

Spending Our Days as Is Represented in the Former Chapter

by Philip Doddridge

Christians are called to live a higher life, not just for themselves, but for the glory of God, and this life is necessary for true happiness and fulfillment.

Scripture: Psalm 36:9, Psalm 112:1, Psalm 141:2, Proverbs 23:17, Isaiah 37:10, Amos 8:7, Matthew 5:16, Matthew 6:13, Mark 8:34, Mark 12:30, John 17:4, Romans 12:11, 1 Corinthians 10:31, 1 Corinthians 15:58, 2 Peter 1:11

Topics: "Spiritual Growth", "Eternal Impact"

Description

Philip Doddridge preaches about the importance of Christians aiming high in their spiritual life, not settling for mediocrity, but striving for a deep and intimate relationship with God. He emphasizes the reasonableness of such a life, considering our identity as God's creation and Christ's redemption, highlighting the comfort, usefulness, and eternal impact it brings. Doddridge also discusses the positive effects of this life on dealing with afflictions, facing death with peace, and preparing for eternity, stating that a lack of desire for improvement would indicate a lack of true religion.

Transcript

1, 2. Christians fix their views too low, and indulge too indolent a disposition, which makes it more necessary to urge such a life as that under consideration.--3. It is therefore enforced, from its being apparently reasonable, considering ourselves as the creatures of God, and as redeemed by the blood of Christ.--4. From its evident tendency to conduce to our comfort in life.--5. From the influence it will have to promote our usefulness to others.--6. From its efficacy to make afflictions lighter.--7. From its happy aspect on death.--8. And on eternity.--9. Whereas not to desire improvement would argue a soul destitute of religion. A prayer suited to the state of a soul who longs to attain the life recommended above.

1. I have been assigning, in the preceding chapter, what, I fear, will seem to some of my readers so hard a task, that they will want courage to attempt it; and indeed it is a life in many respects so far above that of the generality of Christians, that I am not without apprehensions that many, who deserve the name, may think the directions, after all the precautions with which I have proposed them, are carried to an unnecessary degree of nicety and strictness. But I am persuaded, much of the credit and comfort of Christianity is lost, in consequence of its professors fixing their aims too low, and not conceiving of their high and holy calling in so elevated and sublime a view as the nature of religion would require, and the word of God would direct.

I am fully convinced, that the expressions of "walking with God," of "being in the fear of the Lord all the day long." (Prov. 23:17) and, above all that of "loving the Lord our God with all our heart, and soul, and mind, and strength," (Mark. 12:30) must require, if not all these circumstances, yet the substance of all that I have been recommending, so far as we have capacity, leisure, and opportunity; and I can not but think that many might command more of the latter, and perhaps improve their capacities too, if they would take a due care in the government of themselves; if they would give up vain and unnecessary diversions, and certain indulgences, which only suit to delight the lower part of our nature, and, to say the best of them, deprive us of pleasures much better than themselves, if they do not plunge us into guilt.

Many of these rules would appear easily practicable, if men would learn to know the value of time, and particularly to redeem it from unnecessary sleep, which wastes many golden hours of the day: hours in which many of God's servants are delighting themselves in him, and drinking in full draughts of the water of life; while these their brethren are slumbering upon their beds, and lost in vain dreams, as far below the common entertainments of a rational creature as the pleasures of the sublimest devotion are above them.

2.

I know likewise, that the mind is very fickle and inconstant and that it is a hard thing to preserve such a government and authority over our thoughts as would be very desirable, and as the plan I have laid down will require. But so much of the honor of God, and so much of our true happiness depends upon it, that I beg you will give me a patient and attentive hearing while I am pleading with you, and that you will seriously examine the arguments, and then judge, whether a care and conduct like that which I have advised be not in itself reasonable, and whether it will not be highly conducive to your comfort and usefulness in life, your peace in death, and the advancement and increase of your eternal glory.

3.

Let conscience say, whether such a life as I have described above be not in itself highly reasonable. Look over the substance of it again, and bring it under a close examination; for I am very apprehensive that some weak objections may rise against the whole, which may in their consequence affect particulars, against which no reasonable man would presume to make any objection at all. Recollect, O Christian! carry it with you in your memory and your heart, while you are pursuing this review, that you are the creature of God; that you are purchased with the blood of Jesus; and then say whether these relations in which you stand do not demand all that application and resolution which I would engage you to.

Suppose all the counsels I have given you reduced into practice; suppose every day begun and concluded with such devout breathings after God, and such holy retirements for morning and evening converse with him and with your own heart; suppose a daily care, in contriving how your time may be managed, and in reflecting how it has been employed; suppose this regard to God, this sense of his presence, and zeal for his glory, to run through your acts of worship, your hours of business and recreation; suppose this attention to Providence, this guard against temptation, this dependence upon divine influence, this government of the thoughts in solitude, and of the discourse in company; nay, I will add farther, suppose every particular direction given to be pursued, excepting when particular cases occur, with respect to which you shall be able in conscience to say, "I waive it not from indolence and carelessness, but because I think it will be just now more pleasing to God to be doing something else," which may often happen in human life, where general rules are best concerted: suppose, I say, all this to be done, not for a day or a week, but through the remainder of life, whether longer or shorter; and suppose this to be reviewed at the close of life, in the full exercise of your rational faculties; will there be reason to say in the reflection, "I have taken too much pains in religion; the Author of my being did not deserve all this from me; less diligence, less fidelity, less zeal than this, might have been an equivalent for the blood which was shed for

my redemption.

A part of my heart, a part of my time, a part of my labors, might have sufficed for him, who hath given me all my powers; for him who hath delivered me from that destruction which would have made them my everlasting torment; for him who is raising me to the regions of a blissful immortality." Can you with any face say this? If you cannot, then surely your conscience bears witness, that all I have recommended, under the limitations above, is reasonable; that duty and gratitude require it; and consequently, that, by every allowed failure in it, you bring guilt upon your own soul, you offend God, and act unworthy of your Christian profession. 4.

I entreat you farther to consider whether such a conduct as I have now been recommending, would not conduce much to your comfort and usefulness in life. Reflect seriously what is true happiness! Does it consist in distance from God, or in nearness to him? Surely you cannot be a Christian, surely you cannot be a rational man, if you doubt whether communion with the great Father of our spirits be a pleasure and felicity; and if it be, then surely they enjoy most of it who keep him most constantly in view.

You cannot but know, in your own conscience, that it is this which makes the happiness of heaven; and therefore the more of it any man enjoys upon earth, the more of heaven comes down into his soul. If you have made any trial of religion, though it be but a few months or weeks since you first became acquainted with it, you must be some judge, from your own experience, which have been the most pleasant days of your life. Have they not been those in which you have acted most upon these principles? those in which you have most steadily and resolutely carried them through every hour of time, and every circumstance of life?

The check which you must, in many instances, give to your own inclinations, might seem disagreeable; but it would surely be overbalanced, in a most happy manner, by the satisfaction you would find in a consciousness of self-government; in having such a command of your thoughts, affections, and actions, as is much more glorious than any authority over others can be. 5. I would also entreat you to consider the influence which such a conduct as this might have upon the happiness of others.

And it is easy to be seen that it must be very great; as you would find your heart always disposed to watch every opportunity of doing good, and to seize it with eagerness and delight. It would engage you to make it the study and business of your life, to order things in such a manner that the end of one kind and useful action might be the beginning of another; in which you would go on as naturally as the inferior animals do in those productions and actions by which mankind are relieved or enriched; or as the earth bears her successive crops of different vegetable supplies.

And though mankind be, in this corrupt state, so unhappily inclined to imitate evil examples rather than good, yet it may be expected, that while "your light shines before men," some, "seeing your good works," will endeavor to transcribe them in their own lives, and so to "glorify your Father which is in heaven." (Matt. 5:16) The charm of such beautiful models would surely impress some, and incline them at least to attempt an imitation; and every attempt would dispose to another.

And thus, through the divine goodness, you might be entitled to a share in the praise, and the reward, not only of the good you had immediately done yourself; but likewise of that which you had engaged others to do. And no eye, but that of the all-searching God, can see into what distant times or places the blessed consequences may reach. In every instance in which these consequences appear, it will put a generous and sublime joy into your heart which no worldly prosperity could afford, and which would be the liveliest

emblem of that high delight which the blessed God feels in seeing and making his creatures happy. 6.

It is true indeed, that amidst all these pious and benevolent cares, afflictions may come, and in some measure interrupt you in the midst of your projected schemes. But surely these afflictions will be much lighter, when your heart is gladdened with the peaceful and joyful reflections of your own mind, and with so honorable a testimony of conscience before God and man. Delightful will it be to go back to past scenes in your pleasing review, and to think that you have not only been sincerely humbling yourself for those past offences which afflictions may bring to your remembrance; but that you have given substantial proofs of the sincerity of that humiliation, by a real reformation of what has been amiss, and by adding with strenuous and vigorous resolution on the contrary principle.

And while converse with God, and doing good to men, are made the great business and pleasure of life, you will find a thousand opportunities of enjoyment, even in the midst of these afflictions, which would render you so incapable of relishing the pleasures of sense, that the very mention of them might, in those circumstances, seem an insult and a reproach. 7. At length death will come, that solemn and important hour, which has been passed through by so many thousands who have in the main lived such a life, and by so many millions who have neglected it.

And let conscience say, if there was ever one of all these millions who had any reason to rejoice in that neglect; or any one, among the most strict and exemplary Christians, who then lamented that his heart and life had been too zealously devoted to God. Let conscience say, whether they have wished to have a part of that time, which they have thus employed, given back to them again, that they might be more conformed to this world; that they might plunge themselves deeper into its amusements, or pursue its honors, its possessions, or its pleasures, with greater eagerness than they had done.

If you were yourself dying, and a dear friend or child stood near you, and this book and the preceding chapter should chance to come into your thoughts, would you caution that friend or child against conducting himself by such rules as I have advanced? The question may perhaps seem unnecessary, where the answer is so plain and certain. Well, then, let me beseech you to learn how you should live, by reflecting how you would die, and what course you would wish to look back upon, when you are just quitting this world and entering upon another.

Think seriously; what if death should surprise you on a sudden, and you should be called into eternity at an hour's or a minute's warning, would you not wish that your last day should have been thus begun; and the course of it, if it were a day of health and activity, should have been thus managed? Would you not wish that your Lord should find you engaged in such thoughts and such pursuits? Would not the passage, the flight from earth to heaven, be most easy, most pleasant, in this view and connection?

And, on the other hand, if death should make more gradual approaches. would not the remembrance of such a pious, holy, humble, diligent, and useful life, make a dying bed much softer and easier than it would otherwise be? You would not die, depending upon these things. God forbid that you should! Sensible of your many imperfections, you would, no doubt, desire to throw yourself at the feet of Christ, that you might appear before God, "adorned with his righteousness, and washed from your sins in his blood."

You would also, with your dying breath, ascribe to the riches of his grace every good disposition you had found in your heart, and every worthy action you had been enabled to perform. But would it not give you a delight, worthy of being purchased with ten thousand worlds, to reflect that his "grace, bestowed on you, had not been in vain," (1 Cor. 15:10) but that you had, from a humble principle of grateful love, glorified

your heavenly Father on earth, and, in some degree. though not with the perfection you could desire, "finished the work which he had given you to do:" (John 17:4) that you had been living for many past years as on the borders of heaven, and endeavoring to form your heart and life to the temper and manners of its inhabitants? 8.

And once more, let me entreat you to reflect on the view you will have of this matter when you come into a world of glory, if (which I hope will be the happy case) divine mercy conduct you thither. Will not your reception there be affected by your care, or negligence, in this holy course? Will it appear an indifferent thing in the eye of the blessed Jesus, who distributes the crowns, and allots the thrones there, whether you have been among the most zealous, or the most indolent of his servants?

Surely you must wish to have "an entrance administered unto you abundantly into the kingdom of your Lord and Savior," (2 Pet. 1:11) and what can more certainly conduce to it, than to be "always abounding in this work?" (1 Cor. 15:58) You cannot think so meanly of that glorious state, as to imagine that you shall there look round about with a secret disappointment, and say in your heart that you over-valued the inheritance you have received, and pursued it with too much earnestness.

You will not surely complain that it had too many of your thoughts and cares; but, on the contrary, you have the highest reason to believe, that, if any thing were capable of exciting your indignation and your grief there, it would be, that, amidst so many motives and so many advantages, you exerted yourself no more in the prosecution of such a prize. 9. But I will not enlarge on so clear a case, and therefore conclude the chapter with reminding you, that to allow yourself deliberately to sit down satisfied with any imperfect attainments in religion, and to look upon a more confirmed and improved state of it as what you do not desire, nay, as what you sincerely resolve that you will not pursue, is one of the most fatal signs we can well imagine that you are an entire stranger to the first principles of it.

A Prayer suited to the State of a Soul who desires to attain the Life above recommended.

"Blessed God! I cannot contradict the force of these reasonings: O that I may feel more than ever the lasting effects of them! Thou art the great fountain of being and of happiness; and as from thee my being was derived, so from thee my happiness directly flows; and the nearer I am to thee, the purer and more delicious is the stream. 'With thee is the fountain of life; in thy light may I see light!' (Psa. 36:9) The great object of my final hope is to dwell for ever with thee.

Give me now some foretaste of that delight! Give me, I beseech thee, to experience 'the blessedness of that man who feareth the Lord, and who delighteth greatly in his commandments,' (Psa. 112:1) and so form my heart by thy grace, that I may 'be in the fear of the Lord all the day long.' (Prov. 23:17) "To thee may my awakening thoughts be directed: and with the first ray of light that visits my opening eyes, 'lift up, O Lord, the light of thy countenance upon me!' (Psa. 4:6) When my faculties are roused from that broken state in which they lay, while buried, and, as it were, annihilated in sleep, may my first actions be consecrated to thee, O God, who givest me light; who givest me, as it were, every morning a new life and a new reason?

Enable my heart to pour out itself before thee with a filial reverence, freedom, and endearment! And may I hearken to God, as I desire that he should hearken unto me! May thy word be read with attention and pleasure! May my soul be delivered into the mold of it, and may I 'hide it in my heart that I may not sin against thee!' (Psa. 119:111) Animated by the great motives there suggested, may I every morning by renewing the dedication of myself to thee, through Jesus Christ thy beloved Son; and be deriving from him

new supplies of that blessed Spirit of thine, whose influences are the life of my soul.

"And being thus prepared, do thou, Lord, lead me forth by the hand to all the duties and events of the day! In that calling, wherein thou hast been pleased to call me, may I abide with thee, (1 Cor. 7:20) not `being slothful in business,' but `fervent in spirit, serving the Lord!' (Rom. 12:11) May I know the value of time, and always improve it to the best advantage, in such duties as thou hast assigned me, how low soever they may seem, or how painful soever they may be! To thy glory, O Lord, may the labors of life be pursued; and to thy glory may the refreshments of it be sought! `Whether I eat, or drink, or whatever I do,' (1 Cor. 10:31) may that end still be kept in view, and may it be attained!

And may every refreshment, and release from business, prepare me to serve thee with greater vigor and resolution! "May my eye be watchful to observe the descent of mercies from thee; and may a grateful sense of thy hand in them add a savor and relish to all! And when afflictions come, which in a world like this I would accustom myself to expect, may I remember that they come from thee; and may that fully reconcile me to them, while I firmly believe that the same love which gives us our daily bread, appoints us our daily crosses; which I would learn to take up, that I may follow my dear Lord, (Mark 8:34) with a temper like that which he manifested when ascending Calvary for my sake: saying, like him, `The cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?' (John, 18:11) And when I `enter into temptation,' do thou, Lord, `deliver me from evil.' (Matt. 6:13) Make me sensible, I entreat thee, of my own weakness, that my heart may be raised to thee for present communications of proportionable strength.

When I am engaged in the society of others, may it be my desire and my care that I may do and receive as much good as possible; and may I continually answer the great purposes of life, by honoring thee; and diffusing useful knowledge and happiness in the world. And when I am alone, may I remember my `heavenly Father is with me;' and may I enjoy the pleasure of thy presence, and feel the animating power of it awakening my soul to an earnest desire to think and act as in thy sight.

"Thus let my days be spent; and let them always be closed in thy fear, and under a sense of thy gracious presence. Meet me, O Lord, in my evening retirements. May I choose the most proper time for them; may I diligently attend to reading and prayer; and when I review my conduct, may I do it with an impartial eye. Let not self-love spread a false coloring over it; but may I judge myself; as one that expects to be judged of the Lord, and is very solicitous he may be approved by thee, who `searchest all hearts,' and `canst not forget any of my works.' (Amos, 8:7) `Let my prayer come before thee as incense,' add `let the lifting up of my hands be as the morning and the evening sacrifice.' (Psa. 141:2) May I resign my powers to sleep in sweet calmness and serenity; conscious that I have lived to God in the day, and cheerfully persuaded that I am `accepted of thee in Christ Jesus my Lord,' and humbly `hoping in thy mercy through him,' whether my days on earth be prolonged; or `the residue of them be cut off in the midst.' (Isa. 37:10) If death comes by a leisurely advance, may it find me thus employed; and if I am called on a sudden to exchange worlds, may my last days and hours be found to have been conducted by such maxims as these; that I may have a sweet and easy passage from the services of time to the infinitely nobler services of an immortal state.

I ask it through him, who, while on earth, was the fairest pattern and example of every virtue and grace, and who now lives and reigns with thee, `able to save unto the uttermost.' (Heb. 7:25) to him, having done all, I would fly, with humble acknowledgment that I am an `unprofitable servant;' (Luke, 17:10) `to him be glory for ever and ever.' Amen "

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