

Living Up to Our Best Intentions

by J.R. Miller

J.R. Miller emphasizes the importance of transforming good intentions into clear, actionable goals to live a meaningful and faithful life.

Scripture: Proverbs 16:3, Colossians 3:23, James 1:22

Topics: "Living Purposefully", "Intentions and Actions"

Description

J.R. Miller emphasizes the importance of transforming our best intentions into concrete actions for a fulfilling life. He notes that while we often make resolutions during significant moments, these intentions can be fleeting without a clear plan for implementation. Miller encourages us to define our goals and to focus on the everyday duties that can lead to a noble life, rather than seeking grand achievements. He reminds us that true progress comes from faithfully fulfilling our daily responsibilities and that each day presents an opportunity to live well. Ultimately, he asserts that by living each day with purpose and intention, we can create a beautiful and meaningful life.

Transcript

If our best intentions continually dominated our whole life, we would all live well. We all mean to live well; at least, there are times with all of us when we resolve to do so. New Year's days, birthdays, communion Sundays, and other times, when the realities of life stand out in clearer relief than ordinarily, and impress us with unusual vividness, start in most of us serious thoughts, and inspire in us lofty aspirations and noble intentions. We are apt then to make excellent resolutions, and to start off in new and higher planes of living. Now, it would be well for us, if there were some way of perpetuating these better moods, and living up to these good intentions. Too often, however, the serious impressions are but transient, and there is too little vitality in the good intentions and resolutions to make them really potent impulses for many days, or to give them permanence among the motives and forces of our life.

Of course, we cannot make our lives beautiful, merely by alternately adopting resolutions of amendment, and wailing out dolorous confessions of failure. Life runs deeper than mere words. Beautiful living is not fashioned by evanescent good intentions. Blemishes and stains are not covered up, nor are flaws mended--by penitential sighings of regret. Mere transient spasms of true living, do not give grandeur to a life.

If a building is to be stable and stately, every stone from foundation to dome must be cut and set with care. If the texture of the fabric is to be beautiful and strong, every thread of web and woof must be bright and

clean--and the weaving must be done with uniform skill and care. If a life is to be admirable when finished, its periodical good intentions must become strong, self-sustaining principles, shaping its every act, and ruling all its days and hours.

It is possible to live up to the impulses of our best intentions, or, at least, to do so to a much greater degree than most of us realize. In many of these good intentions, one element of weakness lies in their vagueness or indefiniteness. We simply resolve to be better this year than last, or to do more good in the future than in the past; but we have no clear and distinct conception in our minds of the points in which we will be better, or of the particular ways in which we will increase our usefulness. Our ideas of living better, and doing greater good, are nebulous and undefined.

We would be much more apt to succeed in our new purposes, if we reduced them to definite and practical shape. In what respects will we amend our ways? This question starts another. What are our faults? Wherein do we fail in holy living? What are the mistakes we have been making? The answers to these questions will indicate to us the particular ways in which we need to live better. Then, in what definite ways shall we strive to be more useful? To what new Christian work shall we put our hands? Upon what new lines of service shall we enter? Just what old mistakes are we to avoid? If we would bring our vague, hazy ideas of greater usefulness down into some practical forms, and then enter at once upon the execution of our resolutions, they would be much more likely to become permanent, and to grow into our life.

There are many people who sigh over their poor Christian living and their far-awayness from Christ, and pray much, and earnestly too, for more faith, more love, greater nearness to the Savior, who, after all, have no well-defined conceptions of the better things they would like to attain. Their sighings are little more than a vague and indolent discontent. They think they are sincere; but they are not, for they really do not want to be any better, or to have more of Christ, or do more in his service; if they did, they would soon be out of their poor, unsatisfactory condition.

Truly earnest longings heavenward, have a wondrous lifting power. There is a great deal of only imagined spiritual aspiration. Very much of our singing, "Nearer, my God, to You," is only the weakest kind of religious sentimentalism. Such vapid good intentions come to nothing, because there really are no good intentions to begin with. When the spiritual day-dreaming gets vigor enough to be worthy the name of desire or purpose, the higher attainments longed for will soon be reached. We must really want what we ask in prayer--or we shall never get it. Then we must help to answer our own prayers, by reaching after, and struggling toward, what we want--and by climbing the steep paths that lead to the radiant heights.

Another element of weakness in many of our desires for better life and larger usefulness, is that we think of great and perhaps impossible attainments, and overlook the simple things that lie within our reach. No violent, overstrained exertions are necessary to a noble life, no superhuman efforts and achievements--nothing but every-day duty faithfully done. The most of us must be content to live what are regarded as commonplace lives, without attracting the attention of the world, or winning the laurels of fame. We must, for the greater part, devote ourselves to the duties that spring out of our ordinary business, social and domestic relations. The pressure of life's necessities is so great, that we cannot often turn aside to do things that lie outside of our common calling. Whatever service we render to Christ, must be rendered in and along the line of these relations, and while we are busied in the imperative duties which every day brings to our hands.

It is just at this point that many fail. They spend all their life seeking for the place in this world which they were intended to fill: they never settle down to anything with any sort of restful or contented feeling. They have a lofty, though possibly a very nebulous, ideal of a wondrously brilliant life, to which they would like to attain, in which their powers would find full and adequate scope, and where they could achieve great things; but in their present condition, with its limitations, they can accomplish nothing worthy of their powers. So they go on discontented with their God-ordained lot, and sighing for another lot. And, while they sigh, the years glide away; and soon they will come to the end, to find that they have missed every opportunity of doing anything worthy of an immortal being, in the passage from time to eternity.

The truth is, one's vocation is never some far-off possibility; it is always for the present, the simple round of duties that the passing hour brings. Someone has pictured the days as coming to us with their faces veiled; but, when they have passed beyond our recall, the draped figures become radiant, and the gifts we rejected are seen to be treasures fit for king's houses. No day is commonplace, if only we had eyes to see the veiled splendors that lie in its opportunities, and in its plain and dull routine. There is no duty which comes to our hand, but brings to us the possibility of kingly service, with divine reward.

We greatly mistake, therefore, if we think there is no opportunity for ordinary people to make their years radiant and beautiful by simply filling them with acceptable Christian service. There is room in the commonest relations of life, not only for fidelity--but for heroism. No ministry is more pleasing to the Master, than that of cheery and hearty faithfulness to humble duty, when there is no pen to write its history, nor any voice to proclaim its praise. To be a good husband-- loving, tender, unselfish, and nourishing; or a good wife-- thoughtful, helpful, uncomplaining, and inspiring--is most acceptable service. To live well in one's place in the world, adorning one's calling, however lowly, doing one's most common work diligently and honestly, and dwelling in love and unselfishness with all men, is to live grandly. To fight well the battle with one's own lusts and ill-temper, and to be victorious in the midst of the countless temptations and provocations of every-day experience, is to be a Christian hero.

There is a field, therefore, for victorious living very close at home. It is in these common things that most of us must make our progress, and win our distinction; or fail, and be defeated. And there is room enough in these mundane duties and opportunities, for very noble and beautiful lives. There is nothing nobler or greater to a human soul--than simple faithfulness. "She has done what she could," was the highest commendation that ever fell from the Master's lips. An angel could do no more. When we are resolving to live more grandly in the future than in the past, it will help us to bring our eyes down from the far-off mountain-peaks, and from among the stars, where there is nothing whatever for us to do--and to look close about our feet, where lie many neglected duties, many unimproved opportunities, and many possibilities of higher attainment in spirit, in temper, in speech, in heart.

Another element of weakness in much of our resolving, is that we try to grasp too much of life at one time. We think of it as a whole, instead of taking the days one by one. Life is a mosaic, and each tiny piece must be cut with skill. The only way to make a perfect chain is to fashion each separate link with skill and care, as it passes through our hands. The only way to make a radiant day, is to make its each and every hour bright with the luster of approved fidelity. The only way to have a year at its close stainless and beautiful, is to keep the days, as they pass, all pure and noble, with the loveliness of holy, useful living.

It is thus, in little days, that our years come to us--and we have but the one small fragment to fill and beautify at a time. The year is a book, and for each day one fair white page is opened before us; and we are artists, whose duty it is to put something beautiful on the page; or we are poets, and are to write some

lovely thought, some radiant sentence, on each leaf as it lies open before us; or we are historians, and must give to the page some record of work or duty or victory to enshrine and carry away.

It ought not to be hard to live one day well. Anyone should be able to remember God, and keep his heart open toward heaven, and to remember others in need and suffering about him, and keep his hand stretched out in helpfulness--for just one day. Yet that is all there is to do. We never have more than one day to live. We have no tomorrows. God never gives us years, or even weeks--he gives us only days. If we live each day well, all our life will, in the end, be radiant and beautiful.

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