

The Ripening of Character

by J.R. Miller

Character growth is a lifelong process that requires patience, perseverance, and learning from experiences.

Scripture: Galatians 5:22

Topics: "Spiritual Maturity", "Character Growth"

Description

J.R. Miller emphasizes that character is a gradual process of growth, akin to the ripening of fruit, which occurs at different stages in life. He illustrates that every experience, whether joyful or painful, contributes to the development of our character, and that we should embrace life's challenges as opportunities for spiritual maturity. Miller encourages believers to remain steadfast in their faith, allowing God's grace to shape them into Christlike individuals, especially as they age. He warns against allowing life's trials to diminish our spiritual beauty and urges us to actively cultivate our character through every circumstance. Ultimately, he calls for a life that continually seeks to bless others and grow in love and kindness.

Transcript

Character is a process of growth. It is like fruit--it requires time to ripen. Different kinds of fruits come to ripeness at different seasons; some in the early summer, some later, and some only in the autumn. It is so with Christian lives--they ripen at different seasons. There are those who seem to grow into sweetness in early years, then those who reach their best in the mid years, and many who only in the autumn of old age come into mellow ripeness.

All of life is a season of character-growing! We are left in this world, not so much for what we may do here, for the things we may make--as that we ourselves may grow into the beauty of mature Christian character. In the midst of all our occupations and struggles, all our doing of tasks, all our longings and desires, all our experiences of every kind--there is a work going on in us--which is quite as important as anything we are doing with our mind or with our hands.

In the school--the boy has his tasks and lessons. According to his diligence or indolence, is his progress in his studies. In ten years, if he is faithful, he masters many things and stands high in his class. Or, if he is indifferent and careless, he gets only a smattering of knowledge, with so many links missing--that his education is of little practical use to him. But meanwhile there has been going on in him another education, a growth and development of character. The mind grows by exercise, just as the body does. Each lesson learned adds its new fact to the measure of knowledge--but there is, besides, an effect produced upon the mind itself--by the effort to learn. It grows by exercise.

Then there is also a subjective moral impression produced by the way the task is performed. If one is faithful and conscientious, truly doing his best, the endeavor leaves a mark of beauty in the life. But if one is unfaithful, indolent, false to one's self--there is left a wound, a trace of marring and blemish, a weakening of the life.

The same is as true of all life's callings, as of schoolwork. The farmer is cultivating his soil, tilling his fields, looking after the manifold duties of his occupation; but this is not all that he is doing. At the same time he is developing character of some kind, building up the fabric of his own manhood. The carpenter is working in wood--but he is also working on life--his own life. The mason is hewing stones and setting them in the wall--but he is also quarrying out blocks for the temple of character which he himself is building in himself. Men in all callings and employments, are continually producing a double set of results: in that on which they work, and in their own lives! We are in this world to grow, to make character in ourselves, and every hour we leave some mark, some impression on the life within us--an impression which shall endure when all the work of our hands has perished!

But there is also a growth of character, which goes on continually under the influence of life's circumstances and experiences. Fruits are developed and are brought on toward ripeness, by the influence of the weather and the climate. It takes all the different seasons, with their variety of climatic conditions, to produce a delicious apple, a mellow pear, or a cluster of luscious grapes. Winter does its part--as well as spring, summer, and autumn. Night and day, cloud and sunshine, cold and heat, wind and calm--all work together to bring the fruit to ripeness!

In like manner all life's varied experiences, have their place in the making and the culture of our character. All sunshine would not make good fruit, nor would all gladness and joy produce the richest character. We need the dark as well as the light; cold, rough winter as well as warm, gentle summer. We should not, therefore, be afraid of life, whatever experiences it may bring to us. But we should always remember, that nothing in life's experiences ought to be allowed to hurt our spirits.

Temptations may make their fierce assaults, may cause us sore struggles--but we need not be harmed by them, need not carry away from them any stain. Earthly poverty may leave its marks of emaciation on our body--but the inner life need not bear any trace of enfeebling. We ought to be growing continually in beauty and strength of character, however painful our lot in life! Sickness may waste physical strength and blight the beauty of the face--but it need not leave any hurtful trace on the life itself. Indeed, in the midst of the most exhausting and disfiguring illness--the inner life may continue to grow in strength and beauty. Paul gives us this assurance, "Though our outward man is decaying--yet our inward man is renewed day by day." That is, if we are living as we may live in relation to Christ, our real life will only become more radiant and beautiful--as the external life grows more infirm and feeble!

Yet too often, this possibility is not realized. Not all Christian people bear loss, sorrow and sickness, in this victorious way. Too often do we see men yielding to trouble, not growing more beautiful in soul--but losing their spiritual beauty in life's trials. This is not the way it should be, however. Our character should ripen in life's weather, whatever the weather may be. "Tribulation works patience."

The object of life--is to learn to live. We are at school here, and shall always be at school, until we are dismissed from earth's classes to be promoted into heaven! It is a pity if we do not learn our lessons. It is a pity if we grow no gentler, no kindlier, no more thoughtful, no more unselfish, no sweeter in spirit, no less worldly, if the peace of our heart is not deepened--as the years pass over us.

There are some fruits which remain acrid and bitter--until the frosts come. There are lives which never become mellow in love's tenderness, until sorrow's frosts have touched them. There are those who come out of every new experience of suffering or pain with a new blessing in their lives, cleansed of some earthliness, and made a little more like God. It is God's design for us--that this should always be the outcome of affliction, that the fruits of the Spirit in us, should be a little riper and mellow after every experience of trouble; and we fail when it is not so.

Old age should be the true harvest time of the years. Life should grow more and more beautiful, unto the end. It should increase in knowledge, in wisdom, in all the graces of the Spirit, in all the sweetness of love, in all that is Christlike. Aged Christian people, should be like trees in the autumn, their branches full of ripe fruit to feed the hunger of those who live about them.

We have much to do with this ripening of our own character. God gives us his grace--but it is ours to receive it, and we may reject it. It is only when we abide in Christ--that our lives grow in Christlikeness. The same sun brings out the beauty in the living branch--and withers the branch that is torn from the tree. Sorrow and pain blight the life which is not hid with Christ in God, and make more beautiful and more fruitful, the life that is truly in Christ. If we live thus continually under the influence of the divine grace, our character shall grow with the years--into mellow ripeness. Even the rough weather, the storm and the rain, the chill of cold nights and the snows of winter--will only bleach out the stains--and cleanse our life into whiteness!

The smallest things have their influence upon character, and upon the beauty and the helpfulness of a life. It was related recently of an English optometrist, that he had given up cricket purely in the interest of his profession. He was very fond of the game--but he found that playing affected the delicacy of his touch and made him less ready for the work he was required to do every day upon the eyes of his patients. A pianist said the other day, that he had given up riding his bicycle, because grasping the bars stiffened the muscles of his fingers and affected his playing.

There are occupations which in like manner, affect the life and character injuriously, hinder the growth of spirituality or make one less effective in work upon the life and character of others. We need to deal with ourselves firmly and very heroically. Anything that unfits us for doing our work in the best way possible, we should strictly and conscientiously avoid! If a minister cannot preach well after eating a hearty breakfast, he should eat sparingly. If a certain form of amusement dissipates spirituality, we would better not indulge in it! We must seek always to be at our best, ready for whatever duty or service may be required of us. We should see to it that our life always yields fruits that are luscious and sweet, and whatever unfavorably affects the quality of our spirit, our disposition, or our service--should be avoided.

We have but one life to live; we pass through this world but once. We should so live--that every step shall be a step onward and upward. We should strive to be victorious over every evil influence. We should seek to gather good and enrichment of character, from every experience, making our progress ever from more to more. Wherever we go--we should try to leave a blessing, something which will sweeten another life or start a new song or an impulse of cheer or helpfulness in another heart. Then our very memory, when we are gone--will be an abiding blessing in the world.

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