

# Unconscious Farewells

by J.R. Miller

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*J.R. Miller's sermon 'Unconscious Farewells' highlights the importance of cherishing every moment with loved ones, as any goodbye could be the last.*

**Scripture:** Proverbs 15:1, Matthew 5:23, Ephesians 4:29, Colossians 3:13, James 4:14

**Topics:** "Cherishing Relationships", "The Fragility of Life"

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## Description

J.R. Miller emphasizes the fragility of life and the significance of our daily interactions, urging us to cherish every moment with loved ones as it may be our last. He reflects on the profound impact of partings, illustrating how a final farewell can be a source of comfort if filled with love and kindness. Miller encourages us to let love govern our hearts and speech, avoiding harsh words and petty grievances that could lead to regret. He calls for a shift in perspective, suggesting that we should treat each encounter as if it could be our last, fostering tenderness and forgiveness in our relationships. Ultimately, he reminds us that we can create beautiful memories and leave a legacy of love by living each day with intention and grace.

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## Transcript

Every hour there are partings, thought to be only for a little season--which prove to be forever. One morning a young man bade his wife and child 'good-bye' and went out to his work. He was in an accident on the street, and before midday, his lifeless body was borne back to his home. It was a terrible shock--but there was one sweet comfort that came with wondrous power, to the crushed heart of the young wife. The last hour they had spent together, had been one of peculiar tenderness. Not a word had been spoken by either, that she could wish had not been spoken. She had not dreamed at the time, that it would be their last conversation, and yet there was nothing in it that left one painful recollection now that she should meet her husband no more. Through all these years of loneliness and widowhood, the memory of that last parting has been an abiding joy in her life, like a fragrant perfume or a bright lamp of holy peace.

Life is very precarious. Any word may be our last. Any farewell, even amid glee and merriment, may be forever. If this truth were but burned into our consciousness, if it ruled as a deep conviction and real power in our lives, would it not give a new meaning to all our human relationships? Would it not make us far more tender than we sometimes are? Would it not oftentimes put a rein upon our rash and impetuous speech? Would we carry in our hearts the miserable suspicions and jealousies, that now so often embitter the fountains of our loves? Would we be so impatient of the faults of others? Would we allow trivial

misunderstandings to build up strong walls between us--and those whom we ought to hold very close to us? Would we keep alive petty quarrels year after year, which a repenting word any day would end? Would we pass neighbors or old friends on the street without recognition, because of some real or fancied slight, some wounding of pride or some supposed injury? Or would we be so stingy of our kind words, our commendations, our sympathy, our words of comfort--when weary hearts all about us are breaking for just such expressions of interest or appreciation or helpfulness as we have it in our power to give?

We all know how kindly it makes us feel toward anyone, to sit beside his death-bed. We are spending his last hour with him. We would not utter a harsh word or cherish a single grudge against him, for the world. There will never be an opportunity to recall any word spoken now, or to obliterate any painful impression made. We can never again give joy to this heart that is so soon to stop its beatings. What a softening influence this thought has! All our coldness melts down, before the eyes that have death's far-away look in them. All the long-frozen kindly sentiment in our hearts toward our friend, is thawed out as we hold our last fellowship with him.

Then we all know, too, how slumbering love awakens, and cold spirits warm, and all the chill of selfishness dissolves, beside the coffin of one who is dead. Everyone feels kindly then. Not a trace of grudging or bitterness lingers in any heart. Sights and wrongs are forgiven and forgotten. Icy winter changes to mellow summer. Loving words of gratitude or appreciation flow from every tongue. Praise and commendation, never spoken when the weary spirit needed them so much, find an expression, when the heavy ear can hear them no more. Men feel themselves awed in the presence of eternity, and heartily ashamed of their wretched spites, and petty animosities, and cold, mechanical friendship.

Now, how it would bless and beautify our lives, if we could carry that same thoughtful, grateful, patient, forgiving, loving spirit--into our every-day fellowship with each other; if we could treat men with the same gentle consideration, with the same frank, manly sincerity--as when we sit by their death-bed; if we could bring the post-mortem appreciation, gratitude, charity and unselfish kindness--back into the vexed and overburdened years of actual, toilsome life!

It would be impossible to live otherwise, if we but realized that any hour's fellowship with another, might indeed be the last! If a man truly felt that he might be spending his last day with his family, taking his last meal with them, enjoying the last evening with them--would not his heart be cleansed of all harshness, bitterness and selfishness? Would not his feelings, his very tones, be charged with almost a divine tenderness? If a mother felt that today might be the last that she would have her child with her--would she be impatient by its endless questions, so easily annoyed by its restless activities, so fretted and vexed by its faults and thoughtless ways?

Would we be so exacting, so calculating, so cold and formal, so unkind, so selfish, in our fellowship with our friends--if we truly felt that today's sunset might be the last we would see; or that we would never meet our friends again? Would not the realization of the imminent possibility, act as a mighty restraint on all that is harsh or unloving in us, and as a powerful inspiration to bring out all that is kindly and tender?

With many a lonely heart, regret does indeed walk night and day, because of the memory of unkind words spoken which can never be unspoken, since the ears that heard them are deaf to every sound of earth. Friends have separated with sharp words or in momentary estrangement through some trivial difference, and have never met again. Death has come suddenly to one of them--or life has set their feet in paths divergent from that moment. Many a bitter and unavailing tear--bitter because unavailing--is shed over the

grave of a departed one, by one who would give worlds for a single moment in which to beg forgiveness or seek to make reparation.

So uncertain is life and so manifold are the vicissitudes of human experience, that any leave-taking may be forever. We are never sure of an opportunity to unsay the angry word, or draw out the thorn we left rankling in another's heart! The kindness which we felt prompted to do today--but neglected or deferred--we may never be able to perform. The only way therefore, to save ourselves from unavailing sorrow and regret--is to let love always rule in our hearts, and control our speech. If we should in a thoughtless moment, speak unadvisedly, giving pain to another heart, let reparation be made upon the spot. The sun should never go down upon our anger. We should never leave anything over-night, that we would not be willing to leave finally and forever, just in that shape, and which we would blush to meet again in the great day of judgement.

Life's actions do not appear to us in the same colors--when viewed in the noontide glare and in the evening's twilight. Little things in our treatment of others, which at the time, under the crosslights of emulation and rivalry, or in the excitement of business and social life--do not seem wrong--when seen from the shadows of final separation or great grief, fill us with shame and regret. This after-view is by far the truest. After-thoughts are the wiser thoughts. We get the most faithful representation of life--in retrospect. The things we regret in such an hour--are things we ought not to have done. The things we wish then we had done--are things we ought to have done. There could be no better test of life's actions than the question, "How will this appear--when I look back upon it from the end? Will it give me pleasure--or pain?"

We all want to have beautiful endings to our lives. We want to leave sweet memories behind in the hearts of those who know and love us. We want our names to be fragrant in the homes on whose thresholds our footfalls are accustomed to be heard. We want the memory of our last parting with our friends to live as a tender joy with them as the days pass away. We want, if we should stand by a friend's coffin tomorrow, to have the consciousness that we have done nothing to embitter his life, to add to his burdens, or to tarnish his soul, and that we have left nothing undone which it lay in our power to do--to help him, or to minister to him comfort or cheer. We can make sure of this, only by always so living--that any day would make a tender and beautiful last day; that any hand-grasp would be a fitting farewell; that any hour's fellowship with friend or neighbor would leave a fragrant memory; and that no treatment of another would leave a regret, or cause a pang--if death or space should divide us forever.

For after any heart-throb, any sentence, any good-bye--God may write, 'Finis!'

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