Christian joy: forgiveness, childship in God's family, eternal hope, Divine fellowship; but the joy that comes from serving, is the purest and fullest of all.

We have a hint of this, in the Master's word, "It is more blessed to give--than to receive." This is a much deeper saying than we usually think it to be. There is much giving to us, that is very wonderful. There are many and great spiritual blessings which come to us, as gifts. Salvation is all of grace; we earn nothing that we receive. We have the gift of pardon, of life, of the Holy Spirit, of the inheritance in glory; but it is more blessed for us to give--than to receive even these Divine gifts. The richest, truest, deepest, realest blessing that can come to any heart--is the blessing of giving, of doing, of suffering, of sacrificing for others, of serving them in love.

The joy of service is therefore the sweetest, holiest joy possible. After the best happiness that can come through all other pure sources, human or Divine, the joy that means the most to the heart and life--is that which is found in loving and serving others in the name of Christ.

Without this element--no other joy is complete. God's best gifts to us would not make us deeply and securely happy--if we only received and enjoyed them, and did not become servants of others with them. Even communion with God would fail to bring us true and abiding blessing--if we did not go out from the holy presence on ministries of love to those who need. No blessing we keep for ourselves alone, can give

us deep and holy gladness. No vision of angels, no theophany, can produce such thrills of rapture in the heart--as are enjoyed in some lowly service of love.

So it is always in life in this world. Those who sit by fever beds, and minister to human need in its countless forms, seem to miss much that is very beautiful. Their holy ministry keeps them away from places of honor, even from scenes of spiritual ecstasy. While at their common tasks--they see not the angel hosts nor hear the music. Absorption in the duties of human love in the home, or among the poor, causes men and women to miss much that the world esteems. But meanwhile there is a higher reward, not only in the store at the end--but even now, for those who serve. They enter more fully and deeply into the joy of the Lord; and then, in heaven, they will be received into holier fellowship, closer to Christ.

After all, only that life is worth living--which has in it the spirit and quality of service and sacrifice. Dora Greenwell says, "I have often felt significance in the fact that nothing belonging to Christ's kingdom tells much upon the world--which has not in it the element of sacrifice, and of Christlike willingness to participate in pain. A righteous man may effect much good through beneficent deeds and wise and kind plans for the benefit of others; but it is to the man for whom some, perhaps, would even dare to die, the man who himself, if need were, would die for men, that the hearts of men cleave."

It is only life itself--that is worth giving to others. That which we do for others or give to them, and which costs us nothing, has small blessing or help in it for them. A man may speak to us eloquently; but if it is only words that he speaks, we are no richer for listening to them. Only when we serve in love, giving out life itself in our ministry--do we either find deep joy for our own heart, or make others truly happier or more blessed!

The DUTY of Joy

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

"The joy of the Lord is your strength!" Nehemiah 8:10

They are in the habit of saying in the East, that in India the flowers yield no fragrance, the birds do not sing, and the women never smile. In a sense, it is almost literally true. Flowers, even of the richest hues, give out but little perfume; birds of brightest plumage utter only piercing notes instead of sweet songs; and the faces of the women are sad as they go about, enduring their sorrowful lot. All this is suggestive of the spiritual condition of a country where the Gospel of Christ is not known.

Christianity brings joy! The message of the angel to the shepherds was, "I bring you good tidings of great joy, which shall be to all people." Joy was born into the world that Christmas night, when Jesus began His life on the earth. He came to bless men, to comfort sorrow, to open prisons, to lift the lost up to heaven. Jesus talked much about joy. He had a wondrous joy of His own. He was called a Man of sorrows--never was there any other sorrow like unto His sorrow. Yet all the while there was in His heart--a deep joy which nothing could disturb. Before He went away, He bequeathed His joy to His disciples, and prayed that their joy might be full.

Christians should have joy. But Christian joy is not happiness, as the world understands that word. Happiness is on the surface. It depends upon things that happen, and is easily disturbed. During a great battle the soldier noticed, perched on a tree, a bird which sang whenever the roar of battle was hushed for a few moments. But when the terrific noise began again, the bird was silent. So it is with earthly

happiness; it sings in the brief pauses of life's struggles--but is silent while the strife goes on.

Christian joy, however, is too deep to be affected by this world's occurrences. It is like those fresh water springs beside the sea, over which the brackish tides pour--but whose waters are sweet as ever when the tides recede. It is joy which the world can neither give nor take away. It lives in the heart under the bitterest sorrows, and sings its songs in the darkest nights.

Joy is not merely a privilege which a Christian may enjoy--it is also a duty. It is a fruit of the Spirit, and not a mere accident of temperament, or a mere index of experience. Christian life should always be victorious. We are to be more than conquerors, through Him that loved us.

Christians are to be light--and light is a symbol of joy. Gloom, therefore, in the life of any friend of the Master is a contradiction of Christ-likeness. It is our duty to be cheerful, joyful, songful, whatever the circumstances or experience may be. We should never yield to discouragement, to depression, to disheartenment. If we let the darkness into our soul, it will darken our eyes, and mar the beauty of our life. Discouragement is dangerous. It robs a man of strength and skill, and makes him faint in the struggle. It chills his heart, takes the enthusiasm out of his life, and imperils all his career. One of the firm resolves of every man should be, never to be discouraged, since discouragement is defeat.

Then we owe it to the world, also, to live a life of victorious joy. We are to be a blessing to others, and there is no other way in which we can do so much for those about us, but by being habitually joyful. If we go about with sad words on our lips, disheartening words, we make it harder for others to live heroically and worthily. The influence of one depressed spirit on others, cannot be estimated. Their burdens seem heavier, the road seems steeper to them, and the struggle seems sorer--because our hands hang down, the light fades from our eye, and our lips speak discouragingly.

But if we go through life, singing happy songs as we go, songs of joy and gladness, they will become inspiration in the hearts of those who hear them. Men will grow braver; hope will come out of discouragement; and defeat will be changed to victory. Burdens will seem lighter, battles less fierce, and tasks easier--as the joyous notes of our songs ring out on the air.

We have no right to make life harder for others. It is a sin against humanity to do so. The law of love forbids it. He, who makes it harder for a brother to live nobly, and do his work well, has sinned against one of Christ's little ones--therefore, against Christ Himself. We dare not go about among our fellows, saying discouraging things, dispiriting things; for, if we do, we are imperiling those whose burdens are already as heavy as they can bear. One discouraging word, may cause them to sink down and perish.

The law of love bids us bear one another's burdens, and there is no other way in which we can do this so effectively, as by living a life of victorious joy ourselves. He who goes among men throughout the day with glad heart and cheerful face, speaking to everyone he meets some encouraging word, saying something uplifting in every ear--is a wonderful inspirer of strength, courage, and hope in men. He is a Divine minister of good to others. He makes everyone a little braver and stronger. Weary plodders on the dusty way, pluck up fresh energy after meeting him. Fainting ones awake to new courage, when his hopeful words have fallen upon their ears. The influence of such a habitual encourager, can never be measured. It is a noble thing to live thus.

There are few lessons which are needed more than this teaching that joy is a duty. The mass of Christian people seem to pay no heed to it. There really are not many joyful Christians. It would seem as if a large

number of them think there is a virtue in sadness and gloom! They make no attempt to live victoriously--but yield to every discouragement, and allow it to get into their heart. Even the little ills, which full grown men should be ashamed to be affected by--they allow to master them. Even strong men are made wretched by a slight indisposition, by a little disappointment, or by hearing of some other's success.

Then, what is worse, they not only let their own spirits be disturbed by these trivial incidents of pain or inconvenience--but they must needs make everyone they meet share their miserable dispiriting! They carry the dark shadow of their unhappy feeling on their face. They chafe and fret when things do not go well. They pout and sulk like spoiled children when they do not get their own way. If they have not slept well, or if they have a headache, or a cold, or a discomfort of any kind, however trivial--they compel everyone who salutes them courteously throughout the day, to listen to the recital of all the tiresome story of their maladies!

Could any habit be more utterly selfish than this? Do people imagine that the neighbors who inquire kindly after their health--have any pleasure in listening to such an unwholesome tale of woe, often about nothing but some imaginary ailment? Does anyone think that he has a right to pour such a burden of complaining into any human ear? Every noble man is ready to extend sympathy in any case of real trouble; but there is no call for sympathy in such ailments as to make up the staple to the complaints which many of us have to tell our neighbors about. This is one of the human habits concerning which it were well if some power would "the gift to see ourselves--as others see us." We only tire out our friends, and make it harder for them to live, while at the same time we add to our own wretchedness. For such miseries will grow if we nurse them, until by and by they become giants, and bind us hand and foot in hopeless bondage.

Far better is it for one to seal his lips resolutely and persistently against all such morbid talk, and speak only glad, joyous, encouraging things. This is one of the childish things we should put away as we become men, if we find ourselves indulging in it. It is unmanly and it is most unlovely. It is a grievous sin against others--to inflict upon them our miserable hypochondrias. We should be scatterers of light, not of darkness; of good, not of evil; of inspiring influence, not of that which can make life harder for everyone we meet!

Well it would be for us all if we learned the lesson that joy is a duty. God wants us to be happy; and if we live as we should live--we shall be happy. This is not saying that we shall have no sorrow, or that life will be always easy and pleasant for us; but we may at least be always overcomers. We have reason to rejoice, whatever our circumstances and our condition may be. There is an inner life, a life hid with Christ in God, which should be unconquerable in a Christian, though all earthly things are swept away. There is a world beyond this sphere--a world where no storms beat, and where nothing hurtful ever shall come; why should we be so affected by what takes place here, where we are staying but a little time?

Life is made up of habits. We ask God to help us to keep sweet and to live joyfully. He is ready to do it--but the way He would help us is in little lessons which we must learn for ourselves. He will never take out of our life all our miserable ways at one time, and put in place of them a full set of lovely ways, as one might change the works of a watch. That is not God's way of remaking us. We are scholars in Christ's school, and are to learn of Him. No pupil can master an art or a science in a day--it takes months and years! We cannot learn in a day--to live joyfully and victoriously; but we can get a lesson today and another tomorrow, letting no day pass without its line. Meanwhile, God will help us continually, encouraging every effort, permitting us to fail in no lesson. If only we are diligent and persistent, the most cheerless of us can at last so learn the habit of joy, that we shall fill our days with song!

Thunder--or Angel's Voice?

"Then a voice came from heaven: 'I have glorified it, and I will glorify it again!' The crowd standing there heard it and said it was thunder. Others said, 'An angel has spoken to Him!'" John 12:28-29

Different people continually give a different answer--to the same question. Our eyes are alike--and yet no two people see the same picture on the canvas. Our ears are constructed on the same pattern--and yet no two hear the same song as they listen side by side to the singer. The world is not the same to any two people. We carry within us a mysterious power, which interprets to us whatever we see or hear of the sights and voices of the outside world; and this power is distinct in each one. Thus it happens continually that the same voice falls upon the ears of two different people, and is altogether different to the two. Each hears what his own soul is prepared for hearing.

We have an illustration of this in the story of Christ. One day a voice was heard in the temple. It was a Divine voice speaking from heaven. The people standing about the Master heard it, and were strangely impressed by it. Yet they were not all impressed in the same way. Some thought it thundered; the voice awed and terrified them. Others thought an angel had spoken. It was the same sound; the difference was in those who heard it. The state of their heart--gave tone to the voice.

It is always so; our own heart makes our world for us, and fills and populates it, and the music we hear is modulated as it passes over the chords of our own soul. If you hold a sea shell to your ear, you hear a strange, murmuring sound, which we used to be told in childhood, was a sort of reminiscence of the ocean's roar. The thought is that the shell, having lain long amid the waves, the music of the sea has hidden in its magic chambers, and that this is what you hear when you hold the shell to your ear.

This pretty thought is dispelled, however, when you learn that, instead of the music of the ocean, the sound you hear is caused by the beating of your own heart, the throbbing of the blood in your fingers. Lay the shell on a table, and put your ear to it, and there is no music; you hear the murmur--only when you hold the shell in your hands.

Many of the sounds which we hear, attributing them to various sources--are but the noise of our own pulses; and every sound that breaks upon our ear is modified at least by the mood or quality of our own inner life. When our heart is glad--the world is full of song! When our heart is sad--the world is full of tears!

In ourselves the sunshine dwells;

In ourselves the music swells!

Everywhere the light and shade;

By the gazer's eye is made!

What men and women find in the life--depends on what they are themselves. We hear some people talk of the coldness of the world. They find no love anywhere, no gratitude, no appreciation, no sympathy, no tenderness. Others, living in like circumstances and conditions--find only brightness, beauty, gladness, and tenderness wherever they go. The same skies are dull and dreary to one--and glorious with their deep, wonderful blue to another. The same fields are dreary and desolate to one eye--and filled with splendid beauty to another. The same people seem unsympathetic, uncongenial, unneighborly to one--and to the other appear cordial, kindly, responsive, and unselfish.

Each person's heart--casts its own hue and tinge upon all other lives.

Two people listen to the same voice: and while one hears what seems to him to be terrifying thunder, the other hears the entrancing strains of angels' songs!

"Two men looked out from their prison bars--

One saw the mud, the other saw the stars!"

This same difference is seen in the way life's experiences appear to different people. To one pessimistic class, everything seems discouraging. They see only the troubles, the difficulties, the hindrances, the disheartenments. They talk always in sad tone of their burdens, tasks, duties, disappointments, and trials. There is no blue sky in their picture, and no stars shine down upon them.

Then there are others who always look upon life optimistically. They are never discouraged. They are not disturbed by the perplexing things which they meet. They expect to have struggles; since with only easy life there--can be no progress, no victories, no struggling upward, and they grow only the braver and more resolute in battle. They meet obstacles and hindrances; but they are not disheartened by them, and turn them into stepping stones for upward striving. They suffer defeats and reverses; but they are not dismayed, only learning from their failures how to keep from being defeated again. Everywhere they go they hear music, and everywhere they find something beautiful and good.

Emerson puts it well:

Let me go where'er I will,

I hear a sky-born music still;

It sounds from all things old,

It sounds from all things young;

From all that's fair, from all that's foul,

Peals out a cheerful song!

'Tis not only in the rose,

'Tis not only in the bird,

Not only where the rainbow glows,

Nor in the song of woman heard,

But in the darkest, meanest things

There always, always something sings!

'Tis not in the high stars alone,

Nor in the cups of budding flowers,

Nor in the redbreast's mellow tone,
Nor in the bow that smiles in the showers,
But in the mud and scum of things
There always, always something sings!

All will admit that the man with the optimistic spirit--gets far more out of life, and makes far more of life, than his pessimistic neighbor. It is a great deal better to see blue sky and stars--than only dull, dreary clouds. It is a more noble thing to hear angel music that thunders in the voices that break on our ears.

Happiness or unhappiness is, therefore, not so much a matter of external conditions--as of heart attitude. We gather in life--what our habit of heart has fitted us for gathering.

The starling, when it finds itself imprisoned in a cage, begins to struggle, trying to escape, flying wildly against the wires; but it only bruises its breast and wings in its unavailing efforts! The canary, when caged, cheerfully accepts the inevitable, and fills all the place with sweet songs. The canary is wiser than the starling. It is both good philosophy and good religion--to make the best of one's condition.

There is something sacred about that which is inevitable. When we find ourselves in hard or painful conditions, which are clearly providential, over which we have no power, we must conclude that, for the time, these conditions represent the will of God for us. This should help us to accept them, not sullenly--but joyously. Instead of the voice of thunder in them--we should hear angels' songs.

It is not enough, however, merely to state the law, that our own heart gives the quality to the music that breaks on our ears. The fact that one has a melancholy temperament which sees everything hopelessly, in shadow--is not to be regarded as a final, unchangeable fact. We are not to say in excuse for our gloomy way of looking at things--that we were made thus, and cannot remake ourselves.

In the first place, we are not made thus--but, following a trend of tendency in our nature--we have fallen into the miserable habit of weakly yielding to discouragement! Then, even if we had been made thus, with melancholy temperament, that would be no reason for our continuing unto the end of life in this unhappy state. Our business is to grow into the likeness of Christ--and He never let Himself become subject to melancholy moods. He always found the beautiful thing. He always heard the songs of angels, or the voice of God--even when others heard only the sound of thunder. He saw the flowers--where others saw only the thorns. He saw the stars--where those about Him saw only muddy roads. He found hope--where others found only despair!

We should seek to be like Christ in His wonderful optimism. If we find ourselves turning every sight and sound of earth into sadness--we should take ourselves resolutely in hand. We are living wastefully, sinfully, while we succumb to such melancholy moods; and we should set ourselves to work to change the miserable trend and habit--into something more beautiful and wholesome.

Part of the work of Christ in us--is to transform us into songful, cheerful, rejoicing Christians. Paul learned during his long life, in whatever state he was, therein to be content. He carried the secret in his own heart, so that he was not dependent on this world's weather--for the temperature of his inner life.

"Always keep sweet--and go on singing!" is a good motto. Easy, do you say? Only a lesson for children? Do you think so? Did you ever try to live it out for a week--even for a day? The perfection of Christian living, is included in this motto. He who has learned to live by this rule has reached a high attainment. Yet it is thus we are to seek to live continually. We should overcome our morbidity, our unwholesomeness of temperament--and should train ourselves to see beauty in all things, and good in every experience.

In order to do this, we must have the beauty and love of Christ in ourselves. "You must have the bird in your heart--before you can find the bird in the bush." So we must have bird songs in our soul--or we cannot hear bird songs in the groves. Mr. Burroughs tells of a woman who asked a bird lover where she could hear the bluebird. "What, never heard the bluebird!" said he. "Then you never will hear it." He could have taken her in a few minutes where a bluebird's song or warble would fall upon her ears to hear it--but her ears were not sensitized by love for birds. It requires a special organ, as it were, a power either given in creation, or acquired by long training--to hear the voices of nature.

So it is with other things. An earthly mind--cannot hear heavenly voices. An unspiritual person--finds no beauty in the Bible. Spiritual things can be only spiritually discerned. We must have the peace of God in our bosom; and then, and then only, we shall find the peace of God in all things, even in life's wildest storms! We must have the joy of Christ within us; and then, and only then, all earth's noises, even its roaring thunder--will make music of angel voices in our ears!

We cannot change the world, taking out all its thorns, making its tasks easy and its burdens light, modulating all its discords into harmonies, transforming its ugliness into beauty; but we can have our own hearts renewed by the grace of God, and thus the world will be made over for us. A new heart--makes all things new. A heart of love--will find love everywhere. A soul full of song--will find sweet music everywhere!

Belonging to God

"You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore glorify God." 1 Corinthians 6:19-20

It is a great thing to have God for master--and to own it. The trouble with too many of us--is we try to be our own master. We make sorry work of it, too, whenever we take into our own hands--the direction of our life. There is only one safe place to leave it--in the hands of God.

Paul packs into one terse sentence, a whole volume of practical teaching when he says, "You are not your own; you were bought at a price. Therefore glorify God." It is not easy for us with our proud human nature, to confess that we really are not our own. We like to feel that we are independent beings. We are loath to call anyone master. Many of us resent even God's claim to ownership in us, and deny His right to command us.

But the first principle of true religion, declares that we belong to God, that His right over us is absolute. It is nothing unreasonable, either, that is thus required of us. We rightfully belong to God. The authority He claims over us is neither arbitrary nor assumed. He made us, and has the Creator's right over us, His creatures. He is our Father; and as His children we owe Him all homage, obedience, submission, and love. Then, He is our Lord and King; and we ought to recognize His authority, and without question submit ourselves to Him, bringing every thought, feeling, disposition, and affection into subjection to Him.

But there is a higher ground on which this ownership rests. "You are bought with a price." We know well what this price was. We need to think much of the cost of the blessings we enjoy as Christians. It will make them far more sacred, when we remember that it was through the humiliation, sorrow, and death of our Redeemer, that the blessings of salvation became ours. A nation's flag is dear, not merely because of the pieces of cloth that compose it--but because it represents, not only all that the nation stands for--but has written into it all the story of the nations' life. Just so, in the symbols of Christianity, are folded up for us all that Christianity means to the world and to our own heart.

There are things which can be bought with money--but there are some things that money cannot buy. With money a man may build a house, and adorn and furnish it; but money will not buy home happiness, and the sweetness, comfort, and refinement which make true home life. With money we may purchase bread and clothing, coal for the fire, and luxuries for physical enjoyment; but money will not acquire fine character, moral beauty, a gentle spirit, peace in the heart, or any of the elements which make up a noble personality. Money ransomed many a slave from captivity in ancient times--but human redemption was not obtained at any money price. The Son of God gave His life a ransom for souls. Thus our belonging to God is confirmed and sealed by the holiest sanctions.

Yet, while the authority of God over us and His right to us are unquestioned, the relation is one that, as moral beings, we must each voluntarily accept and acknowledge. In one sense, God never compels us to be His; we are sovereigns over our own life. We can do as we will. We can resist even God's authority. Our puny will can shut omnipotence out of our life. We can proudly say, "Our lips are our own; who is Lord over us?"

The truth that we are not our own, must be acknowledged by ourselves. We must make our life God's, by an act of personal devotement. The mere acknowledgment of the fact that we belong to God is not enough--there must be a transaction, a surrender, a giving of the keys of our life over into the hands of God--out of our own hands. No one can make this devotement for us. No mother can make her child--God's child. She may dedicate it to Him in its infancy, and bring it up for Him along the years; but the child is not truly God's--until for itself it makes the personal devotement.

It is with this great act of personal devotement, that a Christian life really begins. What we call faith in Christ--is nothing less than a committal of our whole life to Christ. It is related of Wendell Phillips that, when in the valley of shadows, he was asked by a friend who sat beside him, "Did you ever make a personal consecration of yourself to God?" The great man answered: "Yes; when I was a boy fourteen years of age I heard Lyman Beecher preach on the theme, 'You belong to God.' I went home after hearing that sermon, threw myself on the floor of my room, with the door locked, and said: 'God, I belong to You; take what is Your own. I ask but this, that whenever a thing is wrong--that it may have no power of temptation over me.'"

A like confession of God's right over him, every one of us must make--if he would be in right relationship with God. Jesus Christ is our rightful King, and is worthy to receive all homage, love, and obedience; and we cannot be right with him--until we have confessed that we are His, and have begun to live a life of obedience.

"Therefore glorify God." That is what we must do with the life which belongs to God. How can we augment God's glory? We cannot add a single beam to the splendor of the noonday sun; we cannot make the evening star more brilliant; and God's name is infinitely beyond our poor glorifying. Yet we may honor God

among men. You travel abroad, and meet in a foreign land a man who is noble, gifted, and worthy. Here at home he is not known at all, or at the best his name is known only vaguely and by a very few. You return home and begin at once to speak of this man to your friends, telling them of his life, his work, his charming personality. You pass among your friends the books he has written, which contain his helpful, inspiring words. His name is now no longer unknown in your community--but becomes familiar to many people. His influence begins to be felt in many lives. His books are read, and do good. You have glorified him.

In the same way we may make God glorious. We know His name, His character, His works, and we have His Word, which is full of divine revealings. We can speak of His mercy, love, and goodness. We can tell what we know of Him, what He has been to us, and has done for us. We can show others the words He has spoken, full of comfort, inspiration, and cheer. Where God was scarcely known before, He becomes well known, and many begin to love Him and trust Him. We have glorified God.

Not only by telling others of God may we glorify Him--but also in our own life. Being is more than speaking. In the Palazzo Rospiglioso, in Rome, is the great picture of the Aurora. It is on the ceiling, and can be studied only with much difficulty from the floor. But a mirror is so placed on a table that it reflects the picture, and one can study it there with ease and pleasure.

God is a spirit; and He is in heaven, dwelling in unapproachable light. The incarnation was the bringing of the reflection of the glorious person of God down to earth in a human life. Men looked at Jesus--and saw in Him the very image of God.

Jesus is no longer here in the flesh to reveal the unseen God; but we are here for Him, and it is ours, if we are truly Christians, to be mirrors, reflecting in our own character, the beauty of the Lord, and thus glorifying Him. It is of the utmost importance that those who look into the mirror of our life--may see a true and faithful revealing of God. How else shall they learn what God is like? It would be a sad thing if we should misrepresent Him, giving to anyone a wrong idea of His character.

A little child, after reading in the New Testament one day, asked her mother, "Is Jesus like anybody we know?" The child was eager to discover just what were the elements of the character of Christ, His disposition, His spirit, the mind that was in Him. The mother ought to have been able to answer, "Yes, I am trying to be like Jesus; if you will look at my life and study my character; you will see a little of what Jesus is like." Every follower of Christ should be able to say the same to all who know him. The likeness is imperfect, for in many things we come short; but, if we are true Christians, we must be trying to live as He would--if He were in our place. Unless we live thus--we are not glorifying God. "The one who says he abides in Him--ought himself also so to walk, even as He walked." 1 John 2:6. "Leaving you an example--so that you should follow in His steps." 1 Peter 2:21.

But doing is important as well as being. Jesus glorified God by a life of divine love among men. At every step He wrought deeds of mercy. There is a legend which says that, as He walked away from His grave--sweet flowers grew in His path. It was really so, in every path on which those blessed feet trod; flowers of kindness blossomed wherever He went. He did the works of His Father, and thus glorified Him. If we belong to God, we must glorify Him in the same way; we must continue the ministry of love which our Master began. It is the divine will, that we carry blessing and help to everyone we meet. If we fail to be loving--we do not glorify God.

Our Deposit With Christ

In one of his epistles, Paul tells us of a trust which he had committed to Christ. Speaking of Him with whom he had made this deposit, he says he knows Him whom he has trusted. Christ was no stranger to him, no untried friend. He could not have trusted Him with such tremendous interests, if he had not known Him. Very foolish is the young person who puts confidence in a stranger, admitting him to the place of a friend. She would be a very careless, thoughtless mother--who would commit the keeping of her child to a person concerning whose character, she had not thoroughly satisfied herself. Men who are prudent, will not invest their money in an institution which they do not reasonably believe to be safe. If you were going to cross the sea, you would want to be well assured of the staunchness and seaworthiness of the ship to which you commit your life.

Paul knew Him whom he had trusted as his Savior. Some people know a great deal about Christ--yet do not really know Him. You may read or hear much concerning a man--while you have never seen him. But one day you meet this man--and he becomes your friend. That is the way Paul knew Christ, "I know Him." It was no hearsay knowledge on which he based his confidence.

There are some people whom the better we know--the less we trust! The greater acquaintance, reveals faults and flaws in their character. We find they are not trustworthy, cannot be depended on. Their friendship is inconstant, fickle, and uncertain. When we know them well--we learn that we would better not commit ourselves to them.

We read that on one occasion, Jesus did not commit Himself to certain people, because He knew what was in men; He knew He could not trust Himself in their hands--that they would not prove true to Him. This is the outcome of greater acquaintance in too many cases--we may not safely entrust our interest to men's keeping.

Others there are whom the better we know--the more implicitly we trust. We find them faithful and true in every feeling, in every word, in every act. They never disappoint us, nor fail us, nor harm us. Every thought of their heart is loyal. They would make any sacrifice for our sake. Such a friend is Christ.

If you are traveling in a strange land, you may feel a little uncertain at first about your guide, not having tried him before; but as you go on, and he shows familiarity with the way and ability to conduct you on your journey, you learn to trust him, and at length all fear gives way to complete confidence. So it is that trust in Christ grows as we go on with Him, and find Him always faithful and wise. He never disappoints us. In all experiences of need or trial--He proves His love. Sometimes He denies us what we ask--but we always learn in the end that He was right. Thus it is that we learn to really know Christ--by trying and trusting Him.

Paul then tells us that he has placed a sacred deposit in the hands of Christ, and that he knows it is absolutely secure. "I am persuaded that He is able to guard that which I have committed unto Him against that day." The figure is of a deposit one would make in trusted keeping--as of rare and costly jewels which the owner might put into the hands of one who would safely guard them, delivering them up in due time.

What was it, that Paul had thus deposited with Christ? For one thing, it was his soul. It was a guilty soul when the young rabbi first met Christ; he had been openly fighting against Jesus. It was a hurt soul; he had wounded himself in his resistance. That guilty, hurt soul--he had committed to the keeping of Christ, and he was sure Christ would guard it sacredly, and save it unto eternal life. Paul never worried about his own salvation after making this committal. He knew that all was safe in Christ's hands--and he then gave up his life to the service of Christ.

No one but Christ can keep our soul. There are no other hands in which we may place this sacred deposit. No gentlest, purest, wisest mother--can take charge of her own child's soul. She cannot cleanse its heart of evil dispositions and tendencies. She cannot keep it from the power of evil, and shelter it from temptation. She cannot put upon its nature, Christ's likeness. She may care for its body, and train its mind--but she cannot save and keep its soul. Only Christ can do this.

There is a wonderful verse in the little letter of Jude, which reads: "Now to Him who is able to protect you from stumbling and to make you stand in the presence of His glory, blameless and with great joy" Jude 1:24. Christ alone is able to keep us from stumbling on our way through this world, and at the end present us without blemish before God!

The same confidence is in Paul's words: "He is able to guard that which I have committed unto Him against that day." This keeping is no easy task. There are a thousand things that may hurt a life. Evil lurks--in sunshine and shadow, in joy and sorrow, in pleasure and pain, in success and failure, in health and sickness, in companionship and loneliness, in prosperity and adversity.

An hour's association with a wicked person--may leave in a soul a suggestion of evil which shall work the life's utter ruin in the end. Even a happy home by its very happiness, may become the enemy of the spiritual life, drawing thought, love, and devotion away from God and from the higher things of God's service--to things lower and earthly. Business success--may lead to moral failure; or, on the other hand, failure in business may dishearten and break the spirit. A time of sickness may breed discontent and fretfulness. Invalidism may make one selfish and exacting. On the other hand, unbroken health may weaken the sense of dependence on God, or may rob the heart of patient sympathy, making one harsh and ungentle towards others in their infirmities. Too much companionship, or too great absorption in work--may interfere with the soul's communion with God. On the other hand, too much aloneness may make one's life morbid, unwholesome, self-absorbed, and out of sympathy with others.

These are suggestions of the possible evils that lurk in the common experience, of even the most sheltered life. This is not an easy world to live in--and in which to keep one's self unspotted. It is not easy amid such antagonisms, to grow into Christly beauty. One who has sincerely tried to keep himself pure, loving, gentle, unselfish, rich-hearted in all sympathy and helpfulness, generous, patient, true, and sweet in all ways--even for one little day--knows that it is no easy task! But that is what Christ is able to do for us--to keep us from stumbling on our way through this world, and at the end present us without blemish before God!

In another burst of confidence, just before his martyrdom, Paul used these remarkable words: "The Lord shall deliver me from every evil work, and will preserve me unto His heavenly kingdom." He was in Nero's hands, and would soon die; but his deposit was still safe, and would be guarded until it should be presented in eternal glory!

Our affairs are also a part of this deposit. We soon learn that we cannot be master of our own condition and circumstances. We cannot make our environment helpful to our spiritual growth. We cannot bring good out of evil, blessing out of pain, victory out of defeat.

Take the story of Joseph as an example. Wrong and cruelty seemed to be utterly destroying his young life in its early years. But the strange, tangled experiences were in the hands of God, and out of them all came in due time--great blessing for Joseph and for the world. To have broken into that story with human interference at any point, in those days of trial, would have been to spoil the outworking of a beautiful

divine plan!

"Because I was impatient, would not wait,

But thrust my impious hands across Your threads,

And marred the pattern drawn out for my life-

O Lord, I do repent."

There is a special phase of the lesson, which emerges at this point. You are suffering wrong from others. They are unkind to you, unjust, treating you injuriously. What is your duty as a Christian in this case? Is it not the quiet committal of all the hurts and wrongs--into Christ's hands? You are not a judge; you have nothing whatever to do with judgment. Your whole duty--is to put the matter absolutely and forever out of your own hands--into Christ's, and to leave it there! It is not your province--to set wrong things right, to vindicate yourself from false blame, to avenge injustice or injury inflicted upon you.

In another passage of Scripture, we are told what Jesus Himself did with the wrongs He suffered: "Who, when He was reviled, reviled not again; when He suffered, threatened not; but committed Himself to Him who judges righteously." We have also this counsel: "Therefore let those who suffer according to the will of God--commit their souls in well-doing, unto a faithful Creator."

How simple this teaching makes all life--if only we learn the lesson! Our soul's salvation, the keeping of our life in the midst of this world's dangers and enmities, the outworking of all experiences, the direction of our affairs, the adjustment of all wrongs and iniquities, the overruling of all evil, so as to bring us home at last to glory without blemish--all this is to be committed to Christ, left absolutely, without question, doubt, or fear--in His strong and skillful hands! Our one duty is always to do God's will--as it is made know to us, and then leave all the 'tangles' with Christ.

In Scripture, the lesson is put very clearly: "Commit your way to the Lord; trust in him and he will do this: He will make your righteousness shine like the dawn, the justice of your cause like the noonday sun!" Psalm 37:5-6. "Trust in the Lord with all your heart and do not lean on your own understanding; in all your ways acknowledge him, and he will make your paths straight." Proverbs 3:5-6

Then, Paul's words of confidence as assurance come in again with wondrous strengthening for our hearts: "I know Him whom I have believed, and I am persuaded that He is able to guard that which I have committed unto Him against that day!"

Christ's Deposit with Us

Saving faith--is the committing of the life into the hands of Christ. It is spoken of in the Scriptures, as the depositing of all life's interests, with One who is surely able to keep them safely until the day of final revealing. The thought is very beautiful. Our life is hid with Christ in God.

Then, there is something else to correspond with this. There is another deposit. Christ commits something to us, something which we are to keep and care for and use, bringing it home and restoring it to Him at last unblemished, unwasted. In one of Paul's letters to Timothy we have an illustration: "What you heard from me, keep as the pattern of sound teaching, with faith and love in Christ Jesus. Guard the good deposit that was entrusted to you--guard it with the help of the Holy Spirit who lives in us." 2 Timothy 1:13-14. Timothy

was a young minister; and Paul, who was his spiritual father, and had taught him the truths of the gospel, is exhorting him to be careful and faithful in his holy trust. The preacher's work is very sacred. What if he should not deliver his message correctly?

In transmitting a telegraphic dispatch, the operator made a mistake, and left out just one little word. But the omission of that one word, changed the sense of the whole message. A large business transaction was involved, and great financial loss resulted. The company transmitting the telegram, was held responsible for the consequences of the mistake.

The preacher stands between God and human souls. If in delivering God's message, he makes mistakes, leaving out words, or inserting words of his own, or putting the emphasis in the wrong place, thus changing the meaning of the message, who can tell what the consequences may be? It is of vital importance that the preacher should hold the pattern of sound words which he has received.

An edition of the Bible was once printed; and when it was ready to be distributed it was discovered that the word "not" had been left out of one of the Ten Commandments. All the printed copies had to be destroyed.

Like care has not been exercised always by those who have undertaken to interpret the Words of God to man. Sometimes they have left out words, or added words, not giving their message as God delivered it to them!

People hang on the preacher's utterance to learn how to live, so as not to fail of eternal life. But suppose that the teaching is wrong--what will the consequences be? The minister's half hour on Sunday before a listening people--is a holy time. Not a moment of it should ever be wasted. Not a word should ever be spoken which is not after the pattern of sound words which God has given. A wrong interpretation, may start a soul on a course of fatal error!

A Christian woman has told how all her life has been over-shadowed by the effect of the preaching which she heard in her girlhood. Only the sterner aspects of truth were preached--God's justice and wrath. So she was made to dread God! His name meant terror to her! No thought of love, found a place in the conception of the Deity which the preaching of those early years left on her mind. Later, the truth of God's Fatherhood, with all that fatherhood, interpreted by the life, teachings, and death of Jesus Christ, means--was brought to her. But the early teaching had so wrought itself into the very fibre of her life, into all her thoughts, feelings, and motives--that its effect never has been altogether neutralized. Her life still suffers--from the mistaken teachings of her girlhood years!

Countless lives have been hurt or marred--by unfaithful or mistaken handling of God's Word--in those who were truth's ordained guardians!

The teacher of the young comes under the same responsibility.

The writer of books, to whom the gift of composition is entrusted, is charged with a sacred duty in this regard. There is no distinction of moral and secular, in the matter of authorship. It is just as important that the novelist, the romancer, and the poet shall follow the pattern of sound words--as that the writer of books of devotion or religious instruction shall do it. This puts a most serious responsibility upon everyone who writes--what people will read. Many a popular story has carried in its pages perversions of truth, misinterpretations, errors, insidious scoffs or sneers, which have marred life and wrecked destinies!

It is a serious thing to give a traveler who asks the way--a careless or mistaken direction by which he is led out of his course, perhaps to his own great loss or disadvantage. It is a serious thing to give unwise advice to a young person, or to anyone who is seeking guidance in perplexity. Wrong advice has wrecked many a destiny! We cannot too carefully weigh our speech--when we are speaking words which may influence or shape the lives of others, or determine the course they shall take!

All our influence over others is included in the deposit committed to us. Every person has his influence. God puts into the hands of each one of us, something which belongs to Him, which we are to carry through this world for Him, and bring at last to His feet. When a little child is laid in a young mother's arms, something of God's work which no other one can do, becomes hers. She is charged to guard the precious life in its journey across this world, and to lead it safely home to heaven. Her keeping includes far more than the child's body. Its whole being is entrusted to her--that she may develop beauty and strength in its immortal soul; that she may train the life for its eternal mission, and develop in it all its possibilities of ability and usefulness.

This work requires the best that is in the mother. She must teach her child the truth of God. In the ancient Jewish law--the greatest stress was laid upon home instruction. Parents were commanded to teach the Words of God continually to their children, until their very souls were saturated with the spirit of the holy precepts. Then, there was but one book--now there are many; but the duty of home instruction remains. No book should be permitted in the hands of children, which would bring to them anything that is not consistent with the Word of God. The mother should read the book before her child reads it, since she is set to hold for it the pattern of sound words in faith and love.

The home where children are growing up--should be made as beautiful, as sweet, as pure, as full of love and gentleness and all holy inspirations, as it is possible to make any spot in this world! The good thing committed to the mother--she is required to guard through the Holy Spirit. She cannot do her sacred work alone--without Divine help; she needs the help of God continually, and must live near the heart of Christ--if she would be fitted for her holy ministry.

The same is true of all influence. It is part of the deposit which the Master has made with us, something which we are to cherish and guard most sacredly, and use to its last particle for the bettering, sweetening, and enriching of other lives!

A godly man on his last day wrote: "I die tonight; but the members of my own family and of my own circle of acquaintance will never be again as if I had not known them. My influence upon them for evil or for good--will be perpetuated in them--and through them to others, modifying distant generations! My influence will live for evermore, enduring as the waters of the deep, with countless changes, a power throughout all ages!" Such a trust as this--we must use with holy reverence.

This lesson has its bearing also upon friendship. When a man takes a new friend into his life--he has received a new deposit from Christ. A good thing has been committed unto him, and he is bidden to guard it. Many people believe in guardian angels--that one of these heavenly ministers is appointed to attend each life from infancy to the grave. The thought is very beautiful, and it may be that such guardianship is assigned to each Christian in his passage through this world of danger. But there are also human angels set to guard our steps on the earth. When a new friend comes into our life--we are ordained to a guardianship which is very sacred.

Perhaps we are not apt to think of the responsibility of being a friend. We find pleasure in friendship; and we are apt to welcome eagerly, those who come to us with trust and regard, not thinking what we owe to them, or must do for them, if we accept their confidence. We find cheer, inspiration, stimulation, and help in congenial companionship. Our friends meet our needs, satisfy our cravings, do us good. But we do not always think of the other side--what we are to them. The essential thing is not to have friends--but to be a friend; not to receive--but to give; not what we get--but what we give.

We are seriously concerned, therefore, with the question: What kind of guardian angel are we to be--to the person whose life God has committed to us in friendship? We must bring our charge back to God, not only unblemished and unhurt--but also enriched and helped in every possible way. We dare not take a life into our hands--unless our hands are clean! What if we should put a stain upon the trusting soul--instead of a touch of beauty? What if we should guide the feet into wrong paths, paths leading to ruin? What if our influence should be hurtful--instead of helpful?

It is our responsibility, as far as it lies in us--to keep our friend from falling, and to present him faultless before the presence of God's glory. We can do this with joy--only by being faithful in every thought, word, motive, and influence. "That good thing which was committed unto you--guard through the Holy Spirit." We are fit to be a friend--only when our own life is under the power of the Divine Spirit!

Ministries That Bless

We mistake, when we think that only great deeds make worthy service. In no life can there be many large and conspicuous things; the years must chiefly be filled with little things.

Take even the story of the life of Jesus. In it there were, as recorded, a definite number of miracles which stand out in the narrative, as stars of the first magnitude in the heavens. But strewn through all the days, filling all the moments, crowded into all the interstices of that wonderful life--were innumerable kindnesses and thoughtfulnesses, unrecorded, even unremembered words and acts. Jesus was not always working miracles--but He was always doing good; and the greater measure of the blessing He left in the world came, not from His few supernatural works--but from the countless common human kindnesses He wrought. "Jesus did many other things as well. If every one of them were written down, I suppose that even the whole world would not have room for the books that would be written!" John 21:25. "He went around doing good" Acts 10:38.

It is so in every really great and holy life. Now and then there may be some conspicuous deed done, which wins the applause of men--an account of which gets into the newspapers, and which is talked about near and far. But on all the days of all the years, there is going on a ministry of love which uplifts many people, which give pleasure to old and young, which leaves inspiration of holiness and beauty in countless hearts, which makes one spot of the world sweeter.

Sometimes it happens, that those who seek human applause for what they can accomplish, striving to do things that are conspicuous and that make a sensation in the world--have no beautiful ministry of kindness to fill and brighten the days of their common life. When they give alms--they sound a trumpet proclaiming the fact, that their good deeds may be seen and praised of men. But when they are not exhibiting their charity or their generosity, that is, when others are not watching, they are neither charitable nor generous! They do not take the trouble to be kind or loving--when there is nothing to be gained by it. That is, their doing of good is spurious, because it is something enacted for men's eyes, not for God's. The stap

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