

The Ministry of Comfort - Part 3

by J.R. Miller

The secret to effective serving and happiness is love and the peace of Christ in the heart.

Scripture: Matthew 5:44, Mark 10:45, Romans 12:10, 1 Corinthians 13:4-7, Galatians 5:22-23, Ephesians 4:32, Philippians 4:4, Colossians 3:23-24, 1 Thessalonians 5:16-18, 1 John 4:19

Topics: "Love in Service", "The Power of Gratitude"

Description

J.R. Miller emphasizes the essential role of love in the ministry of comfort, arguing that true helpfulness stems from genuine affection for others. He illustrates that material aid, while valuable, is greatly enhanced when accompanied by heartfelt compassion, as seen in the life of Jesus, who served others with love and kindness. Miller also discusses the importance of developing habits of happiness and gratitude, asserting that a thankful heart can transform one's perspective on life's challenges. He encourages believers to cultivate a spirit of service and to view every interaction as an opportunity to express love, reflecting Christ's example. Ultimately, Miller calls for a commitment to love and serve others selflessly, regardless of their response.

Transcript

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J. R. Miller, 1898

The Secret of Serving

Before we can do people good, we must love them. There is no other secret of real helpfulness. The weakness of many schemes for the relief of distress and the amelioration of misery, is that they are only systems, working in mechanical lines--but without a heart of love to inspire them. A paid agent may dispense charity very justly and generously, and what he gives may serve its purpose well enough--fuel for the fire in winter, bread for hunger, and clothes to cover the shivering poor. But how much would be added to the value of these gifts--if love dispensed them, if a real heartbeat of human sympathy throbbed and thrilled in each bit of helpfulness. There are deeper needs than those of the body. There is a higher help than that which satisfies only physical needs. When with the gift of bread, love comes to the door, when it is a brother's hand that brings the welcome loaf, two hungers are fed, the hunger of the body and the hunger of the heart.

But not in charity only, is it the element of love which imparts the best blessing, multiplying many times the value of the material gifts disbursed. In all lines of life, it is love which is the true secret of power. We know the difference in the serving which is merely professional, however skillful it may be, and the serving which love inspires. It is interesting to remember that the one question which the Master asked His disciple, whom He was about to restore to his lost place as an apostle, was, "Do you love Me?" Not until Peter had answered this question affirmatively, could the care of souls be put into his hands. The essential qualification, therefore, for being a pastor, a teacher, or a spiritual helper of other lives--is love.

It is, first of all, love for Christ. One who does not love Him more than all other things, and all other beings, is not truly His disciple, and certainly is not fitted for shepherd work among Christ's sheep and lambs. But if there is true love for Christ--there will also be love for our brothers. No one is fit to do Christ's work for men, who does not love men.

Love is the essential thing in preparing one for being a helper of others. It is not enough for the preacher to declare to all men that God loves them--the preacher must love them too--if he would make them believe in the divine love for them. The true evangel is the love of God interpreted in a human life. No other will win men's confidence and faith. We must show the tenderness of God--in our tenderness. We must reveal the compassion of God--in our compassion. God so love that He gave--we must so love as to give.

The only efficient preaching of the cross--is when the cross is in the preacher's life. The man must love men, and must love them enough to give himself for them; otherwise his preaching will have but little power. It was this which gave Jesus Christ such influence over men and drew the people to Him in such throngs. He told them of the love of God--but they also saw that love and realized its compassion in His own life. He loved, too. He wrought miracles and did many gracious things; but that which made all His ministry so welcome and so full of helpfulness, was that He loved the people He helped or comforted.

That is the meaning of the Incarnation--it was God interpreted in a human life, and since God is love, it was love which was thus revealed and interpreted. Just in the measure, therefore, that we love others, are we ready to help them in any true way. Nothing but love will do men good. Power has its ways of helping. Law may protect. Money will buy bread and build homes. But for the helpfulness which means the most in human lives, nothing but love prepares us. Even the most lavish and the most opportune gifts, if love is not in them, lack that which chiefly gives them their value. It is not the man whose service of others costs the most in money value, who is the greatest benefactor--but the man who gives the most of human compassion, the most of himself, with his gifts. He who puts his heart, his life, into his service, has given that which will multiply his gifts a thousand times.

It is worth our while to think of love's true attitude to others. The spirit of serving is different altogether from the spirit in which men usually think of others. The world's attitude is that of self interest. Men want to be served, not to serve. They look at other men, not with the desire to be helpful to them, to do them good, to give them pleasure--but rather with the wish to be served in some way by them, to have their own personal interests advanced through their association with them. Even friendship too often has this selfish basis--the gain there will be in it. But the love which Christ came to teach us, looks at others in an altogether different way. Instead of asking how they can be made profitable to us, it teaches us to ask in what way we may be helpful to them.

Jesus put it in a sentence when He said of Himself, "The Son of man came not to be ministered unto--but to minister." A study of His life in this regard, will make His meaning plain. He never demanded attention.

Conscious of His divine glory, He never exacted reverence. He used all His authority and power, not to humble men beneath Him, nor to compel them to help Him--but in serving them and doing them good. The picture of Jesus with the basin and the towel is one of the truest representations of His whole life. He lived to serve.

On one occasion Jesus taught His disciples the lesson with special clearness, setting in contrast the world's way and His own: Jesus called them together and said, "You know that those who are regarded as rulers of the Gentiles lord it over them, and their high officials exercise authority over them. Not so with you. Instead, whoever wants to become great among you must be your servant, and whoever wants to be first must be slave of all. For even the Son of Man did not come to be served, but to serve, and to give his life as a ransom for many." Mark 10:42-45. Thus He taught that the noblest, the divinest, life is that which seeks to serve. He is greatest, who ministers.

This does not mean that the servant in a house is greater than his master or his work more pleasing to God--the master may serve more truly than the servant. It is not by the position--but by the spirit, that the rank is determined. The law of love requires us to look upon everyone with a desire for his good and with a readiness to give him help, to do him service. As Paul puts it, we are debtors to every man, owing to each a debt of love and service. If this mind which was in Christ Jesus is in us, it will inspire in our heart, kindly thought of everyone. We will think not so much of having friends--as of being a friend, of receiving, as of giving, of being helped, as of helping.

We should not press our service officiously on anyone--this is an error always to be avoided. We will not over help--nothing could be more unwise or unkind. Nor will this spirit make us fawning or patronizing in our relations to others. On the other hand, nothing is manlier than the love which our Lord enjoined upon His followers, as the very badge of discipleship, and whose portrait Paul painted so inimitably.

It is when we have this spirit of service, that we are prepared to be truly helpful to others. Then we will look upon everyone we meet as our brother. Even the most debased will appear to us as still having in him possibilities of something noble and beautiful.

In both low and high, there is need always for love's serving. We are debtors to everyone--to every man we owe love's debt; and if we are truly following our Master--we must love all, and be ready ever to serve all in love's best way.

An interesting story is told of a good woman who opened a home for children for whom no one seemed to care. Among those received into her home was a boy of three years whose condition was pitiable indeed. His skin was blotched, and his disposition was fretful and unhappy. Try as she would, the woman could not love him. Something in him repelled her. She was outwardly kind to him--but it was always an effort to show him any tenderness.

One day she sat on the veranda of her house with this boy on her knee. She dropped asleep and dreamed that she saw herself in the child's place, the Master bending over her. She heard Him say, "If I can bear with you, who are so full of fault and sin, can you not, for My sake--love this poor child, who is suffering, not for his own sin--but through the sin of his parents?"

The woman awoke with a sudden startle, and looked into the face of the boy. Penitent because of her past unkind feeling, and with a new compassion for him in her heart, she bent down and kissed him as tenderly as ever she had kissed babe of her own. The boy gave her a smile so sweet that she had never seen one

like it before. From that moment a change came over him. The new affection in the woman's heart transformed his peevish, fretful disposition into gentleness. She loved him now, and her serving was glad hearted and Christlike, no more perfunctory.

There is no other secret of the best and truest serving. We must love those we would help. Service without love counts for nothing. We can love even the unloveliest, when we learn to see in them possibilities of divine beauty. But only the love of Christ in us will prepare us for such serving.

The Habit of Happiness

Our habits make us. Like wheels running on the road, they wear the tracks or ruts in which our life moves. Our character is the result of our habits. We do the same thing over and over a thousand times, and by and by it becomes part of ourselves.

"Sow a thought and reap an act;

Sow an act and reap a habit;

Sow a habit and reap a character."

For example, one is impatient today in some matter. Tomorrow there is another trial and the impatience is repeated. Thus, on and on, from day to day, with the same result. It begins to be easier to give way to the temptation, than to resist it. Again and again the stress is felt and yielded to, and at length we begin to say of the person, that he has grown very impatient. That is, he has given way so often to his feelings, that impatience has become a habit. If he had resisted the first temptation, restraining himself and keeping himself quiet and sweet in the trial; and then the second, the third, the fourth, the tenth time, had done the same, and had continued to be patient thereafter, whatever the pressure of suffering or irritation, we would have said that he was a patient man. That is, he would have had formed in him at last, the fixed habit of patience. As we say again, it would have become "second nature" with him to hold his imperious feelings in check; however he might have been tried. Patience would then have become part of his character.

In like manner, all the qualities which make up the disposition are the result of habit. The habit of truthfulness, never deviating in the smallest way from what is absolutely true, yields at length truth in the character. The habit of honesty, insisted upon in all dealings and transactions, fashions the feature of honesty in the life and fixes it there with rocklike firmness.

It is proper, therefore, and no misuse of words, to speak of the habit of happiness. No doubt there is a difference in the original dispositions of people, in the quality of cheerfulness or gloom which naturally belongs to them. Some people are born with a sunny spirit, others with an inclination to sadness. The difference shows itself even in infancy and early childhood. No doubt, too, there is a difference in the influences which affect disposition in the first months and years of life. Some mothers make an atmosphere of joy for their children to grow up in, while others fill their home with complaining, fretfulness, and discontent. Young lives cannot but take something of the tone of the home atmosphere into the disposition with which they pass out of childhood.

Yet, in spite of all that heredity and early education and influence do--each one is responsible for the making of his own character. The most deep seated tendency to sadness, can be overcome and replaced by happy cheerfulness. The gospel of Christ comes to us and tells us that we must be born again, born anew, born from above, born of God, our very nature recreated. Then divine grace assures us that it is not

impossible even for the most unholy life, to be transformed into holiness. The being that is saturated with sin, can be made whiter than snow. The wolf can be changed into lamb-like gentleness. The fiercest disposition can be trained to meekness. There is no nature, therefore, however unhappy it may be because of its original quality or its early training, which cannot, through God's help, learn the lesson of happiness.

The way to do this, is to begin at once to restrain the tendency to gloomy feeling and to master it. We should check the first shadow of inclination to discouragement. We should choke back the word of discontent or complaining, which is trembling on our tongue, and speak instead a word of cheer. We should set ourselves, to the task of keeping sweet and sunny.

It will make this easier for us if we think of our task as being only for one day at a time. It should not be impossible for us even if we have things disheartening or painful to endure--to keep happy for only one day. Anybody should be able to sing songs of gladness, through the hours of a single short day. At the time of evening prayer, we should confess our failures; and the next morning begin the keeping of another day, bright and joyous, unstained by gloom, resolved to make our life more victorious than the day before.

At first the effort may seem utterly to fail--but if the lesson is kept clearly before our eyes, and we are persistent in our determination to master it, it will not be long until the result will begin to show itself. It takes courage and perseverance--but the task is not an impossible one. It is like learning to play on the piano, or like training the voice for singing. It takes years and years to become proficient in either of these arts. It may take a lifetime to learn the lesson of joy--but it can be learned. Men with the most pronounced and obdurate gloominess of disposition have, through the years, become men of abounding cheerfulness. We have but to continue in the practice of the lesson, until repetition has grown into a fixed habit, and habit has carved out happiness as a permanent feature of our character, part of our own life.

The wretched discontent which makes some people so miserable themselves, and such destroyers of happiness in others, is only the natural result of the habit of discontent yielded to and indulged through years. Anyone, who is conscious of such an unlovely, un-Christlike disposition, should be so ashamed of it that he will set about at once conquering it and transforming his gloomy spirit, into one of happiness and joyousness.

Let no one think of happiness as nothing more than a desirable quality, a mere ornamental grace, which is winsome--but is not an essential element in a Christian life, something which one may have or may not have, as it chances. Happiness is a duty, quite as much a duty as truthfulness, honesty, or good temper. There are many Scripture words which exhort us to rejoice. Jesus was a rejoicing man. Although a "man of sorrows," the deep undertone of His life, never once failing, was gladness. Joy is set down as one of the fruits of the Spirit, a fruit which should be found on every branch of the great Vine. Paul exhorted his friends to rejoice in the Lord. There are almost countless incitements to Christian joy. We are to live a songful life. There are in the Scriptures many more calls to praise, than to prayer.

But how are we to get this habit of happiness into our life? The answer is very simple--just as we get any other habit wrought into our life. There are some people to whom the lesson does not seem hard, for they are naturally cheerful. There are others who seem to be predisposed to unhappiness, and who find it difficult to train themselves into joyful mood. But there is no Christian who cannot learn the lesson. The very purpose of divine grace, is to make us over again, to give us a new heart.

A man who has formed the habit of untruthfulness and then becomes a Christian, may not say that he never can learn now to be truthful--that untruthfulness is fixed too obdurately in his being. No evil can be so stained into the soul's texture--that grace cannot wash it white. The love of Christ in a person makes him a new man, and whatever the old is, it must give way. So, though we have allowed ourselves to drift into a habit of gloom and sadness, there is no reason why we should not get our heart attuned to a different key, and learn to sing new songs. This is our duty, and whatever is our duty--we can do by the help of Christ.

The secret of Christian joy--is the peace of Christ in the heart. Then one is not dependent on circumstances or conditions. Paul said he had learned in whatever state he was, therein to be content. That is, he had formed the habit of happiness and had mastered the lesson so well, that in no state or condition, whatever its discomforts were, was he discontented. We well know, that his circumstances were not always congenial or easy. But he sang songs in his prison with just as cheerful a heart and voice as when he was enjoying the hospitality of some loving friend. His mood was always one of cheer, not only when things went well--but when things went adversely. He was just as songful on his hard days--as on his comfortable days.

Then Paul gives us the secret of his abiding gladness, in the word he uses--"content." It means self-sufficed. He was self sufficed--that is, he carried in his own heart the springs of his own happiness. When he found himself in any place, he was not dependent on the resources of the place for his comfort. The circumstance might be most uncongenial. There might be hardship, suffering, poverty; but in himself he had the peace of Christ, and this sustained him so that he was content.

There is no other unfailing secret of happiness. Too many people are dependent upon external conditions--the house they live in, the people they are with, their food, their companions, the weather, their state of health, the comforts or discomforts of their circumstances. But if we carry with us such resources that things outside us cannot make us unhappy, however uncongenial they may be--then we have learned Paul's secret of contentment, which is the Christian's true secret of a happy life.

Thinking Soberly

The smallest life is of infinite importance. It sends streams of influence into eternity. If it fails of its mission, it leaves a blank in God's universe. Therefore we should think reverently of our life. Yet we should also think humbly of it, for in God's sight the greatest are very small. It is well that we seek to have true thoughts of ourselves and of our place and importance in the world. One may have too exalted an opinion of one's self--there is a self conceit which exaggerates one's value to society, one's work, and one's influence among men. Then there is also such a thing as having too low an opinion of one's self and of one's abilities, by reason of which one shrinks from serious duty and fails to meet life's full responsibility.

In one of his letters, Paul exhorts the followers of Christ not to think of themselves more highly than they ought to think--but so to think as to think soberly, according as God has dealt to each man a measure of faith. Then follows an illustration of the exhortation, drawn from the body and its members. There are many members in the body, and these members do not all have the same office or function. Not all followers of Christ have the same gifts, or are fitted to perform the same duty. Some have the gift of teaching, others of ministering, and others of exhortation.

The counsel is that no man think more highly of himself than he ought to think--but so to think as to think soberly. Thinking soberly is recognizing the truth, first of all, that whatever our particular gift may be, it is

what God has given us. Our gifts differ--but it is according to the grace bestowed upon us. This takes away all ground for glorying in our individual ability or power. If our gift is greater than our neighbor's, we may not boast of it nor be prideful because of it. God saw fit to endow him with certain abilities, in order that he might discharge the duties which are allotted to him in his appointed place. We have a different place to fill, with different duties, requiring different abilities, and through the grace of God we have received gifts fitting us for our particular duties. Therefore we should not think too highly of ourselves--but rather should think humbly and gratefully, giving God the praise and honor for whatever gifts we have received.

There are many people who see the dusty road on which they are wading--but see not the glorious sky which arches above them. They toil for earth's perishing things, and see not heaven's imperishable glory which might be made theirs. They spend all their life striving to get honor, wealth, or power--and miss God. Thinking soberly is getting God and eternal things first of all into our life. If we fail of this, nothing else that we may do will be of any avail. Without God, a life full of services great and small, is only a row of ciphers, with no numeral before them to give them value.

Thinking soberly, recognizes the truth that others also have abilities which God has bestowed upon them. We are not the only one to whom God has given brains and a heart. And how do we know that our gift is really greater or more honorable than our neighbor's? One man may have eloquence, and be able to move and thrill hearts. Another is a quiet man, whose voice is not heard in the street or in any assembly. But he has the gift of intercession. He lives near to God, and speaks to God for men. While the preacher preaches, this man prays. May the man of the eloquent tongue boast over his brother who cannot speak with impressiveness to men--but who has the ear of God and power in heaven instead? Who knows but that by the ministry of intercession, more things are wrought in peoples hearts and lives, than by the eloquence which wins so much praise among men?

Often, the gifts which men praise and regard as most honorable, are not those whose power reaches highest into heaven and deepest into men's hearts--but the gifts which attract no attention, of which no man boasts. Let not the eloquent preacher think more highly of himself or of his gift, than he ought to think--but so to think as to think soberly. It may be, that but for the lowly brother who sits on the stairs and prays, the great preacher's words would have no power over men to bring them to God.

Thinking soberly does not forget that the greatest gifts are great only in the measure in which they are used. The abilities which God bestows upon us are not merely for the adornment of our life--they are given to us in order that they may be used. No one gift in itself is really greater than another. The humblest member of the body which fulfills its function, thereby becomes honorable. But this gives it no reason to think highly of itself, or to depreciate other members and their functions. The lowliest Christian who does well the lowliest work given him to do, making the most of his gifts or his abilities in the serving of men and for the honor of God--is realizing God's plan for his life, and is pleasing God just as well as he who with his large ability, does a work far greater in itself.

Instead, therefore, of thinking highly of himself because of the attractiveness of his gift or power, each man should accept it as something committed to him by God, to be used. There is no room for contention as to which is greater, or for claiming that our particular form of doing good is superior to our neighbor's. Instead of this, each one should consecrate his own particular ability to God, and then use it. "If our gift is ministry, let us give ourselves to our ministry; or if it is one who teaches, to his teaching; or he who exhorts, to his exhorting; he who gives, let him do it with liberality." That is the way thinking soberly about our own life

should inspire us to use our gift. Instead of boasting of our fine abilities, we should use our particular ability to its very utmost and in its own line. Many a person, with most meager natural gifts, makes his life radiant by its service of love--while the man with the brilliant natural powers does nothing, his gifts, unused, dying in his brain and heart.

Thus there are many reasons against thinking of ourselves more highly than we ought to think, and for thinking soberly. Noble gifts, instead of making us proud and self conceited, should inspire in us a sense of responsibility. We are to use our abilities, whether large or small, and then we must account for them at the last--not for the abilities as they were when first given to us, mere germs and possibilities--but for their development into their full power of usefulness, and then for their use in ways of blessing, unto the uttermost. If we understand this, we cannot but think soberly about our life.

Stumbling at the Disagreeable

Many people fail in life, because they lack courage to do or to endure disagreeable things. They demand a career with only congenial experiences. They insist on getting the roses without the thorns. They want to reach fine results, without the toil it costs other men to reach them. They wish to stand upon the mountain peaks--but they are unwilling to climb the steep, rugged paths which lead up to them. They desire success in life--but they are not ready to work for it. They dream beautiful dreams--but they have not the skill or the energy to forge their dreams into realities. They would like to leave the disagreeable out of every phase of their existence. They are impatient of a disagreeable environment. They dislike disagreeable people and have not the good nature necessary to get along with them. They complain bitterly when they must suffer any inconvenience, when the weather is uncomfortable, when circumstances are unfavorable, when they are sick. They cannot bear disappointment, and they chafe and fret when things do not turn out as they expected.

But there really is nothing manly or noble in such an attitude towards life. It may be said, first of all, that it is impossible to find a path in this world, which has not in it something disagreeable. There always are thorns as well as roses, and usually they grow on the same stalk. There are some dark, unpleasant days in the brightest and most cheerful summer. It is not likely that every one of a hundred neighbors or companions at work, is altogether congenial--almost certainly there will be one disagreeable person among them. Then it is not by any means certain that even one's most congenial and best natured friend will be perfectly agreeable every hour of the three hundred and sixty five days in a year. The sweetest people are apt to have their disagreeable moods now and then. The sunniest hearted friend will likely have a day of cloud now and then.

It may be said, further, that not only is the disagreeable inevitable in life--but it is also the school in which much that is best may be learned. Nothing really noble and worthy is ever attained easily. One may get money by inheritance from an ancestor--but one cannot get education, culture, refinement, or character as an inheritance. These possessions can become ours only through our own struggle, toil, and self discipline.

Some people dream of genius as a gift which makes work unnecessary. They imagine that with this wondrous power, they can do the finest things without learning to do them. They fancy, for example, that genius can sit down at a piano the first time it sees the instrument, and play exquisitely the noblest music; or put a vision of beauty on the canvas without having touched brushes before; or write a story, a poem, or an essay which will thrill all hearts, without ever having been a student and without literary training; or go

into business and build up a great fortune without having had any preliminary business experience.

But such thoughts of life, are only idle dreams. The truest definition of genius is that it is merely "an infinite capacity for taking pains." Those who expect results without processes, can only be bitterly disappointed in the end. Nothing beautiful or worthy in any department of life, was ever achieved or attained without toil. "Wherever a great work is done, there also has been Gethsemane." The lovely works of human creation which people linger before with admiring wonder, have all cost a great price. Somebody's heart's blood has gone into every great picture, into every stanza of sweet song, into every paragraph which inspires men. It has been noted that the root of the word bless is the word for blood. We can bless another in deep and true ways, only by giving of our life blood. Anything that will do real good, can be wrought only in tears and suffering. When Raphael was asked how he produced his immortal pictures he replied, "I dream dreams and see visions--and then I paint my dreams and my visions."

And not only are these painful processes necessary in order to produce results which are worth while--but it is in them that we grow into whatever is beautiful and noble. Work is the only means of growth. Instead of being only a curse, as some would have us believe, work is a means of measureless good. Not to work is to keep always an undeveloped hand, or heart, or brain. The things which work may achieve, are not half as important as that which work does in us.

A genial writer has given us a new beatitude--"Blessed be drudgery!" and in a delightful essay, proves that we owe to what we speak of ordinarily as drudgery, the best things in our life and character. A child dislikes to be called in the morning and to have to be off to school at the same hour every day, and chafes at rules, bells, lessons, and tasks; but it is in this very drudgery of home and school in which the child is being trained for noble and beautiful life. The child that misses such discipline, growing up as its own sweet will inclines, may seem to be fortunate and may be envied--but it is missing that without which all its future career will be less beautiful and less strong. "Blessed be drudgery!" It is in the tiresome routine of hours, tasks, and rules--that we learn to live worthily and that we get into our life itself those qualities which belong to true manhood. Those who have been brought up from childhood to be prompt, systematic, to pay every debt, always to keep every promise and appointment, never to be late--will carry the same good habits into their mature life, in whatever occupation it may be called, and when these qualities will mean so much in success.

Thus, irksome things play an important part in the making of life. We can shirk them if we will--but if we do so, we throw away our opportunity, for there is no other way to success. Young people should settle it once for all, that they will shrink from no task, no toil, no self discipline which faces them, knowing that beyond the thing which is unpleasant and hard, lies some treasure which can be reached and possessed in no way, but by accepting the drudgery. Nor can we get some other one to do our drudgery for us, for then the other person, not we, would get the reward which belongs to the task work, and which cannot be obtained apart from it. We must do our own digging. The rich man's son might easily find some other one who would be willing to study for him, for a money consideration--but no money could buy the gains of study and put them in among his own life treasures. We can acquire knowledge, culture, breadth of mind--only through our own work.

It is a misfortune to a young man to be born rich, not to have to ask, "What shall I do for a living?" unless he has in him the manly courage to enter life as if he were a poor man and to learn to work as if he must indeed earn his bread by the sweat of his own brow. There is no other way to grow into manly character. There is no other way to make life worth while.

We are very foolish, therefore, certainly very short sighted, to quarrel with the disagreeable in our lot, of whatever sort it is. The disagreeable is inevitable. We cannot find all things just to our own mind, in even the most perfect human lot in this world. Nor could we afford to miss the things which are less pleasant, which are even painful. We shrink from life's hard battles--but it is only through struggle and victory, that we can reach the fair heights of honor, and win the prizes of noble character. We dread sorrow--but it is through sorrow's bitterness that we find life's deepest, truest joy. We hold our life back from sacrifice--but it is only through losing our life that we can ever really save it. If we have faith and courage to welcome struggle, cost, pain, and sacrifice--we shall find our feet ever on the path to the best things in attainment and achievement in this world, and the highest glory at the last.

The Duty of Thanksgiving

Thanksgiving is one of our highest and holiest duties. There are in the Scriptures, more commands and calls to praise than to prayer. Yet few duties are more frequently neglected than this. There are many people who are always coming to God with requests--but who do not come to Him with thanksgiving after their request have been granted. Ten lepers once cried to Jesus, as He was passing at a distance, beseeching Him for cleansing. He graciously heard them and granted their plea. When they had been healed, one of the ten returned to thank the Healer--but the other nine did not thank Him for the great favor they had received. So it is continually--many are blessed and helped--but only one here and there shows gratitude. Our Lord felt keenly the ingratitude of the lepers. "Where are the other nine?" was His pained question. God pours out His gifts and blessings every day upon His children; and whenever no voice of thanksgiving is heard in return, He misses it. If one bird in the forest is silent in the glad spring days, He misses its song. If one human heart fails to utter its praise amid life's countless blessings, He is disappointed.

Some people seem to think that if they set apart certain definite days for praise, it is enough. For example, they will be grateful for a whole day once in the year--thinking that this is the way God wants them to show their gratitude. But the annual Thanksgiving Day is not intended to gather into itself the thanksgiving for a whole year; rather it is intended to give the keynote for all the year's life. Life's true concert pitch, is praise. If we find that we are below the right pitch, we should take advantage of particular thanksgiving seasons to get keyed up. That is the way people do with their pianos--they have them tuned now and then, when the strings get slack and the music begins to grow discordant--and it is quite as important to keep our life in tune as our piano.

The ideal life is one of joy. Discontent and fretfulness, are discord in the song. We have no right to live gloomily or sadly. Go where we may, we hear the music of joy, unless our ears have become tone deaf. The world is full of beauty and full of music. Yet it is strange how many people seem neither to see the loveliness, nor hear the music.

It was well if many of us would train ourselves to see the glory and the goodness of God as revealed in nature. It will be sad to leave this world after staying in it three score or fourscore years, without having seen any of the ten thousand beauties with which God has adorned it. "Consider the lilies," said Jesus. Every sweet flower has a message of joy--to him who can read the writing. One who loves flowers and birds and trees and mountain and rivers and seas, and has learned to hear the voices which everywhere whisper their secrets to him who understands, never can be lonely and never can be sad.

We must have the beauty in our soul, before we can see beauty anywhere. Hence there are many who are really blind to the loveliness which God has strewn everywhere, with most lavish hand, in His works. So we must have the music in our heart, before we can hear the music which sings everywhere for Him who has ears to hear. If we have thanksgiving within us, we will have no trouble in finding gladness wherever we go. It is a sad and cheerless heart, which makes the world dreary to certain people; if only they would let joy enter to dwell within, a new world would be created for them.

If we allow our heart to nourish unlovingness, bitterness, evil thoughts and feelings, we cannot hear the music of love which breathes everywhere, pouring out from the heart of God. But if we keep our heart gentle, patient, lowly, and kind, on our ears will fall, wherever we go, sweet strains of divine music, out of heaven.

A great man used to say that the habit of cheerfulness was worth ten thousand pound a year. This is true not only in a financial way--it is true of one's own enjoyment of life and also of the worth of one's life to others. A glad heart gets immeasurably more out of life--than one which is gloomy. Every day brings its blessings. If it is raining, rain is a blessing. If trouble comes, God draws nearer than before, for "as your days, so shall you strength be." Then in the trouble, blessings are folded up. If there is sorrow, comfort is revealed in the sorrow, a bright light in the cloud. If the day brings difficulties, hardships, heavy burdens, sharp struggles, life's best things come in just this kind of experience, and not in the easy ways. The thankful heart finds treasure and good everywhere.

Then, a glad life makes a career of gladness wherever it goes. It leaves an unbroken lane of sunbeams behind it. Everybody is better as well as happier for meeting, even casually, one whose life is full of brightness and cheer.

We can do nothing better either for ourselves or for the world in which we live--than to learn the lesson of praise, of thanksgiving. We should begin at once to take singing lessons, learning to sing only joyous songs. Of course there are troubles in every life--but there are a thousand good things--to one which is sad. Sometimes we have disappointments--but even these are really God's appointments, as some day we shall find out. People will sometimes be unkind to us--but we should go on loving just as before, our heart full of unconquerable kindness. No matter what comes--we should sing and be thankful, and should always keep sweet.

Manners

Manners are very important. Some people will tell you that if a person is genuine in character, it makes small difference what kind of manners he has. But this is not true. A man may have the goodness of a saint--but if he is crude, awkward, lacking refinement, a large measure of the value of his goodness is lost. Manners are the language in which the life interprets itself; oftentimes much of the sweetness and beauty of the heart's gentle thoughts and feelings, is lost in the faulty translation.

Everywhere in life, manners count for a great deal. In business, civility is almost as important as capital. A man, who is crude, discourteous, and brusque, lacking the graces of cordiality and kindness, may have fine goods in his store--but people will not come to buy of him. On the other hand, a man with affable manners, who treats his customers with politeness, who is patient, thoughtful, ready always to oblige, desirous to please--will attract patrons to his place and will build up a business. No merchant will retain in his employ, a salesperson who treats customers rudely.

The same is true in the professions and in all occupations and callings. The surly, discourteous physician will not get patients. If you begin to deal with a tradesman who appears to be cross tempered, and disobliging, you will not continue to go to him. The principal of a private school was very popular with his boys and did splendid work for some years. Meanwhile the school prospered. Then something happened which soured the principal and embittered his spirit. His manners changed, becoming stern, severe, and harsh. He would give way to fits of violent temper in which he lost self control and used language in the presence of his pupils that no gentleman should ever use. One year of this, was enough to break up the school.

We all know the impressions which the manners of people make upon us when we first meet them. A beautiful behavior goes a long way in winning our favor and confidence; and ill manners offset many excellences of character and much true worth.

In a passage in the Old Testament there is intimation that the manners of the people of Israel very sorely tried the Lord in the days of the wilderness wanderings. It is said that for about the space of forty years, He endured their manners in the wilderness--not only bore with them--but endured them. There is no doubt that their manners were very bad. They were always murmuring and complaining. They did not praise the God who had done so much for them. They were ungrateful and rebellious. It is given as a mark of the Divine patience that the Lord endured their manners all those years. It is implied, also, that He was sorely grieved by all that was so unbeautiful and so unworthy in their manners.

There is a class of ill manners which is much too common, and which many people seem not to think of as in any way ungracious--the habit of fretting and complaining about one's condition or circumstances.

There are some people who's greatest pleasure appears to be found in talking about their discomforts and miseries, their ill health, their trials. They seem never to think there is anything discourteous or unrefined in thus inflicting upon their neighbors, the tale of their real or imagined at least exaggerated, woes. Yet the truest Christian spirit always avoids the intruding of self in any way, especially the unhappy or suffering self, into the life of others. "By the grace of God I never fret," said Wesley. "I am discontented with nothing. And to have people at my ear fretting and murmuring at everything is like tearing the flesh off my bones."

The Bible is the best book of manners ever written. All its teachings are toward the truest and best culture. It condemns whatever is crude in act, coarse and unlovely in disposition, ungentle in word or thought. Jesus Christ was the most perfect gentleman who ever lived, and all His teachings are toward whatever things are lovely, whatever things are of good report, pleasing to others, well spoken of. Paul, also, is an excellent teacher of good manners. If we would learn to live out the teachings of the thirteenth chapter of First Corinthians, for example, we would need no other instruction on how to behave. No rules of conduct ever formulated in books of etiquette, are so complete or cover all possible cases so fully--as these few words in that immortal chapter: "If I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and if I give my body to be burned--but have not love, it profits me nothing. Love is patient and kind; love envies not; love vaunts not itself, is not puffed up, does not behave itself unseemly, seeks not its own, is not provoked, takes not account of evil; rejoices not in unrighteousness--but rejoices with the truth; bears all things, believes all things, hopes all things, endures all things."

This subject is very important. We cannot pay too careful heed to our manners. Religion is love, and love, if it is true and large hearted, inspires perfect manners. There are certain conventional rules regulating one's conduct in good society, which everyone should know and follow. There is a place for etiquette, and

no one has a right to ignore the formalities which prevail among refined people. But the essential element in all good manners, is the heart. The love which Paul so earnestly commends inspires gentleness, kindness, thoughtfulness, unselfishness, humility, good temper, self control, patience, endurance of wrong, and all the graces.

A daily study of this one chapter, the thirteenth of First Corinthians, with hearty and earnest effort to get its teaching into the heart and then to live them out in all life's relationships, would ultimately change the faultiest manners into the beauty and gracefulness which belong to all true Christian life.

Some people are greatly hindered in the cultivation of politeness by their shyness. A great deal of rudeness is unintended; indeed, it is altogether unconscious. All that is needed to cure it, is thoughtfulness. But we have no right to be thoughtless. Lack of thought is only a little less blameworthy than lack of heart. A man says, when he learns that some word or act of his, gave great pain, "I didn't know that my friend was so sensitive at that point." If he had been more thoughtful he would have known, or at least he would not have spoken the word nor done the thing which hurt so. We never know what burden our neighbor is carrying, how tender his heart is. If we knew, we would be more careful.

In seeking to have our manners thoroughly Christian, we need to bring every phase and every expression of our life, under the sway of the love of Christ. It is easy enough to be gentle to some men, for they are so kindly in their spirit, so patient, so thoughtful, and so generous, that they never in any way try us. But there are others to whom it is hard to be gentle, for they are continually doing or saying things which would naturally irritate us and excite us to unloving and unlovely treatment of them. But our manners should be unaffected by anything in others. It was thus with our Master. His moods were not dependent on the influence which played upon Him. Rudeness to Him in others--did not make Him rude to them. Wrong and injustice did not dry up the fountain of love in His heart. He was as gracious and sweet in spirit and manner to the discourteous and the unkind, as if they had shown Him the most refined courtesy. If we have the mind that was in Christ Jesus, we, too, will be unaffected by the atmosphere about us. Love bears all things, endures all things, and never fails.

One has sketched the character of a gentleman, in the Christian sense, in words that it is worth while to quote:

"It is almost the definition of a gentleman, to say he is one who never gives pain ... He carefully avoids whatever may cause a jar or a jolt in the minds of those with whom he is cast--all clashing of opinion or collision of feeling, all restraint or suspicion or gloom or resentment--his great object being to make everyone at ease and at home. He has his eyes on all his company. He is tender toward the bashful, gentle toward the distant, and merciful toward the unreasonable; he guards against unreasonable allusions or topics which may irritate; he is seldom prominent in conversation and never wearisome.

"He makes light of favors while he does them, and seems to be receiving when he is conferring. He never speaks of himself except when required to do so, never defends himself by mere retort. He has no ears for slander or gossip, is scrupulous in imputing motives to those who interfere with him, and interprets everything for the best. He is never mean or little in his disputes, never takes an unfair advantage, never mistakes personalities or sharp sayings for arguments, or insinuates evil. He has too much sense to be affronted at insult. He is too busy to remember injuries and too wise to bear malice. If he engages in controversy of any kind, his disciplined intellect preserves him from the blundering discourtesy of better, though less educated minds, who, as with blunt weapons, tear and hack instead of cutting clean.

"He may be right or wrong in his opinion--but he is too clear headed to be unjust. He is as simple as he is forcible, and as brief as he is decisive. Nowhere shall we find greater candor, consideration, and indulgence. He throws himself into the minds of his opponents, he accounts for their mistakes. He knows the weakness of human nature as well as its strength, its province, and its limits."

The best school of manners is the school of Christ. The best culture is heart culture. To be a Christian in the fullest sense, is to be a gentleman or a lady of the highest type. The world's standards are worldly; the Beatitudes give the heavenly standard, which is infinitely better.

Things Which Discourage Kindness

It is well always to be optimistic about people. Jesus was. He never gave anybody up as hopeless. Evil returned by those who received His kindness, never checked nor lessened the flow of kindness in Him. The fountain of love in Him was not dried up by the bitterest enmities and persecutions. The person who wronged Him, was the very one He sought the earliest opportunity to befriend. When a man had proved unworthy, taking advantage of His compassion and unselfishness, and returning only ingratitude and injury, the next one who came with his needs did not find the heart of the Master closed, or the flow of affection checked--but met as tender love as if that great heart had never received a hurt. In all our Lord's dealings with others, we find this abiding love, with exhaustless patience, sympathy, hope and help.

The Master would have all His followers like Him in this. He has taught us that we are to love as He loved. "As I have loved you," the new commandment runs. We are to show to others the same forgiveness that we ask from God for ourselves. We are to love our enemies--as Jesus loved His enemies. When others use us spitefully, we are to pray for them, instead of resenting their unkindness and cherishing bitterness toward them in our heart.

This is one point at which we need to keep most careful watch over our own life. We are naturally disposed to resent wrongs done to us, and to be affected in our own disposition by the treatment we receive from others. When we have denied ourselves and made sacrifices to help another, and he shows no appreciation, no gratitude, the danger is that the warmth of our love shall be chilled, and the flow of our kindness checked.

The old teaching was that one should forgive another three times. Peter thought he was taking a great stride forward, when he suggested that a Christian should forgive seven times. But Jesus set the standard far beyond Peter's, saying, "Not seven times--but seventy times seven." That is, forgiveness is to be exhaustless. We are never to weary of exercising it. However often one may repeat his offence against us, we are still to be ready to forgive and forgive. The same is true of patience, of compassion, of kindness, of all goodness. The love in our heart is to be unailing, like a spring of water which flows continuously.

Yet there are many things which discourage kindness, which make the kindly disposed, to restrain their gentle impulses and withhold their hand from ministry. Ingratitude is too common. Too often those we help, even at much cost to ourselves, prove unworthy. Nothing comes of our efforts to do them good. They promise to do better--but soon are back again in the old paths. They take our favors and enjoy our gifts--and pay us with neglect or injustice. Too frequently those for whom we have done the most, make the smallest return. It is easy in such experience to conclude that it is not worth while to continue to show favors or to deny ourselves to do others good, since nothing comes of it--nothing but disappointment.

In the matter of helping with money, there is special discouragement. There are people who are ready always to assist others in time of need. But perhaps no other form of kindness proves quite so unsatisfactory as this. In the fewest cases do gifts of money bring back a return of gratitude. The acceptance of such help seems to have a sinister influence upon the feelings. Not many retain afterward as close friends, those to whom they have given financial assistance. Many godly men who begin dispensing money with a free hand, truly interested in other's troubles and eager to assist them, meet with such discouragement in the effect of their gifts upon those who receive them, that the fountains of their charity are at last dried up. Not only are they led to decline to give further help to those who have proved so ungrateful--but, as a consequence, they harden themselves against all such appeals for help in the future. As a result, when really worthy objects of benevolence are presented to them, there is no answer of sympathy.

These are suggestions of things which discourage kindness and check the flow of benevolence. In ancient times in the East, a common practice among tribes at war was to fill up each other's wells. Every well thus rendered useless was a public blessing destroyed. Similar crime against humanity is it--when a well of kindness in a heart is stopped. The world's need and sorrow are the losers. The thirsty come to drink where before their need had been satisfied, and are disappointed.

But the most serious consequence, is in the harm which is done to the people themselves, whose love and compassion are thus restrained. One of the great problems of Christian living, is to keep the heart gentle and sweet amid all the world's trying experiences. Nothing worse could happen to anyone, than that he should become cold toward human suffering, or bitter toward human infirmity and failure.

Jesus gave us in His own blessed life the example of One who lived all His years amid ingratitude and enmity, and yet never lost the sweetness out of His spirit. He poured out love, and men rejected it. He scattered kindnesses today, which tomorrow were forgotten. He helped people in sorest need and distress, and they turned about and joined His maligners. He came to save His nation, and they nailed Him on a cross. Yet amid all this rejection of His love, this rewarding of good with evil, of love with hate--the heart of Jesus never lost a trace of its gentleness and compassion. He was just as ready to help a needy one on the last day of His life--as He was the day He set out to begin His public ministry. He wrought a miracle of healing on an enemy, on the night of His betrayal; and when being fastened on His cross--he prayed for the men who were driving the nails through His hands!

Love is always the divine answer to human sin. The answer to the crucifying of the Son of God, was redemption. So love, more love, should be our answer to all injury, to all wrong, to all injustice and cruelty, to all ingratitude. No evil returned for our good, should ever be permitted to discourage us in the doing of good.

Whatever failure there may seem to be in our ministry of kindness, through the shutting of lives against it, our heart should never lose any of its compassion and yearning. One writes of finding a fresh water spring close beside the sea. Twice every twenty four hours the tides rolled over it, burying it deep under their brackish floods. But when the bitter waters rolled out again, the spring was found as fresh as before, with no taint of the salt sea in its sweet stream. So should it be, with the heart of love. When the tides of unkindness, injustice, or cruelty have swept over it, it should emerge unembittered, patient, long suffering, and meek, rich still, in its generous thought and feeling, and ready for any new service for which there may be opportunity tomorrow.

That is one of the great lessons, which Jesus would teach us. The secret of such a life is to have and ever to keep in us--the heart of a little child. Instead of allowing our spirit to grow bitter when our kindness has been abused, when our love has been repaid with hate, we should take the first opportunity to repeat the kindness and the love, thus overcoming evil with good. The Master said, "Love your enemies, and pray for those who despitefully use you, and persecute you." That is, if you have an enemy, one in whose breast is bitterness toward you--he is the very man you are to love. If anyone has used you badly today, he is the very person you are to pray for tonight when you bow before God.

Someone may say that this is impossible, that no love can endure rejection and unrequiting day after day, and lose none of its warmth; that no kindness can meet unkindness, continually, and yet keep all its warmth and generosity undiminished. But Paul tells that love suffers long and is kind, seeks not its own, is not provoked, takes no account of evil, bears all things, endures all things, never fails. Christian love is not an earth-born affection--it is born out of heaven, out of God's own heart. Hence it is immortal, its life is inextinguishable, and it cannot perish.

Putting Away Childish Things

There is a wide difference between childlikeness and childishness. Childlikeness is commended as very beautiful in life and disposition. The Master exhorted His disciples to become as little children, and said that until they would do so, they could not enter into the kingdom of heaven. The finest things in character are childlike things--humility, simplicity, trustfulness, the absence of scheming and ambition.

But childishness is something altogether different. It is something to get as far as possible away from, and not something to cultivate. It is one of the things we are to put off and leave behind as we grow into the strength and beauty of mature manhood. Instead of being a noble quality, the mark of rank and greatness in spiritual life--it is the sign of weakness, of unmanliness.

Childishness in a child may be endured. One is expected to be a baby--before he becomes a man. But a childish life is not beautiful. Precocity is deformity, monstrosity. We are forbearing with childishness in a child. We do not grow impatient with it. "He is only a child," we say in apology for actions and words and ways which are not beautiful. But when these childish things appear in one who has come to manhood in years, we find no excuse for them. They are blemishes, marks of immaturity. We ought to leave them behind us, when we pass up into the larger, more mature life of manhood. We have good authority for saying that when we are children--we speak as children, we feel as children, we act as children; but when we become men--we put away childish things.

Yet there are too many people who keep their childish ways--after they are grown up. For example, pouting is not uncommon in quite young children. Something disappoints them, and they turn away in sullen mood, thrusting out their lips and refusing to speak to anyone or take part in what their companions are doing. It is no wonder that the other children jeer at such puerile behavior in one of their number, ridiculing him with taunting epithets. The lesson of good naturedly bearing slights, hurts, or defeats--usually has to be learned by experience, and the lesson is a long one.

It need not be wondered at, therefore, if young children are sometimes slow in mastering their sensitiveness in this regard. We may have great patience with them. Immaturity is always faulty. An unripe apple is not usually sweet. Unripeness, however, is not blameworthy. It is but a phase in the progress toward ripeness.

But every now and then--we find full grown people who have not gotten beyond the pouting phase. They are very genial and happy in their relations with others--while nothing occurs to impinge upon their self esteem. But the moment anyone seems to slight them or to show improper respect for them, when one appears to treat them unkindly, or when some scheme or proposal of theirs is set aside, instantly out go the lips in a childish pout, down come the brows in a bad tempered frown, and the offended person goes off in a fit of babyish sulking.

This spectacle is not uncommon among young people in their relations with each other. There are some who demand absolute and exclusive monopoly in their friendships. They are ardent in their devotion to the person on whom they fasten their affection--but that person must become wholly theirs, scarcely treating any other one respectfully, certainly showing no cordiality to anyone. If the object of their attachment fails to be fully loyal, the doting friend pouts and sulks and whimpers, "You don't care for me any more!" Such conduct may be tolerated in children--but in young people who are past the years of childhood, it is the token of a sickly and most unwholesome sentimentality.

A beautiful friendship is one which is generous and trustful, not exacting and unreasonable in its demands, which is willing and glad to see others esteemed and honored, and sharing in affection and regard. Yet too many people are selfish in their friendships, not only demanding the first place--but insisting that no other one shall be admitted to any second or third place, even that no one else shall be treated with common courtesy. Such people are not fit to have friends. Even the most childish child rarely shows such a spirit. Envy and jealousy are most unlovely, and are unworthy of anyone, especially of anyone who bears the Christian name; and are certainly to be set down among the childish things which should be put away, on becoming men and women.

There are other manifestations of feeling and disposition which should be left behind by all who grow up into maturity of life. Paul names many qualities which have no rightful place in a Christian life and which should be put away--anger, wrath, malice, railing, and shameful speaking. There are many good people, good in the great features of life and character, who are very hard to live with. They are thoughtless, ungentle, uncontrolled in speech. They lack the graces of kindness and helpfulness. While they are honest, true, strong, upright--they are lacking in the refinements of life, which in the last analysis, are essential to real loveliness of character, and which make a person winsome, agreeable, companionable, and pleasant to get along with in intimate relations.

Very much of the unhappiness of human lives is caused, not by cruel wrongs which crush the heart--but by tiny unkindnesses and irritations, which fret and vex the spirit continually. A thoughtful woman says very truly: "Taking life through and through, the larger part of the sadness and heartache it has known, has not come through its great sorrows--but through little needless hurts and unkindnesses. Look back and you can readily count up the great griefs and bereavements which have rent your heart and changed your life. You know what weary months they darkened. There was certain sacredness and dignity, like the dignity of lonely mountain tops, in their very greatness; and looking back, if not at the time, you can often understand their purpose. But, oh! The days which are spoiled by smaller hurts! Spoiled because somebody has a foolish spite, a wicked mood, an unreasonable prejudice, which must be gratified and have its way, no matter whose rights, plans, or hearts are hurt by it!

One has said, "There are so many hard places along the road for most of us, made hard needlessly by human selfishness, that the longing to be kind with a tender, thoughtful, Christlike kindness grows stronger in me each day I live."

It is not expected of a child, that he be always thoughtful--the lesson usually has to be learned, and the learning of it takes years and long experience. But when one has come to maturity, it is certainly time that at least one has begun to grow kind and considerate.

These are only illustrations of a most unhappy spirit which is much too common in the world. We all know how such conduct mars the beauty of manliness. Nothing is a better test of character and disposition, than the way one meets defeat or bears injury. "Blessed are the meek" is a great deal more beautiful beatitude than we are accustomed to think. Commendation is sweet--but we show a pitiable weakness if we keep sweet only when people are sayin

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