

The Virtue of Dependableness

by J.R. Miller

The sermon highlights the critical importance of dependableness as a foundational virtue that shapes character and reputation.

Scripture: Proverbs 25:14, Matthew 5:37, Luke 16:10, Colossians 3:23

Topics: "Dependability", "Integrity"

Description

J.R. Miller emphasizes the virtue of dependableness as a fundamental quality that defines a person's character, arguing that true worth is not measured by achievements or eloquence but by the integrity and reliability of the individual. He critiques those who fail to keep their promises, highlighting how their lack of dependability damages their reputation and relationships. Miller illustrates that dependability is essential not only in business but also in personal interactions, urging individuals to cultivate this virtue from a young age. He concludes that a dependable person embodies the beauty of God and stands firm amidst life's challenges, ultimately becoming a source of trust and strength for others.

Transcript

After all, the old-fashioned virtues mean the most in life--and are of greatest value. Brilliance is well enough, if there is something solid and sure beneath it. It is interesting to listen to a fascinating talker--but what is it that he is saying? And who is he who is speaking so charmingly? "If I speak in the tongues of men and of angels, but have not love, I am only a resounding gong or a clanging cymbal." It is not what a man SAYS, nor what he DOES--that measures the man--it is what he IS. Achievements may be very fine--but what of the man who made the achievements? A splendid career dazzles people's eyes. When a man climbs up before his neighbors' sight until he stands on giddy heights--people are amazed. But thoughtful men, before they decide upon the real splendor of his ascent, wish to know how he got up, whether by honest climbing or in some other way. All that the world praises as 'success' must be tested by the question, "What of the man--at the center of it all?"

A man who can be absolutely trusted, has gained life's highest rank and won life's richest prize. Nothing counts for more in a man--than the quality of dependableness. Some people lack it. There are some who pass for good, and who really are good in many ways--who yet continually fail those who trust them and depend on them.

There are some who are slack and careless in meeting their money obligations. It is popularly said, for example, of a certain man who does many generous things, that he cannot be depended on in the matter

of paying his debts. He gives large amounts of money to benevolence. His name is never lacking on subscription papers in behalf of worthy causes. He is active in the work of the church of which he is a member. He takes part in the weekly prayer meetings and is ready, even eager, to do whatever his hand finds to do in religious service. But it is known throughout the community, that he is very slow in meeting his obligations, especially in paying the monthly bills of the people who serve his household with provisions and other necessaries and luxuries. It is needless to say, that the man's goodness in other ways, and his generosity and his devoutness, suffer immeasurably and hopelessly in the opinion of others, through his disregard of these monetary obligations, and his lack of dependableness in a financial way.

But there are other ways in which many people fail to be dependable. They make engagements with their friends or neighbors, yet do not keep them. The worst of it is, the breaking of the engagement does not appear to trouble them. They do not think of it as in any sense a moral delinquency. They make no apology to those they have disappointed and put to inconvenience. When the matter is brought to their attention, they show no regret at the annoyance their neglect has caused. They think only of their own convenience, and if for any reason it is not suitable or agreeable to them to do what they had promised to do, the matter troubles them no further. They seem to feel no sense of obligation to anyone, but themselves.

There are a great many of these people. It is impossible to calculate the amount of trouble they cause to those who depend upon them and are made to suffer by their lack of faithfulness. Then the effect upon their own name and reputation is most disastrous. Anyone may now and then find himself justifiably unable to do what he has promised to do. He should then instantly send his explanation and express his regret. With any reasonable person, this will be satisfactory. But where no explanation is given and especially where the failure is repeated again and again--it soon becomes evident that there is a flaw in the person's character. He is not a man of his word. He has no sense of the sacredness of a promise. He is not dependable!

It is no wonder that those who fail to keep their promises and live up to their engagements, suffer in reputation. A good name can be won and kept--only by continued and unbroken faithfulness. It does not take long for anyone to advertise the fact, that his word cannot be relied on. Those who have dealings with him may be patient with his shortcomings for a little while--but they will soon grow weary of his failures. Then they will withdraw their patronage.

There are tradesmen and business men who set out well, with excellent opportunities for success--but who, through lack of promptness and dependableness, blight their own prospects, and foredoom promising beginnings to early decay.

A painter promises to do the work you want on a certain day, and neither appears nor sends any explanation of his not coming. When you chide him for not keeping his word, he has some trivial excuse which he expects you to accept as sufficient reason for his failure. The dressmaker promises your gown positively by a certain day. You tell her you want to wear it that evening and she must not disappoint you. She assures you you need have no fear--it will certainly be delivered to you in good season. But it is not delivered, and when you show your vexation, she is very sorry--but somebody failed her and she had to disappoint you. She shows no real regret, and you can only make the best of it, for your garment is unfinished, and you cannot take it out of her hands. But you will probably not go to her with your next gown.

In the end, all such treatment of others, all such disregard of one's word, will result in the destroying of one's reputation for dependableness. People are patient--but ultimately they will cease to patronize the man who is not dependable. They cannot afford to be disappointed, and put to inconvenience, and compelled to suffer loss again and again, through any man's carelessness in keeping his engagements.

The tradesman, the merchant, the professional man, the business man in any line, who keeps his word, is the one in whom people ultimately put their confidence and to whom they give their patronage. It is a splendid reputation, for example, for a store to get--that its goods may be absolutely depended upon, that its advertisements tell the truth, that its salespeople never misrepresent anything they are trying to sell, that a child or the most simple-minded person will be as honestly dealt with as the keenest-eyed purchaser who comes in. The way for any store to get such a reputation, is always to be what it wants its patrons to believe it to be.

But it is not only in business matters that dependableness is important; it is equally important in all personal relations. The Sermon on the Mount teaches us that no merely external or general observance of the law of God is enough. The commandments must be in the heart, and must permeate the whole being, ruling every smallest thought, feeling, word, and act.

At Oxford it used to be said of a young undergraduate, whose short life fulfilled its early promise, "See the man with the Ten Commandments in his face!" The same writing should be seen, not only in every Christian's face--but in his whole life. Good Sunday-keeping is right--but the same sacred seriousness should mark our lives on the weekdays that follow--the same reverence for God, the same spirit of obedience. We should have the beauty of the Lord upon us in our business life and in all our relations with others, as well as when we are praying or receiving the holy communion.

There is a story of a Welsh pastor, about to baptize a shoemaker, and who thus addressed the candidate, "Take care, John, that you wax the threads more carefully, that you draw the seams more closely, and that all your work is done more to the glory of the Master, to whom you now dedicate your life." That is the way religion is to show itself in our lives--if we are truly and fully following Christ.

"Not words of winning note,

Not thoughts from life remote,

Not fond religious airs,

Not sweetly languid prayers,

Not love of sect and creeds;

Wanted--deeds!"

It is well that young people should train themselves from the first, in all things to be absolutely dependable. Let them begin in early youth to keep every engagement, however trivial it may seem; never to break a promise, though it be only for some smallest matter; never to exaggerate; never to misrepresent; never to disappoint anyone's trust or confidence. A life which begins in this way and never deviates from the strictest faithfulness, will gain at last a reputation which will be worth more than the largest fortune. Better still, it will build itself up into a character strong and firm and true and abiding, beautiful with the beauty of God, and armor against temptation and all the unholy influences of the world.

The lesson of dependableness is not learned, however, in a day, nor is it something which comes in a consecration meeting, or in an hour of spiritual rapture--it is the work of years, to get it wrought into the life, and the place where it is learned--is out in the fields of duty, of struggle, of temptation. "The workshop of character is every-day life. The uneventful and commonplace hour--is where the battle is lost or won!"

Dean Stanley says, and his words are worthy of being written in letters of gold: "Give us a man, young or old, high or low--on whom we can thoroughly depend, who will stand firm; when others fail--the faithful and true friend, the honest and fearless adviser, the just and chivalrous helper; in such an one there is a fragment of the Rock of Ages."

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