

When Kindness Is Unkind

by J.R. Miller

True kindness and love require us to be willing to suffer and deny ourselves in order to help others grow and develop.

Scripture: Hebrews 12:11, James 1:2

Topics: "Discipline", "True Kindness"

Description

J.R. Miller addresses the dangers of overindulgence in parenting and education, arguing that kindness can sometimes lead to unkindness by preventing children and students from facing challenges and hardships necessary for growth. He emphasizes that true kindness involves allowing individuals to endure difficulties, as this fosters resilience and character. Miller illustrates that God's love is not indulgent but rather involves discipline and the allowance of pain for the sake of spiritual growth. He warns that the modern tendency to avoid discomfort can lead to failure in preparing the younger generation for life's struggles. Ultimately, he calls for a balance between kindness and the necessity of hard lessons, drawing parallels to the sacrifices made by artists in pursuit of their ideals.

Transcript

The demand today is that all things should be made easy. It is so in homes. Nothing must be hard for children. They must be tenderly nurtured. Their burdens must not be made too heavy. Their tasks must not be made too exacting. Their wishes must never be refused. Even their whims must be gratified. A writer gives an example of the way this method of child training is carried out. "O George," spoke a young mother in a tone of rebuke to her husband, who had been reproving the little daughter of the household, "you said, 'Don't!' just now to Dorothy. How could you? Just think what you have done! You have interfered with her individuality." It may not always be with the same deliberate thought, that mothers never deny a child anything. Not always is the motive to preserve the child's individuality from repression.

Still there is in homes a great deal of this spirit of indulgence which moves along the line of least resistance in home government.

The same is true also in many schools. Everything must be made pleasant. The teacher must always make the lessons so interesting, that it will not tax the pupils to listen to them -- and so simple, that it will not require any effort to understand them. It is thought to be unreasonable to expect pupils to do any hard thinking for themselves. A distinguished teacher says that pupils of this dainty kind, would like to lie in bed and have their studies sent up to them.

It may seem very pleasant for young people to have their work made so easy. But that is not the way for them to make the most of their lives. To evade effort -- is to fail of achievement. For the student to have the hard work done for him -- is to rob him of the results of faithful study. There are some things we can get done for us, but nobody can achieve our education for us. If we insist on never doing the things that are unpleasant we cannot expect to receive the benefits and the rewards.

This does not mean that the hard work of the student is not pleasant -- it may be pleasant, yet not easy. The harder he works -- the more pleasure does he find in his studies. The student who is diligent -- grows enthusiastic. He "burns the midnight oil" in pursuit of knowledge. He becomes eager in his research. He finds joy in his work. On the other hand, when the pupil has no interest in his studies -- he makes no progress in them, and gets nothing from them. He probably blames it on the teacher, saying that he does not make the lessons interesting. He does not make things so simple, so easy -- that no thinking is necessary, no knitting of brows, no hard study. He is quite ready to teach, but the best teacher is not the one who leaves nothing for his pupil to do. Good teaching tells the least she can -- it makes the pupil do the work.

The demand of many pupils, is that the teacher shall always be interesting. He shall tell everything about the lesson in such a bright, charming way, that the pupils shall be made happy. There is the same demand in other lines, where one man is set to guide others. The people in the pews demand that the preacher shall interest them. They do not want hard thinking -- they go to church to be entertained -- and if they are not entertained, the fault is with the sermon. If they grow sleepy -- they say the preacher is dull and does not know how to make his sermons impressive. Books must be made interesting -- or people will not read them. They pronounce them dull, if they do not sparkle in every sentence.

This demand to be entertained -- is of the spirit of indolence. Everyone who insists that he must not be required to work hard in his search for knowledge -- will miss the attainments which will be won only through patient toil. Parents want to be kind to their children -- and sometimes they overdo their kindness by indulging their dislike of hard duty, their distaste for self-denials. "To spare our children," says one, "only to make it more certain that we shall have failed to harden them for the battles of life; to make it more probable that they will go down in the struggle; to send them out only to suffer and bend and break under the ruthless pressure of the modern world -- that is perhaps the worst crime that can be committed against the future of the race, and the happiness of humanity."

Life is full of tragedies coming from such 'kindness'. The loving-kindness of God is the most perfect illustration of love. God is never unkind he cannot be unkind. Yet he never indulges his children, giving them their own way -- when their own way is not good. He does not answer their cries to be freed from pain -- when pain is the best thing for them. He insists on obedience, however hard it may be, because no other way can bring blessing and good. God's severity with his children -- is the greatest kindness. This ought to be the model for parents in dealing with their children. Anything else leads to the spoiling of life, the marring of character. Perhaps no other failure in parental training in these days is so great or so ruinous, as that which is produced by over-kindness, or what is thought to be kindness. All who are teachers of the young, are in danger of erring in the same way. The popular sentiment today, is that we should never cause anyone pain. But it is not thus that the divine teaching runs. "Through many tribulations, we must enter into the kingdom of God." Pain is the way to the highest, truest life. God gives joy, the most perfect joy -- but we reach it through suffering. We must love our children so well, that we can let them meet and endure pain, in order that the beauty of soul in them shall be perfected.

Then for ourselves, if we would reach the highest, we must be willing to suffer, to pay any price of self-denial or restraint -- that the image of Christ in us, be not marred. We praise peace, but peace if anything less than the holiest and highest, is not the peace we want to rest in.

There is a story of a sculptor who worked for years in poverty and obscurity, to reach his ideal. At last the work was finished in clay. But sudden cold came upon the city that night, and the old man knew that his model would freeze and be destroyed. He had no fire in his poor attic, which served both as studio and sleeping-room. In the morning they found the statue wrapped with the blankets from his bed, warm and unharmed. But the sculptor, they found dead. He had given his life, to save his masterpiece. We should be ready to suffer even unto death -- that our ideal may be kept unmarred. Nothing of cost or sacrifice should be spared, that our lives may reach the best.

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