

Hands: A Study

by J.R. Miller

Our hands are a powerful tool for good, and we should strive to develop all the good in them and use them to bless, comfort, and help others.

Scripture: Colossians 3:23

Topics: "Service", "The Power of Action"

Description

J.R. Miller emphasizes the profound significance of our hands in his sermon 'Hands: A Study,' illustrating how they are instruments of power, creativity, and service. He reflects on the journey of a hand from infancy to old age, highlighting the potential for both good and harm that resides within our actions. Miller urges the congregation to train their hands for diligent work, loyalty to duty, and gentle ministries, drawing parallels to the hands of Christ, which bear the marks of sacrifice and love. He concludes by reminding us that even in stillness, folded hands can be powerful through prayer and intercession, leaving a lasting impact on the lives of others. Ultimately, the beauty of our hands is measured not by their appearance but by their willingness to serve and bless others.

Transcript

"Take my hands, and let them move

At the impulse of Your love."

Frances Havergal

Man is the only being that has such wondrous hands; the hand, therefore, is one of the marks of man's rank and of his power. With his hand he conquers nature; with his hand he does the great works that distinguish him in God's creation; with his hand he cultivates the soil, fells the trees of the forest, tunnels the mountains, builds cities, constructs machines, belts the globe with iron rails, navigates the sea and turns all the wheels of business.

It is man's hand, too, which gives form and reality to the dreams and the visions of man's brain and soul. With his hand, the thinker puts his thoughts into written words, to become powers in the world; with his hand the poet weaves into graceful lines--the gentle inspirations of his Muse; with his hand the musician interprets on his instrument, the marvelous harmonies that move and stir men's hearts to their depths; with his hand the artist puts on his canvas the wonderful creations of his genius which immortalize his name

and become part of the world's heritage of beauty.

Thus we have hints of the importance of our hands. Just what to do with them--is a vital question! In them there are great possibilities of power and of usefulness. A distinguished author, when he saw the marble image of an infant's hand, wrote of it something like this: that it ought to be kept until the child had grown to womanhood and then to old age; until the hand had felt the pressure of affection and returned it; until it had worn the wedding-ring; until it had nursed babies and buried them; until it had gathered the flowers of earth's pleasure and been pierced by the thorns; until it had wrought its part in the world's work; until it had grown old, wrinkled and faded and been folded on the bosom in the repose of death; that then another cast of it in marble ought to be made, when the two hands would tell the whole story of a life.

It is intensely interesting to look at an infant's hand and to try to read its prophecy. Perhaps sleeping in the little fingers--there is music which some day may thrill men's souls; or it may be that hidden away in them there are pictures which by and by will be made to live on the canvas; or possibly there are poems whose magic lines will some time breathe inspirations for many lives; at least, there must be folded up in the baby's chubby fingers, countless beautiful things which will take form through the years--as the hands do their allotted task-work. It is interesting to look at the little hand--and to wonder what it will do.

Then it is interesting, when a hand is folded in the coffin, to look at it and to think of all it has done--its victories, its achievements, its beneficences; or perchance of the evil it has wrought--the hurt it has given to human lives, the suffering it has caused, the seeds of sin it has scattered. The story of all this--the cold, still hand tells!

Our hands should be trained to do their best; all the possibilities for good in them should be developed. No doubt God has put into many fingers, music which has never been drawn out, and pictures which have never been painted upon canvas, and beauty which has never charmed men's eyes, and noble beneficences which have never been wrought in acts. We should seek to bring out all that God has hidden in our hands. The things they were made to do--we should strive to teach them to do.

We should train them, also, to perform all their work carefully and thoroughly--always to do their best. Even the smallest things, that seem insignificant, we should do as well as we can. That is the way God works. The most minute micro-organisms, millions of which swim in a drop of water--are as perfect in all their functions--as are the largest of God's creatures. We do not know what is small or what is great in this world. Little things may be seeds of future great things; from the most infinitesimal acts, stupendous results may come.

"From things we call little Your eyes

See great things looking out."

Our hands, therefore, should be trained to do always their best work. It is a shame to do anything in a slovenly way. It is a shame to work negligently, to slight what we are set to do, to hurry through our tasks--marring the workmanship we ought to fashion, just as carefully if it be but the writing of a postal-card or the dusting of a room or the building of a coal-shed--as if it were the painting of a great picture, the furnishing of a palace or the erection of a cathedral.

Our hands should be ready always for duty. For a time, the child does not find anything for its hands to do but to play; soon, however, it begins to discover tasks--for life is duty. Youth is full of bright dreams. Its

earlier outlook paints life as pleasure only--but soon the aspect changes, the glamour fades out, and something harder and sterner emerges--as duty begins to press its claims. Life's responsibility, when realized, is very serious and starts grave thoughts. It may be a burden to lift, a duty to do, a cross to bear--yet to decline it is to fail.

"Life is a burden--bear it;

Life is a duty--do it;

Life is a thorn-crown--wear it.

Though it break your heart in twain,

Though the burden crush you down,

Close your lips and hide your pain:

First the cross--and then the crown!"

Our hands should be loyal. They should never be withheld from duty. The question of pain or cost--we should never raise. Sometimes we may have to grasp thorns, and the thorns will pierce our hands and leave them bleeding--yet we should not shrink even then from loyalty to duty.

We can never forget how the hands of Christ were pierced and mangled in making redemption for us. They were beautiful hands; they were soft and gentle--so gentle that they would not break a bruised reed; they were healing hands and hands that were ever scattering blessings; yet the cruel nails tore them. He might have turned away from his cross--but he never faltered. With white face and steady step--he went straight on to death! Thus the most beautiful hands in all the universe today--are wounded hands.

Indeed, the wounds are the very marks of glory on the hands of Christ. The hands of our Savior--are known by the print of the nails. In heaven we shall know him by his wounded hands. The most beautiful hands may not then be the softest, the smoothest--but may be hardened with toil,- or torn in struggle!

We may go through life trying to keep our hands very white, unroughened, unwounded--yet at the end we may find that they have wrought nothing, won nothing. When an army comes home from victorious war, it is not the regiment with the full ranks of unscarred men that the people cheer most loudly--but the regiment with only a remnant of soldiers, and these bearing the marks of many a battle. Hands scarred from conflict with life's enemies--are more beautiful when held up before God--than hands white and unwounded and covered with flashing jewels, because the scars tell of toil and battle.

Many a good man seems to live in vain, in this world. He toils hard--but gathers nothing; he seems unsuccessful all his days; the things he undertakes do not prosper. He is a good man, faithful, conscientious, prayerful, honest and diligent--yet he appears to have no earthly reward. His life is one long discouragement, one unbroken struggle with unfavorable circumstances and conditions. The burden of care never lightens, and the shadow of disappointment never lifts. He dies a poor man--with hands rough and scarred and empty. His neighbor, close beside him, seems to have only success, and never failure. No disappointment comes to him; everything he touches prospers. Without toil or struggle or wounding--his hands are filled with earth's treasures! But when God looks upon the two men's hands--it may be that he will honor most the empty hands with the knotted joints and the marks of toil and struggle

and suffering!

Our hands should be trained to gentle ministries. It would be pleasant to think of what a hand--just a common hand without money or gifts of any kind--can do to bless, to inspire, to comfort, to soothe, to help! A dying father lays his hand upon the head of his child in parting blessing, and through all his life the child feels the touch and is blessed by its memory. A baby wakes in the darkness and cries out in terror; the mother reaches out her hand and lays it upon her little one, and it is instantly quieted. You are sick and hot with fever--and a friend comes in and lays a soft, cool hand upon your burning brow, and a delicious sense of soothing thrills you.

You are in sore affliction, sitting with breaking heart in your home, out of which the light has gone; there seems no comfort for you. Then one comes in and sits down beside you; he scarcely speaks--but he takes your hand in his and holds it with warm, gentle pressure. It may be a rough, hard hand--or a large, awkward hand--but there flows through it to your soul a current of loving sympathy and of strengthful inspiration, which seems to fill up your heart's drained fountains. The friend goes away without having spoken a dozen words--but you are conscious of a wonderful uplifting.

You go out some morning discouraged and heavy-hearted; you do not see the blue sky overhead, for your eyes are downcast on the dull earth, where only clods and cobbles can be seen. Something has cast a shadow over you. Suddenly in the way a friend meets you and greets you in cheerful tone; reaching out his hand, he grasps yours with great heartiness and holds it for a moment tight in his own warm clasp while he looks into your face and speaks an earnest, whole-souled greeting. He goes his way and you hurry on in yours--but now you look up and see that there is blue sky over your head; the shadow has lifted and the sunshine has entered your soul. Your friend's handshake did it all.

At the Beautiful Gate lay a lame man reaching out his hand for alms. Two men approached, and the beggar craved a money-gift. The men had no money to give--but in the name of Christ they bade him rise up and walk; then one of them gave him his hand to help him to his feet. We say the age of miracles is past--but yet everywhere consecrated human hands are helping fallen ones to rise! Thousands who are in heaven today--were saved through the ministry of a human hand that at the right moment was reached out in sympathy or in helpfulness, to enable them to rise.

These are hints only of the possibilities of blessing which God has hidden away in our hands. Even without money and without words--we may perform a wonderful ministry of good simply with our hands! The power that is in their touch or in their clasp is almost infinite! There is a possible ministry of incalculable influence--in our ordinary handshaking. Every day as we pass along, come unnumbered opportunities to do great good simply by the reaching out of our hands to those who are tempted or discouraged or sorrowing, or who have fainted and fallen in the strife.

We ought to give our hands to Christ in consecration; we ought to let our heart flow out through our hands--that with every hand-grasp and every touch--our best love may go forth to those who need its healing, inspiring ministry. God wishes our hands to be always ready to minister to those who are in need. No other work in this world is so important as this. No matter what we are doing, when the call of human distress reaches our ear--we must drop everything and be quick to respond.

The old legend says that once three young ladies disputed about their hands, as to whose were the most beautiful. One of them dipped her hand in the pure stream; another plucked berries until her fingers were pink; and the third gathered flowers whose fragrance clung to her hands. An old haggard woman passed

by and asked for some gift--but all refused her. Another young woman, plain and with no claim to beauty of hand, satisfied her need. The old woman then said, "It is not the hand that is washed in the brook, nor the hand tinted with red, nor the hand garlanded and perfumed with flowers, that is most beautiful--but the hand that gives to the poor." As she spoke her wrinkles were gone, her staff was thrown away, and she stood there--an angel from heaven.

This is only a legend--but its judgment is true: the beautiful hands are those that minister in Christ's name to others.

Sometimes the hands can only be folded in quietness, unable longer to toil or do battle or perform active service of good. But even folded hands need not be useless.

It is a sad pity when hands that are strong and full of life and power--are folded in indolence or cowardice. But when through physical illness or through maiming on the field--our hands can no more labor or bear the sword or do their gentle deeds--we should not repine. God never asks impossibilities, and he is pleased with sweet resignation when in his providence we can no longer take our place amid his active workers. The most acceptable service we can then render to him--is a ministry of joy and praise, while we submit to his loving will and are quiet under his afflicting hand. But even folded hands may still be hands of blessing: they may be reached up to God in prayer and intercession, and may draw down rich blessings upon other lives!

At last, the busiest hands must lie folded on the bosom in the stillness of death--but the things we have done in this world shall not perish--when the hands that wrought them are moldering to dust! Touches of beauty which we have left on other lives--shall never fade out; the thrill of new strength given by our warm hand-clasp, shall go on forever in quickened life. The fallen one lifted up by us and saved--shall walk eternally in glory! The seeds which our hand have scattered--shall grow into plants of immortal beauty! When we rest from our labors--the work of our hands shall follow us.

Men journey now thousands of miles to look upon the paintings of artists whose hands for centuries, have wrought no beauty; ages and ages hence, in heaven, angels and redeemed men shall look with rapturous joy upon some touch of beauty put yesterday in a human soul--by a lowly consecrated hand of earth!

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