

The Grace of Thoughtfulness

by J.R. Miller

Thoughtfulness is a key characteristic of a noble Christian character that involves thinking of others and modifying one's conduct to avoid causing harm or pain to them.

Scripture: Philippians 2:3

Topics: "Christian Love", "Thoughtfulness"

Description

J.R. Miller emphasizes the importance of thoughtfulness in our interactions with others, arguing that many people cause unintentional pain through heedless words and actions. He encourages cultivating a spirit of consideration that prioritizes the feelings and needs of others, rather than acting solely on personal impulses. Miller illustrates this with the example of a child who sacrifices his beloved canary to spare his sick mother distress, highlighting that true love involves selflessness and attentiveness. He warns against the dangers of thoughtlessness, which can lead to a lack of harmony in family and community life, and calls for proactive kindness and support. Ultimately, Miller asserts that thoughtfulness is a reflection of noble Christian character and a vital aspect of living out our faith.

Transcript

"I didn't think!" is what people say oftentimes when they suddenly become aware of the pain which some heedless act or careless word of theirs has given to a gentle heart. Too often our thoughtfulness is an afterthought; the problem is to get it to its true place, where it will become motive and inspiration to gentleness, instead of pain and penitence over a failure in love's duty. It is infinitely better that thoughtfulness should strew our friends' path with flowers--than that regret should pile exaggerated floral offerings on their coffins! We would do well to get our kindnesses done while they will do good, giving cheer and encouragement, and not keep them back until there is no need for them. It ought to be possible to get the grace of thoughtfulness into our life, as part of our spiritual culture, even in early years.

No doubt much evil is wrought by lack of thought. Many people with kindly heart, continually cause pain to others by mere heedlessness. They seem to have no perception of the sensibilities of those around them. They have never trained themselves to think at all of others, in connection with their own words and acts. They have accustomed themselves to think only of their own pleasure, and to say and do only what their own impulses prompt, without asking whether others will be pleased or displeased. They think only of their own comfort and convenience, and never of how the thing they wish to do may break into the comfort or convenience of others.

We find abundant illustration of this in all our common life. The fellowship of many homes is marred and spoiled by exhibitions of this thoughtless spirit. Family life should be a blending of all the tastes, dispositions, talents, gifts, and resources of all the members of the household. In each one there should be much self-restraint. No member may live in a home circle, as if he were dwelling alone in a great house, with only himself to consider. He must repress much in himself, for the sake of the other members. He must do many things which he might not do if he were alone, because he is a member of a little community, whose happiness and good he is to seek at every point. No household life can ever be made truly ideal, by all having always their own way.

But many people who are tied up in family life forget this. They expect to live as if regardlessly of others, as if they were living alone. They consider no one's comfort, peace, or pleasure but their own. They let their own impulses have full and free expression. They make no effort to repress any elements or dispositions in themselves, which tend to give pain to others. They demand all their rights, not remembering that the other members of the family have rights too, and that home happiness can be secured only by the mutual surrender of rights, each in honor preferring the others, each seeking not to be ministered unto--but to minister. This exacting spirit leads to continual thoughtlessness.

Thoughtfulness is thinking of others, and modifying one's conduct so as to avoid whatever would give trouble, inconvenience, or hurt to others. A child had a beautiful canary bird. From morning until night it sang, and its song filled all the house. But the child's mother was ill--so ill that even the singing of the bird, which to the boy was such delicious music, disturbed and distressed her. He put it into a part of the house as far away as possible from the sickroom, thinking that the sound could not reach his mother's ears. But the shrill singing still came into the room, and pained the weak invalid.

One morning, as the child stood holding his mother's hand, the bird began to sing, and the notes came into the chamber very faintly; and yet as he watched the sufferer's face, he saw an expression of pain sweep over it. She said nothing--but the boy needed no words to tell him that the bird's singing was distressing her. "It is no music to me," he said, "if it pains my mother!" So he took the cage, and, carrying it away, gave the bird to a friend. "But you loved the bird," his mother said, when she learned what he had done. "Yes," he replied; "but I love you more."

That was a beautiful thing to do. It told of true thoughtfulness in the child. His personal pleasure must be sacrificed because gratifying it gave pain to one who was dear to him. This is the spirit which should characterize every Christian. We should repress in ourselves, the tastes which are not agreeable to our friends. We should cut off the habits which hurt the sensitive hearts whose happiness is dear to us. We should put away the things in us, whatever the cost may be, which give pain to our loved ones.

This spirit will lead us to regard the feelings of others with most gentle care. If one is lying ill in our home, it will make us quiet in our movements through the house, that we may not disturb the sick one. If a friend is in any trouble, it will make us kindly in all our treatment of him. If one has some weakness or deformity, it will make us guard against any allusion to the defect or disfigurement, which would give mortification to the unfortunate person.

Some people seem to have a genius for making others miserable! They are continually touching sensitive hearts, so as to cause pain. They are always saying things which sting and irritate. If you have any bodily defect, they never see you without in some crude way, making you conscious of it. If any relative or friend of yours has done some dishonorable thing, they seem to take a cruel delight in constantly referring to it

when speaking with you. They lack all delicacy of feeling, having no eye for the things in others, which demand gentleness of treatment.

Thoughtfulness is the reverse of all this. It simply does not do the things which thoughtlessness does. It avoids the painful subject. It never alludes to a man's clubfoot or humpback, nor ever casts an eye at the defect, nor does anything to direct attention to it or to make the man conscious of it. It respects your sorrow, and refrains from harshly touching your wound. It has the utmost kindness of feeling and expression. A truly thoughtful person, is one who never needlessly gives pain to another.

Then, there is also an active side. No grace is altogether negative. Thoughtfulness does not merely keep one from doing thoughtless things; it also leads to continued acts of kindness and good will. It watches ever for opportunities to give pleasure and happiness. It does not wait to be asked for sympathy or help--but has eyes of its own, and sees every need, and supplies it unsolicited. When a friend is in sorrow, the thoughtful man is ready with his offer of comfort. He does not come next day, when the need is past--but is prompt with his kindness, when kindness means something. Thoughtfulness is always doing little kindnesses. There are many Christian people who seem never to find any good thing to do for another. Opportunities come to them in unbroken succession, through all the days--but they see them not until they are past and gone. Thoughtfulness, on the other hand, has an instinct for seeing the little things that need to be done, and then for doing them.

The secret of all this, is that people can see around them--only what they have in their own heart. One who has birds in his mind--sees birds on every bush. One who is looking for flowers--will see flowers everywhere. A heart full of sympathy and love will see in others, on even the commonest days--a thousand things which need to be done. One who is thinking of others' comfort and good--will never lack occasions for doing the things that give comfort and do good.

There are some rare Christians who seem born for thoughtfulness. They have a genius for sympathy. Instinctively they seem to understand the experiences of pain in others, and from their heart there flows always a blessing of tenderness which is full of healing. This is the highest and holiest ministry of love. It is not softness nor weakness; it is strength--but strength enriched by divine gentleness. Not all love possesses this crowning quality. There is love that is heedless, and lacks the fine sense of others' feelings which is needed to make it perfect in its helpfulness.

Thoughtfulness is one of the truest and best tests of a noble Christian character. Thoughtlessness is rudeness, boorishness. It is selfishness, cold-heartedness. It is unrefined. It is cruel and unkind. Thoughtfulness is refined. It is love working in all delicate ways. It is unselfishness which forgets itself, and thinks only of others. It is love which demands not to be served, to be honored, to be helped--but thinks continually of serving and honoring others. Thoughtlessness is "lack of heart," and he who has a gentle heart cannot but be thoughtful. Love is always thoughtful.

In older days, in sermons and in prayers, much reference was made to sins, as divided into those of omission and those of commission. In the confession of sins, the worshiper acknowledges that he has left undone--the things he ought to have done. Perhaps we give altogether too little attention to our sins of omission. We may think we are living fairly well, because we do not commit grave and flagrant errors and sins; but how about the other side of our life? Are we doing the thousand acts of kindness, which sincere love would prompt? Do not the weary, and the heart-hungry, and the tempted, and the struggling, and the needy--pass by us continually, with their silent appeals to us for what we have to give them--yet pass by in

vain?

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