

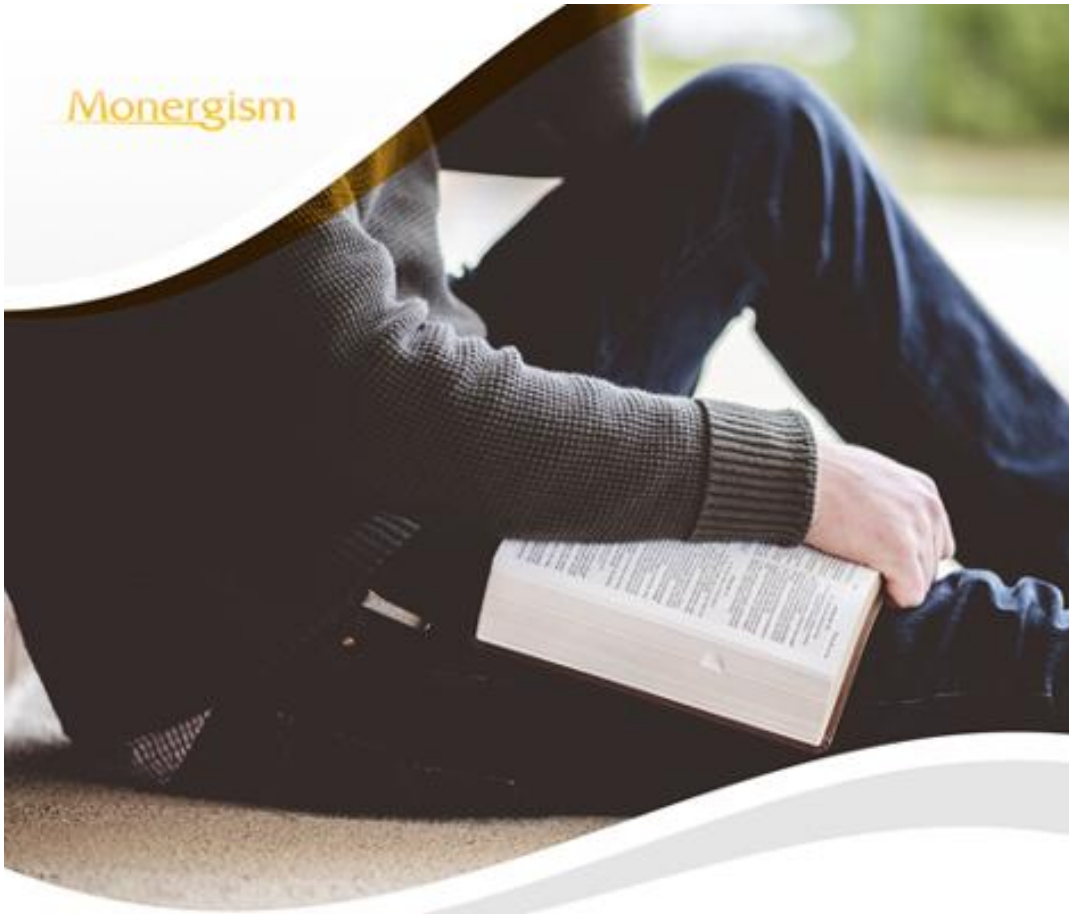
Monergism



The Book of
COMFORT

J. R. MILLER

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by J. R. Miller

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Speak Tenderly

"Comfort, comfort My people. Speak tenderly to Jerusalem, and announce to her that her time of servitude is over, her iniquity has been pardoned, and she has received from the Lords hand double for all her sins." Isaiah 40:2

There is need always for tender words. Always there is sorrow. Everywhere hearts are breaking. There is no one who is not made

happier by gentle speech. Yet there is in the world, a dearth of tender words. Some people scarcely ever speak them. Their tones are harsh. There seems no kindness in their hearts. They are gruff, severe, faultfinding. Even in the presence of suffering and sorrow, they evince no tenderness. "Speak tenderly" is a divine exhortation. That is the way God wants us to speak to each other. That is the way God himself ever speaks to his children. The Bible is full of tender words. We would say that in view of the wickedness of men, their ingratitude, the base return they make for God's goodness, the way they stain the earth with sin—God would be angry with them every day. But instead of anger, only love is shown.

He is ever speaking in words of loving kindness. He makes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends the rain on the just and the unjust. Every message he sends is love. All his thoughts toward his children are peace. The most wonderful expression of his heart toward the world, was in the giving of Christ. He was the Word, the revealer of the heart of God. He never spoke so tenderly to men—as when he sent his Son. Who can measure the comfort that was given to the world in Jesus Christ? Never an unkind word fell from his lips, never a frown was seen on his brow. Think of the tender words he spoke in his mother's home. He was a sinless child, never giving way to angry words or violent tempers. His youth and manhood were without a trace of unlovingness.

We also know what he was during his public ministry—having all power—but gentle as a woman; able to call legions of angels to defend himself—but without resentment, returning only gracious love for cruelty and bitter hate. Think of the tender words he spoke—to the sick who were brought to him for healing, to the mourners sitting beside their dead, to the weary ones who came to him to find the warmth of love in his presence. The ministry of his gracious words as they were uttered by his lips and fell into sad and discouraged hearts—was marvelous in its influence.

In his life, Christ set an example for us. He wants us ever to be speaking tender words. We shall not meet a man today in our going about, who will not need the tender word that we are able to speak. The gift of speech is marvelous in its possibilities. Man is the only one of God's creatures to whom this gift is given. This is one of the qualities that makes him Godlike. It is never meant to be perverted—it was intended always to be beautiful and pleasing. Dumbness is very sad—when one cannot speak. But would not one better be dumb—than use his divine gift of speech in anger to hurt others?

Yet how many are those who never speak—but to give pain? The hurt that is done any fairest day by words, is incalculable. War is terrible. Who can describe the ruin wrought by shot and shell rained upon a city of homes, leaving devastation everywhere. Words may not lacerate, mangle like the missiles of war—but they may be almost as deadly in the cruel work they do. God wants us to use our speech to speak only and ever tenderly. When this message was first given to the prophets, it had a definite meaning. The people were in sore straits. They were suffering. They were in sorrow because of the judgments visited upon the land and upon the holy city. Jerusalem lay in ruins, a city through whose breached walls all the winds of heaven blew mournfully across her forsaken floors. And the heart of Jerusalem, which was with her people in exile, was like the city—broken and defenseless. In that far-off, unsympathetic land it lay open to the alien; tyrants forced their idols upon it. The people tortured it with their jests." It was to these people in sorrow and distress, that God bade his heralds go with divine comfort.

The words were remarkable for their tenderness. The heralds were to go to carry comfort to these broken-hearted ones. The words, "Speak tenderly," have in them therefore a divine sobbing of love. God cares that men and women and children about us are sad. He knows their distress and pities them. He would have us go out to them in his name, carrying in our hearts and upon our lips the echo of his compassion and yearning. It is our privilege to represent God himself in our relations with people about us. How can the gentleness of God

be passed to those who are being hurt by the world's cruelty and unkindness, if not through us, God's children? Who will carry God's sympathy and impart God's comfort to those who are sorrowing and broken-hearted, if we do not? God needs us to be his messengers, his interpreters. If we do not faithfully and truly represent him, how will people in their suffering and distress know his gracious interest in them and his compassionate feeling toward them? If we fail in showing kindness to those who are in need, if we treat them with coldness, withholding our hands from the ministries of love which we might have performed for them, we are not only robbing them of the blessing which we ought to have given them—but we are also failing to be true to God, are misrepresenting him, giving men false conceptions of his character and his disposition toward them.

Men learn what God is, and what his attitude toward them is—only when his own friends are faithful to all their duties and responsibilities. When one in trouble receives no kindness, no help; when one in sorrow receives no sympathy and comfort, it is not because God does not care—but because some child of God neglects his duty.

A story is told of a child sitting sadly one day on a door-step when a kindly man was passing by. "Are you God?" the child asked. The man was struck by the strange question. "No," he answered. "I am not God—but God sent me here, I think." "Weren't you a long time coming?" the boy asked. Then he told the passer-by that when his mother had died a little while ago, she told him that God would care for him. The boy had been watching for God to come. Too often not God—but those he sends, are long in coming to speak for God or to bring the relief or comfort God sends by them. People in distress, who have learned to believe that God will provide for them, are oftentimes compelled to wait long, until their hearts grow almost faint before the blessing comes. Sometimes they begin to wonder whether after all God really hears prayers and keeps his promises; while the delay is not with God—but with us who are so long coming.

"Speak tenderly." We need to train ourselves to remember that we are God's messengers, that it is ours to be intent to any bidding of our Master and to go quickly with any message of relief or encouragement, or comfort, which he gives us to carry. We must not linger or loiter. The need may be urgent. The person may be near death. Or the distress may be so keen that it cannot be endured a moment longer. What if the sufferer should die before we reach him? We are sent to give comfort to one who is in the anguish of bereavement. We hesitate and shrink from carrying our message. Meanwhile the bereft one has come back from the grave to the desolated home and the emptiness and silence. God's heart is full of compassion and he has blessed comfort for his child—but there is no one to go with the message.

There are Bibles in the sad home—but there is no human messenger to speak the tender words. It needs a gentle heart to bring in tender and loving words and the warm touch of comfort which is needed. We fail God while we do not hasten on his errand to our friend who sits un comforted in the shadows. We try to excuse ourselves by saying that we ought not to break in on our friend's sorrow, that we should make our condolences formal, that it would be crude and could only add to the pain if we were to try to speak of the sorrow. This may be true of the world of people in general—but there is always one to whom God gives the message, "Go and speak tenderly," one who will fail God if he does not carry the message, leaving the heart to break when God wanted it to be relieved and comforted.

The Ministry of Comfort

"Comfort, comfort My people—says your God." Isaiah 40:1

A distinguished clergyman said, in reviewing his ministry at its close, that if he were to begin over again, he would preach more comfortingly. There always are in any company of people, many who have sorrow, many at least who need uplifting and encouragement.

There is always a place for the comforter. And there are few who really understand the art of giving comfort. Many who seem to think they do and who are ready on every occasion to seek to console others who are in trouble, fail in their efforts. Job said that the friends who came to him in his calamity and spoke to him so volubly concerning his afflictions, were only "miserable comforters". Those who have passed through experiences of trouble and have had their friends and neighbors come and sit with them and give them what they considered words of consolation, have found oftentimes that they gave but small help. The burden of sorrow was not lighter after they had gone. No new light broke through the clouds upon those who sorrowed as they listened to the words of their friends. Their hearts were not quieted. They had learned no new song of joy.

It is worth our while to learn what true comfort is, and how we can speak tenderly to others. No ministry is more needed or finds more frequent opportunity for exercise. No men, in any community, become so highly esteemed and loved while the years go by—as those who are wise in giving comfort to others. The sad and weary turn to them for encouragement and help. They always have a word to give, which imparts strength.

Those who would be wise in comforting—must be sympathetic. They must be patient with even the smallest griefs of others. It is not easy for the strong, to sympathize with the weak. They cannot understand how little sufferings and troubles, such as those which seem so hard for others to bear—should really cause any distress. They are disposed to laugh at the complaints of those who seem to have so little of which to complain. No doubt there are many people who make altogether too much, of very small cares and difficulties. They fret over every imaginable inconvenience or discomfort. No matter how well they are—they imagine they have many ills and can never talk to any one without speaking of their ailments. They magnify the minutest sufferings and sorrows. It seems to be their natural disposition to think of themselves, as particularly unfortunate. They

find their chief pleasure apparently in having others commiserate them and sympathize with them.

It is not easy for people of a strong, brave spirit, who are accustomed to look with contempt on the little trials and sufferings in their own life—to have patience with those who are really weak and unable to endure; or with those who so magnify their little ills and troubles. But if the strong would become real helpers of the weak, they must learn to be patient with every phase of their weakness, and to condescend to it. Indeed, weakness of this kind needs comfort that will cure it and transform it—into manly strength. Sympathy, to be truly rich and adequate, in its helpfulness, must be able to enter into every form of suffering, even the smallest, and to listen to every kind of complaining and discontent, to every fear and anxiety, however needless.

It was thus that Christ condescended to all human frailty. He never treated any one's trouble, however small, or any one's worry, however groundless, with lightness, as if it were unimportant. He bade to come to him, all who were weary, receiving graciously everyone who came. He was infinitely strong—but his strength was infinitely gentle to the weakest. Nothing in this world is more beautiful than the sight of a strong man giving his strength to one who is weak, that he may help him also to grow strong.

Another class who find it hard to sympathize with sorrow—are those who never have any sorrow of their own. They have been reared in sheltered homes, with love and tenderness all about them. They have never had an unmet need. They have never known hardship. They have never watched by the death-bed of a loved one, and there has been no break in their home circle. They have never had a bitter disappointment in their life. What do they know—of the experiences of suffering, of pain, of anguish, of struggle, of want, which comes to such multitudes in some form or other in life? These cannot sympathize with their fellows in their trials, in the things which make

their life so hard. They do not understand what these experiences mean.

An artist has painted a picture which represents the scene of the crucifixion after it was all over. The crowd has gone. The cross is empty. The thorn-crown is lying on a rock, and an angel is looking at it, with his finger touching one of its sharp thorns wonderingly. He is trying to learn what pain is. He had beheld the anguish of the Son of God on the cross, and could not understand the mystery. The angels cannot understand our suffering, for they have never suffered. Nor can men who have never had pain or sorrow understand these experiences in us. They may pity us when they see us enduring our sufferings—but they cannot sympathize with us. Before we can be true comforters of others—we must know by experience in our own lives, the meaning of the things which give us pain or distress. If we do not, we cannot help them by any words we may say to them. There is nothing in our experience to interpret to us what they are suffering.

If we would help those who are in trouble, we must know what comfort really is. Many people do not. Many think that if they weep with those who weep, that they have comforted them. There is a measure of help in this. It does us good when we are suffering—to know that another feels with us. It brings another life into fellowship with ours. We are not alone—somebody cares. This makes us stronger to endure. We can bear our pain better if a friend holds our hand. This is the only way some people think of giving comfort. They sit down beside us and listen to our recital of grief. They let us tell it out in all its details. They encourage us to dwell on the painful incidents. They give expression to their pity, entering with us into our suffering as if it were their own. They dwell on the bitterness of our trial, emphasizing its sharpness and poignancy, thus adding to our pain and distress. Then they rise and go their way—leaving us just where they found us when they came in! They have shown their interest in us, their sympathy with us. But they have not given us the best comfort!

The word "comfort" is from a root that means to strengthen. In our modern use of the word, we have almost dropped this thought of its original sense. But we would better recall it. To comfort is to strengthen. When we would give comfort to others, we are not merely to let them know that we are their friends and are sorry for them. We are not just to try in some way to alleviate their pain. It is not enough that we in some measure relieve their distress. We are to seek to have them grow strong—so that they can endure the trouble and rejoice in it. This should be our aim in our ministry of comfort to others. We have not finished our work with them, therefore, until we have brought them some divine truth which will cast light on their sorrows, which will inspire them with hope and courage!

The comforter needs gentleness, for a harsh word would make the sorrow deeper. He needs patience, for grief yields slowly even to most faithful love. He needs tenderness like a mother's. God says to his afflicted ones, "As one whom his mother comforts, so will I comfort you." A father's comfort is different from a mother's, and if we would be like God we must learn from mothers how to comfort. He who would give comfort must have faith. He must believe in God, must know him, must be sure of God's love. Then he will know how to sustain with words, him who is weary.

How Christ Comforts His Friends

The little Twenty-third Psalm is the most familiar, and most often read portion of the Bible. It has comforted more sorrow than any other composition the world possesses. Next to it, the Fourteenth Chapter of John is the best known of all the Scriptures. It is a chapter of comfort. How many tears it has dried! To how many sorrowing hearts has it brought peace! Its words were first spoken to a company of broken-hearted friends, who thought they never could be comforted. It is well to study how Jesus, the truest comforter the world ever has known, consoled his friends. Look at the way Jesus comforts his disciples.

First of all, in that saddest of all hours he bade them not to be troubled. Yet they were about to lose their best friend. How could they but be troubled? He comes to his friends today in their bereavement with the same word: "Let not your heart be troubled." This is not mere professional consolation. As Jesus saw it that night, there was no reason why the disciples should be troubled. As Jesus sees it, there is no reason why you should be troubled, even though you are watching your dearest friend pass away, in what you call death. It is only the earthly side of the event which you see—and it seems terrible to you. The friends of Jesus thought they were losing him and forever. He had been a wonderful friend. He had a rich nature, a noble personality, power to love deeply, capacity for unselfish friendship, and was able to inspire us to all worthy life. The disciples thought they were about to lose all that. You think you are losing all friendship's best, in the departure of your friend. Yet Jesus, looking upon his disciples and looking upon you—bids you not to be troubled.

Death is not an experience which harms the believing one who passes through it. The Christian mother who died this afternoon, is not troubled and in sorrow where she is tonight. Dying has not disturbed her happiness—she never was happier than she is now! Leaving her children behind has not broken her heart, nor filled her with distress and anxiety concerning them. As she looks upon them from her new point of view, on death's other side, there is no cause for grief or fear. They are in the divine care which is so loving, so wise, so gentle, and so far-reaching, that she has not a shadow of uncertainty regarding them. The children are in distress because they have lost their mother, who has been so much to them. They cannot endure the thought of going on without their mother's love and tenderness, her guidance and shelter.

Yet the Master says to them: "Do not be troubled." He means that if they understood all that has taken place as he understands it—if they knew what dying has meant to their mother—and what the divine love will mean to them in the days to come—they would not be

troubled. What seems to them calamity, would appear perfectly good—if they could see it from the heavenly side. Jesus told his disciples what they should do. "Believe in God, believe also in me." They could not understand that hour why all was well, why nothing was going wrong, why good would be the outcome of all the things, that then seemed so terrible. They could not see how their loss would become gain, when it was all wrought out to the end; how what appeared the destruction of their hopes would prove to be the glorious fulfilling of those hopes. Yet they were to believe. That is, they were to commit all the broken things of their hearts that night, into God's hands, trust him, and have no fear, no anxiety, no doubt.

They themselves could not bring good out of all this evil—but God could, and faith was committing the whole matter to him. "Believe in God." Jesus had taught them a new name for God. He was their Father. A whole world of love-thoughts was in that name. The very hairs of their heads were numbered. Not a sparrow could fall to the ground without their Father—which meant that the divine care took in all the events of their lives, all the smallest incidents of their affairs.

We are to believe absolutely in the love of God, and trust him—though we cannot see him. We do not need to understand, we do not have to know. We must believe that the eternal God is caring for us—and nothing can ever go wrong in his hands! "Believe in God."

"Believe also in me." They had been believing in Jesus Christ, thinking that he was their Messiah. "You are the Christ!" Peter had confessed. But they were now in danger of losing faith in him, when they saw him sent to the cross. He called them to keep their faith through the terrible hours just before them. We are always in danger of losing faith in Christ—in time of great sorrow or of trouble which sweeps away our hopes. Again and again Christian people in grief and loss are heard asking, "Why does Christ let me suffer thus? If he loves me, how is it that he allows me to be thus troubled?" The

trouble is, that our vision is short-sighted. We are impatient and cannot wait.

The going away of their Master left the disciples in despair. They thought they were losing him. They did not know that his going away was part of his love for them, its highest expression, that none of the things about him they had believed had failed. We need to continue to believe in Christ—though everything seems to have gone from us. His way is always right! Our comfort comes through abiding trust in him.

Jesus went further with his disciples. He told them more. He told them where he was going, and what his going away would mean to them. "In my Father's house are many mansions. I am going to prepare a place for you!" On this earth there is no place so sweet, so sacred, so heart-satisfying as home. It is a place of love. It is a place of confidence. We are sure of home's loved ones. We do not have to be on our guard after we enter our home doors. Home is a refuge in which we are safe from all danger, from injustice, from unkindness. Home is the place where hungry hearts are fed on love's bread.

Mrs. Craik, in one of her books, has the fine picture: "Oh, conceive the happiness to know someone dearer to you than your own self, some tender heart into which you can pour every thought, every grief, every joy; one person who, if all the rest of the world were to culminate or forsake you, would never wrong you by a harsh thought or an unjust word; who would cling to you the closer in sickness, in poverty, in care; who would sacrifice all things to you—and for whom you would sacrifice all; from whom, except by death, night or day, you never can be divided; whose smile is ever at your hearth—and you love the same. Such is marriage," says Mrs. Craik, "if they who marry, have hearts and souls to feel that there is no bond on earth so tender and so sublime." This is a glimpse of what ideal home love is. We may find the picture partially realized in some earthly homes—but in the Father's house the realization will be perfect!

The New Testament paints heaven in colors of dazzling splendor, its gates and walls and streets and gardens all of the utmost brilliance—but no other description means so much to our hearts as that which the Master gives us in these three words. "My Father's house!"—Home! One writes: "Life changes all our thoughts of heaven. At first, we think of streets of gold, of gates of pearl and dazzling light, of shining wings and robes of white, and things all strange to mortal sight. But in the afterward of years—it is a more familiar place. A home unhurt by sighs and tears—where waits many a well-known face. With passing months it comes more near; it grows more real day by day—not strange or cold—but very dear—the glad home-hand, not far away, where none are sick, or poor, or lone—the place where we shall find our own. And as we think of all we knew who there have met to part no more—our longing hearts desire home, too, with all the strife and trouble over."

"My Father's house." That is the place where those we have lost awhile from our earthly homes, falling asleep in Jesus, are gathering. That is the place to which the angels have carried our believing family and friends, who have passed out of our sight. That is the place where the broken Christian life of earth will find its perfectness!

"My Father's house!" Home! Is there any comfort sweeter than this in the sorrow of our parting from the dear ones, who leave us in the experience which we call dying?

The Master said further in his comforting, that he would come and receive his friends to himself. Dying is no accident, therefore. It is merely Christ coming to receive us to himself. Do not think something has gone wrong in the ways of God—when you hear that a Christian friend is dead. Your friend passed away the other night. You were expecting that he would be with you for many years. Has Christ any comfort? Yes, in all this experience, one of God's plans of love is being fulfilled. The end is home, blessedness. One said, "Yes—but my friend was with me such a little while. I could almost wish I

had not let my heart fasten its tendrils about the dear life, since so soon it was torn from me." Say it not! It is worth while to love and to let the heart pour out all its sweetness in loving—though it be for a day!

Be of Good Cheer!

"And now I exhort you—to be of good cheer!" Acts 27:22

In the story of his voyage and shipwreck, we find Paul not only cheerful himself—but a giver of encouragement to others. The storm had grown fiercer and fiercer. It had simply laid hold of the ship, torn it out of the hands of the officers and seamen, and was forcibly bearing it along in its teeth. There was nobody in command. The record says, "But the weather changed abruptly, and a wind of typhoon strength (a "northeaster," they called it) caught the ship and blew it out to sea." No wonder the long hope of being saved was gone. The people on the ship were in despair. Then came Paul with his inspiring word, "Be of good cheer!" That was a splendid message—and it was not a mere idle or empty word.

Some people's optimism has no basis. Some people's "Don't worry" is only meaningless talk. But when Paul said, "Be of good cheer," he had reasons for saying it. "I believe God," he said. And it was not an empty faith he had. God had sent an angel to him that night, assuring him of deliverance from the storm, both for himself and for all on the ship. So his words had power over the panic-stricken men on the ship. He besought them to take some food. They had been so terrified that they had eaten almost nothing for fourteen days. He urged them now to eat, and said that not a hair should perish from the head of them. Then, to encourage them by example, he himself took bread, and having thanked God before them all, he broke the bread and began to eat. Then they were all of good cheer, and took some food.

Note how the one man lifted up a despairing company of nearly three hundred men, and gave them encouragement. There is no mission of faith and love—which is more important and Christlike, than that of being encouragers, of giving cheer! Everyone needs encouragement at some time. Life is hard for many people—for some it is hard at all times. Some are always bending under heavy burdens. Some are in storm and darkness many a night.

I am not justifying worry. A child of God never should worry. Paul said: "Do not worry about anything." Jesus himself said: "Do not worry about tomorrow." Discouragement and worry are unbelief—and unbelief is sin. None who love God—should ever worry. Yet there are many who have burdens, cares, sorrows and trials—who always need encouragement, and to whom we should ever be saying: "Be of good cheer!" There is scarcely a person you will meet today or tomorrow, who will not be helped on the journey—by the hearty word of encouragement which you can so easily give.

Jesus told his disciples, when he sent them out to preach, not to stop to greet anyone along the way. Their mission was urgent, and there was no time to lose in mere courtesies. He did not mean however, to forbid us to show kindness even on our busiest days, or to speak a word to the lowly and suffering ones we meet on the way, even when we are most hurried.

The example of Paul on this ship—is full of beautiful and inspiring meaning. We cannot know what those two hundred and seventy-six men would have done—if it had not been for his earnest and faithful encouragement. There was no other person to say a brave word to them. Think how he lifted them up and made their hearts strong.

Let us take the lesson. Tomorrow we may find ourselves in a home of distress, or in the presence of men who are discouraged or cast down. Even if there should be no special trouble, we shall meet people whose hands hang down, whose knees are feeble, to whom no one is giving encouragement or cheer. Have you ever noticed how many

people were perpetual discouragers? They make life harder for every person they meet. They tell you, that you do not look well. They remind you of your paleness or sallowness of complexion. If you are sick and they call to see you, they talk ominously of your condition. They seem to think you like that kind of 'sympathy'. When you have had some sorrow or trouble, they appear to think it kind to dwell upon its painful features. They talk pessimistically about your affairs, about everything. It is hard to speak patiently of this miserable habit of discouraging others, which is so very common.

Many people who love you and mean well for you, unintentionally become hinderers of your progress, dishearteners, and make life harder for you!

They tell us in mountain regions, that avalanches are oftentimes hanging poised so delicately on the crags, that even the reverberation of a whisper on the air may cause them to fall with ruinous effect upon the homes and villages in the valleys! The guides caution tourists at certain points not to speak or sing, lest they cause disaster. Just so—there are human lives bearing such burdens of sorrow and trouble—that one disheartening word may bring them into despair! We should learn never to give discouragement. It is a crime against humanity. Beware that you never speak dishearteningly to any one. Only love can save the world. No matter how the person may have sinned, only gentleness can save him.

A newspaper writer makes the suggestion, that for men like himself some kind of league should be formed by which those who join should bind themselves to say some kind word, or do some kind act daily. The editor suggests, however, that only one kindness daily is too formal, and altogether too meager. There is need for kindness not once a day—to one person; but a thousand times a day—to a thousand people. There is need for encouragement continually. If you can truly say, "I believe God," you cannot but be an encourager. God himself is a God of encouragement. True religion is simply love and kindness.

Washington Gladden says that "religion is friendship; friendship first with the great Companion, on the Godward side. Then on the manward side the same is true." To be friends with everybody; to fill every human relation with the spirit of friendship; is there anything more than this—that the wisest and best of men can hope to do? So let us seek to encourage others wherever we are. You cannot possibly estimate the uplifting power of such a life as Paul's, moving among men. You cannot possibly estimate the uplifting power of your own life in the community where you dwell. Let us live so that everyone may go away from us heartened and brave. Let our message ever be, "Be of good cheer, for I believe God!"

Does God Care?

About the beginning of this century, an unbeliever was reported to have said that the mission of the twentieth century would be to discover God, and when God should be discovered, it would be found that he does not care. It would be a bitter sorrow for the world—if this opinion was true. Into countless homes and hearts—it would bring the darkness of despair. The secret of hope in believing souls everywhere, is that God does care! This is the one great truth that God has been striving through all the generations, to have men believe. This is the whole gospel of redemption. The Bible presents it on its every page. The world's condemning unbelief, has always been its refusal to believe that God cares.

But does God really care? Is there anywhere, an omnipotent ear—which hears the world's cries of pain—and gives attention to them? Is there anywhere a loving heart which is touched by the world's sorrows, which feels with those who suffer, and which desires to give help and comfort? The greatest stranger when he is passing along the street and sees one suffering, in pain or distress—somewhat cares and pities him. A tender-hearted man feels even for an animal, or a bird which has been hurt. Some great calamity occurs—the destruction of a city by an earthquake, a volcanic eruption pouring its

lava streams over homes and villages, an explosion in a mine, burying hundreds of miners—and a wave of pain sweeps over the world. Human hearts are sensitive to every shade of need and experience in others. When we see a passing hearse, telling us that there is death within, that a family is mourning, though they are utter strangers to us—our hearts are touched, we walk softly, laughter is hushed, loud speech is restrained, we speak more quietly. We care. Is God less compassionate than men are?

Some believe, that God's care is general—not individual. They believe that all things in creation and providence, are planned for the good of the race as a whole. The movements of the earth are so guided as to bring day and night, the seasons in their order, cold and heat, winds and tides and all the changes which bring health, comfort and fruitfulness. God is good to all. "He makes his sun to rise on the evil and the good, and sends rain on the just and the unjust." Nature is ready with gentle service, in all its attributes and forces. But it is the same to all. There is no love in all this, no care for any individual. They say that the providence of God is kindly, benevolent, helpful—but is no more so to the weak than to the strong, to the sick than to the well, to the distressed and broken-hearted than to the happy and rejoicing. There seems to be no special divine tenderness shown to a home where there is suffering, or where there is great need or bitter sorrow. Life appears no more kindly to the blind man, to the cripple, to the helpless, to the bedridden—than to those who have the use of all their powers and faculties and are well and strong.

Does God really care for us, as individuals? Does he give personal thought to any of us—to you, to me—according to our condition? Does pain or trouble in us, cause pity in his heart? Does God care? Does he see the individual in the crowd? When you are passing through some great trouble, enduring pain or adversity—does God know it, and does he care? Does he have any thought or feeling for you different from that which he has for the person living in the house next to yours—who has no trouble, no suffering?

We know how it is with our human friends. Love is individual. Its interest in us is sympathetic, and varies with our condition and our need. When we are happy, without painful condition, our friends love us—but feel no anxiety concerning us. Tomorrow we are sick or are suffering from some painful accident, or enduring some loss. Then they love us no more than before—but their hearts are torn with sympathy. That is what it means to care. Is there any such experience as this in God? When we suffer—does he suffer too? Does he know that we are in any particular need—and is his feeling toward us affected by our experience?

A mother was speaking to a trusted friend about her daughter. The child had had a bitter sorrow, a sore disappointment. The mother knew just what her daughter was passing through. Her love for her child, entered into and shared all the child's experiences. The mother cared. Is there ever anything like this in the heart of God—as he looks upon his children and knows that they are suffering?

The Psalmist says: "I am poor and needy—yet the Lord thinks upon me!" There was wonderful comfort in this assurance. For a man, one man, in the great world of millions—poor, needy, surrounded by enemies and dangers, and with no human friend or helper, to be able to say: "Yet the Lord thinks upon me!" was to find marvelous strength.

But was the needy and beleaguered soul justified in its confidence? Was it indeed true—that the great God in heaven thought upon his servant on the earth in his loneliness and suffering? Or was it only a imagined assurance, with which to comfort himself? Did God really care for him? And does God care for us, and think upon us—when we are poor and needy?

When we turn to the Bible we find on every page the revelation—that God does care! The Old Testament is full of luminous illustrations of the truth. A great crime has been committed, a brother slain by a brother—and God cares! A woman is in distress because she has been

cast out—and God cares! The Lord has heard your affliction," was the message sent to comfort her. All the Bible story shines with records of similar divine care. The Psalms likewise are full of assurances of God's personal interest in men.

Christ teaches the same truth. He speaks over and over of the Father's thought and care. He told his disciples that amid all his care of the worlds—God clothes the grass and the lilies, and finds time to attend to the feeding of the birds, and in all the events of the universe, notes the fall of a little sparrow. He assured them further that the very hairs of their heads are all numbered, meaning that God personally cares for all the minutest affairs of our lives. Not only did Christ teach that God cares for his children—but that he cares for them as individuals. His love is not merely a vague kindly sentiment of interest, in the whole human family—but it is personal and individual as the love of a mother for each one of her children.

The Shepherd calls his sheep by name. Paul took the love of Christ to himself as if he were the only one Christ loved. "He loved me—and gave himself up for me!" God's love is personal. His heart lays hold upon each life. He cares for us—for me! He enters into all our individual experiences. If we suffer—he suffers. In a remarkable passage in the Old Testament, the writer, speaking of the love of God for his people, says: "In all their suffering—he also suffered, and he personally rescued them. In his love and mercy he redeemed them. He lifted them up and carried them through all the years." Isaiah 63:9. How could the care of God for his children, be expressed in plainer or more positive way? In their afflictions—he was afflicted. When they suffered—he suffered. In their sorrows—he sorrowed!

We know how Jesus entered into all the experiences of his disciples. Their life was his. It is the same today. In heaven he is touched with the feeling of his people's infirmities! If you are weak—the burden of your weakness presses upon him. If you are hurt—the hurt is felt by him. If you are wronged—he endures the wrong. There is no experience of your life—which he does not share. Whatever your

need, your trial, your perplexity, your struggle may be—you may be sure that God knows and cares—and that when you come to him with it, he will take time amid all his infinite affairs to help you—as if he had nothing else in all the world to do!

God cares! His love for each one of His children is so deep, so personal, so tender—that He has compassion on our every pain, every distress, every struggle. "As a father has compassion on his children, so the Lord has compassion on those who fear Him!" Psalms 103:13. God is our Father, and his care is gentler than a human father's—as his love exceeds human love.

Much human care has no power to help—but when God cares—he helps omnipotently. Jesus said that when his friends would leave him alone—yet he would not be alone—"because the Father is with me." When human friendship comes not with any relief—then God will come. When no one in all the world cares—then God cares! "Cast all your care upon Him, because He cares about you!" 1 Peter 5:7

You Will Not Mind the Roughness

Sometimes there is inscrutable mystery in the difficult experiences through which godly people are led.

A few years ago a happy young couple came from the marriage altar, full of hope and joy. Their home was bright with love. A year later a baby came and was welcomed with great gladness. From the beginning, however, the little one was a sufferer. She was taken to one of the best physicians in the land. After careful examination, his decision was that her condition is absolutely hopeless. Until that moment the mother had still hoped that her child might sometime be cured. Now she understands that however long she may live, she will never be any better. "What shall I do? What can I do? How can God help me?" was the mother's question. What comfort can we give to such mothers as this?

Yes, it is hard to look upon the child's condition, so pathetic, so pitiful, and to remember the doctor's words: "Absolutely hopeless!" Is there any comfort for this condition? Can this mother say that God is leading her in the path of life? Is this experience of suffering, part of that path? Does God know about the long struggle of this mother? Does he know what the doctor said? Yes—he knows all. Has he then no power to do anything? Yes—he has all power. Why, then, does he not cure this child? We may not try to answer. We do not know God's reasons. Yet we know it is all right. What good can possibly come from this child's condition, and from the continuation of this painful condition year after year? We do not know. Perhaps perhaps it is for the sake of the mother and father, who are being led through these years of anguish, disappointment and sorrow. Many people suffer for the sake of others, and we know at least that these parents are receiving a training in unselfishness, in gentleness, in patience, in trust.

Perhaps this painful experience in their child is to make them richer-hearted. The disciples asked the Master, "Why was this man born blind? Was it a result of his own sins or those of his parents?" "It was not because of his sins or his parents' sins. He was born blind so the power of God could be seen in him." May it not be, that this child's suffering finds its justification in the ministry of love it has called out in the father and mother? They are being prepared for a blessed service to other suffering ones. Perhaps in eternity, they will learn that they owe to their child's suffering, much of the beauty of Christ which grew into their characters.

In one of the lace shops of Brussels there are certain rooms devoted to the spinning of the finest and most delicate lace patterns. The rooms are left altogether dark, except for the light that comes from one very small window. There is only one spinner in each room, and he sits where a narrow stream of light falls from the window directly upon the threads he is weaving. "Thus," says the guide, "do we secure our choicest products. The lace is always more delicately and beautifully woven, when the worker himself sits in the dark and only

his pattern is in the light." May it not be the same with us in our weaving? Sometimes we must work in the dark. We cannot see or understand what we are doing. We cannot discover any possible good in our painful experience. Yet, if only we are faithful, we shall some day learn that the most exquisite work of our life was done in those very dark days.

Let us never be afraid, however great our sufferings, however dark life is. Let us go on in faith and love, never doubting, not even asking why, bearing our pain and learning to sing while we suffer. God is watching, and he will bring good and beauty out of all our suffering. We must remember that it is "the path of life" that God is showing us. He never leads us in any other path. If we are prompted to go in some evil way, we may be sure that it is not God's way for us. He leads us only in paths of life. They may be steep and rough—but the end will be blessed and glorious—and in our joy we will forget the briars and thorns on the way!

There are days when you do not know what to do. You have perplexities, doubts, uncertainties. You lie awake half the night wondering what you ought to do. Something has gone wrong in your affairs, in your relations with a friend, or in your home life. Or, one near to you is suffering and you want to help—but you do not know what to do. Your days are full of questions. Instead of vexing yourself, just go to Him who is infinitely wise and say: "Show me the path!" and He will.

There is something else. It is told of Wenceslaus, king of Bohemia, that he was one night going to prayer in a distant church, barefoot, over the snow and ice; and his servant, Podavivus, following him, imitating his master's devotion, grew faint. "Follow me," said the king; "set your feet in the prints of mine." That is what our Master says when we grow weary in the hard way, when the thorns pierce our feet, or when the path grows rough or steep: "Follow me. Put your feet into my footprints! It is but a little way home!"

Why Does No One Ever See God?

There are many sincere Christians who are longing for clearer revealings of God. An earnest young Christian wrote to her pastor: "I find myself ever asking, as I read the New Testament, "These things are very beautiful—but do we know that they are true?" Several years since, a writer told of two girls who were overheard one evening talking as if in perplexity, and one of them said: "Yes—but why has no one ever seen God?" This was all that was heard of the conversation—but that single sentence revealed the questioner's state of mind. Evidently she had been talking about the apparent unreality of spiritual things. Why had nobody ever seen God? She had heard a great deal about God—about his love, his care, his interest in human lives, his kindness. But she had never had a glimpse of him. How could she know that all she had heard about him was true? How could she know that the things of Christian faith and hope, were real?

Such questions will arise with all who think. Does God indeed love me? If he does, why must I suffer so? If he does, how can I explain all the accidents, calamities, and troubles of life? It is not surprising, if sometimes we cannot understand the mysteries of Christian faith. All of life is full of things which we cannot comprehend. Can you understand how, on the bushes in your garden, which in March were bare and briery, there are coming masses of glorious roses? In the most common things there is mystery. A great botanist said that there was enough mystery in a handful of moss, to give one a lifetime's study. There really are but few things we can understand. How do your eyes see? How do your ears hear? How does your mind think? Shall we refuse to believe these things—because we cannot explain them?

Why, then, should we doubt that when a mother sat by her suffering child the other night, and pleaded with God, her prayer reached the ears of her Heavenly Father? Why do we question that God loves us,

when we believe that our human friends love us? You cannot see the love in your friend's heart—any more than you can see the love in God's heart. You say that your friend is true, is patient, is kind, that he is a tower of strength to you; but you cannot see these qualities in him. Your friend is much out of your sight, and you cannot set spies on him to know that he is always faithful. Yet you never doubt him. How can you not in like manner, believe in the love of God, which you cannot see?

A sorrow breaks in upon you. You cannot understand it. Yet—we would be far happier sometimes, if we did not try to understand things. Sir Robertson Nicoll says: "There are some very devout people who know far too much. They can explain the whole secret and purpose of pain, evil, and death in the world. They prate about the mystery of things—as if they were God's spies. It is far humbler and more Christian, to admit that we do not fully know the reason and method in this long, slow tragedy of human existence."

But God does really show himself to us, and we do see him oftener than we think. Philip said to Jesus: "Lord, show us the Father;" and have you noticed what Jesus said to him in reply? "Have I been so long time with you, and have you not known me? He who has seen me has seen the Father." What Philip had in mind when he said: "Show us the Father," was some outshining of God's majesty and splendor. That was the way he thought God must appear. When Jesus said: "He who has seen me has seen the Father," he referred to his common, daily life with his disciples—not to his miracles. Only a small proportion of the things Jesus did were supernatural. Most all of his acts were simple, common things, that did not need deity to perform. He wrought only one recorded miracle in the Bethany home. But in his frequent visits—sitting with the family by the hearth, or at the table, talking with them in the evening, walking with them in the garden, showing them the gentle things of friendship—there were a thousand kindly words and acts, which made his name forever sacred to them.

It was so in all Christ's life. There were a few miracles, showing divine power; there were countless revealings of gentleness, sympathy, thoughtfulness, encouragement, which were as full of God as the miracles. It was chiefly to this part of his life, that Jesus referred when he said to Philip: "He who has seen me has seen the Father." His miracles awed them. Mary could not have sat at his feet and listened calmly—if he had appeared in glory and majesty. John could not have leaned on his breast restfully and quietly—if supernatural glory had been shining in his face. God is love, and he reveals himself in acts of love. Jesus showed the disciples the Father—in all the sweetness and compassion that they saw in him continually. Do we not see him in like ways? Does he not reveal himself to us in a thousand familiar things, which we do not think of at all—as divine revealings?

A writer says that most men are religious when they look upon the faces of their dead babies. The materialism which at other times infects them with doubts of God and immortality, drops from them in this hushed hour.

People see God only in the unusual. "If we could see miracles," they say, "we would believe!" But the common things are likewise full of God. Moses saw God in one bush which burned and was not consumed. Yet God is as really in every bush in the woods—for those who have eyes to see—as he was in a special way in that little bush at Horeb. Have you never seen God? If you think of God as only burning majesty, shining glory, you will answer: "No—I never saw God!" But splendor, Sinai clouds, and flaming fires are not God. You have seen God a thousand times—in love, in peace, in goodness, in comfort. You see him daily in providential care, in the sweet things of your home, in friendships, in the beauty of little children. You have been receiving blessings all your life in manifold ways. Do not call it chance, luck, or good fortune!

The heart-hungry girl asked: "Why has no one ever seen God?" Yet she had seen God every day, every hour of her life, in the goodness

and mercy which had followed her from her infancy. You have seen God a thousand times! You were in danger, and there came a mysterious protection which sheltered you from harm. You called it chance; but it was God! You had a great sorrow which you thought you could not possibly endure, and there came into your heart a strange, sweet comfort. You thought a friend brought it; but God sent the friend! There was a tangle in your affairs which seemed about to wreck everything, and then in an inexplicable way it was all straightened out by invisible hands. The hands were God's! Your years have been full of wonderful providences, unusual guidances, gentle comforts, answered prayers, sweet friendships, surprises of goodness, help, and care. All your life you have been seeing God! Do not question it—but rejoice in the vision, that you may see him still more!

The One Who Stands By

Jesus spoke to his disciples of the Holy Spirit as the Comforter. We think of a comforter, as one who gives consolation in trouble. There is much sorrow in the world, and there is always need of those who understand the art of comforting. There is constant need for true comforters. Barnabas is called, a "son of consolation." No doubt he was a sunshiny man. No other one, can be a consoler. When Barnabas went into a sick room, we are quite sure his presence was a blessing. It is a great thing to be son of consolation. Christ himself was a wonderful comforter. The Holy Spirit is a comforter. He brings the gentleness and healing of divine love, to hurt hearts.

But the best scholars agree that "comforter" is not the word which most adequately gives the sense of the original word which our Lord used. It is Paraclete. It is used only a few times, and only by John. In his Gospel, it is translated Comforter. But, in John's First Epistle, it is translated Advocate. Advocate is perhaps the more accurate translation—not merely a comforter who consoles us in trouble, and makes us stronger to endure sorrow—but one who stands for us. The

word Advocate means one who stands by; strictly, one who stands by the side of another.

The thought "one who stands by" is very suggestive. This is one of the best definitions of a friend. He must be one who always stands by. He may not always be close to you, always manifesting affection in some practical way, always speaking words of encouragement. He may be miles away in space—but you know that he is always true to you, your real friend, wherever he may be. He always stands by you. He may not be able to do many things for you. Indeed it is but little that a friend, even your best friend, really can do at any time for you. He cannot lift away your load. Each one must bear his own burden, meet his own life's questions, make his own decisions, endure his own troubles, fight his own battles, accept his own responsibilities. The office of a friend is not to make life easy for you. But he always stands by you. If ever you need him in any way and turn to him, he will not fail you nor disappoint you. If you do not see him for years, nor even hear from him, and if you then should go to him with some appeal—you will find him unchanged, the same strong, faithful friend as always. Though your circumstances have changed, from wealth to poverty, from popular favor to obscurity, from strength to weakness, still your friend is the same, stands by you as he did before, meets you with the old cordiality, the old kindness, the old helpfulness. Your friend is one who stands by you through everything.

Such a friend the Holy Spirit is. Jesus said the Father would give "another Comforter," that is, another one like himself. Jesus an advocate for his disciples, who always stood by them, their comrade, their defender, their shelter in danger. His friendship was unchanged through the years. His disciples failed him, grieved him, disappointed him—but when they came back to him they found him the same, waiting to receive them. Jesus said they would receive another comforter when he was gone. He was not really going away from them. They would not see any face, would not feel any hand—but he would be there, as he always had been—ever standing by. They would lose nothing by his going away. In the Paraclete, he

would still be with them and would still be their Comforter, their Comrade.

Think what it was to them to have Jesus for a personal friend. There never was such another Friend. Think of his gentleness, his tenderness, his sympathy, his kindness, the inspiration of his love. Think of the shelter he was to them, the strength, the encouragement. Then remember what he said—that the Holy Spirit would be "another Comforter," one like himself, and that it would be more to them to have the Spirit for their Friend and Comforter—than if Jesus had stayed with them.

The Holy Spirit is everything to us—which Jesus was to his personal friends. He is our Advocate. He always stands by, and for us. We speak of the love of the Father. We are his children. He comforts us with his wonderful tenderness. We talk and sing of the love of Christ. We do not speak or sing so much of the love of the Spirit. Yet the Spirit's love is just as wonderful as the Father's or the Son's! For one thing, he loves us enough to come and live in our hearts. Does that seem a little thing? We speak a great deal, especially at Christmas time, of the condescension of the eternal Son of God in coming to earth, to be born in a stable and cradled in a manger. Is it a less wonderful condescension, for the Holy Spirit to make your heart his home—and to live there as your guest? Think what a place a human heart is! Think of the unholy thoughts and desires, the impure things, the unlovingness, the jealousy, the bitterness, the hate—all the sin of our hearts. Then think of the love of the Spirit—which makes him willing to live in such a place, in order to cleanse us and make us godly and holy! The love of the Spirit is shown in his wondrous patience with us in all our sinfulness, while he lives in us and deals with us in the culturing of our Christian life.

We speak of the patient love of Christ with his disciples the three years he was with them, having them in his family, at his table, enduring their ignorance, their dullness, their narrowness, their petty strifes, their unfaithfulnesses. It was a marvelous love—which

never grew weary of them, which loved on in spite of all that so tried his love. We never can understand the depth of the love of Christ, in enduring all that he endured in saving the world. But think also of the love of the Holy Spirit in what he suffers in his work with us. A young Christian had a friend whom she had long loved deeply. She had regarded this friend as like an angel—in the truth and beauty of her life. She never had had a shadow of doubt concerning her. Then she learned that this girl had been leading a double life for years. The discovery appalled her! At first she refused to believe it—but the evidence was so unmistakable that she could not but believe it, and it almost killed her. She wrote: "I understand now a little of the bitter sorrow of my Savior in Gethsemane, as he drank the cup of his people's sins." If a human friend can be broken-hearted over the sin of a friend, how the Holy Spirit must suffer in his nourishing of us, in his wondrous brooding over us. How he must grieve when we fall into sin!

After Bereavement—What?

There is something in bereavement, which makes it mean a great deal in a woman's life. It is a sore disappointment. Dreams of love's happiness are shattered. The beauty which had only begun to be realized in her home, in her wedded joy, in her social life, in the development of her plans and hopes—is suddenly left to wither. Very great is the sorrow—when one of two lovers is taken and the other left. Widowhood is very desolate and lonely. When she has been a wife only a brief time, there is special loneliness in her case. The experience is particularly perplexing and trying. For one thing, she has probably had no training in the affairs of life. She has never learned a trade. Her husband, in the gentleness of his manly love, has sought to spare her from everything hard and rough. He has never permitted her even to know of the struggles and perplexities of

his daily business life. He has sought to carry home in the evening, only the bright things, the cheerful things, with not a breath of anything that would give pain. He has not permitted his wife to know the smallest things of business. She had no bank account. She did not know how to write a check. She never knew how much money she might properly spend in a month. She had no more idea of business, than a child. The day after her husband's funeral, she saw herself utterly unprepared for the duties and responsibilities which she found suddenly devolving upon her.

Just how shall she meet her perplexities. She is a Christian. She knows that her husband was God's child, and she is comforted by the thought that he is not dead—but has only passed into the immortal life. She is comforted also in her own grief, by the truth of the divine love, that her sorrow was no accident, that her bereavement was not the plan of God to break up the goodness and beauty of her life, that nothing has really gone wrong in the plan of Christ for her. But the question presses itself upon her mind—I am sure it has done so a thousand times—How am I to go on in this broken life of mine? What am I to do in my shattering and bereavement?

Her life is not finished. She is only a girl in years. She may live—she probably will live—forty years or more. What does Christ want her to do with her life? What does he want her to do with the broken dreams that lie shattered about her feet? These questions, and questions like these—are coming to her every day and every night. This is the deeper meaning of her sorrow. Sometimes women in her position see no brightness, find no hope, think the story all written out to the finish, their dream only shattered, and sink away into despair. But that is not the way to meet a sorrow like this. The story of her life is not finished. God's plan for her was not spoiled, when her sorrow came and interrupted everything, leaving her in darkness. The sorrow was only an accident in the plan. It was not a surprise to God, and his plan for her life runs on to the end of her years.

What the remainder of the plan is, she does not know for the present. She must not know. It is not best that she should know. Her faith must not fail, she must not despair. She must go on in trust and confidence. What then is her part?

First, faith in Christ. Believe that all these broken things are in his hands. Let her remember what he said after the miracle of the loaves—"Gather up the broken pieces which remain, that nothing be lost." That is what he is saying to her today. Let her gather up the broken pieces, from this miracle of love and happiness. Let nothing she has had these days of joy, of blessing, of experience, be lost. Let her keep all the fragments.

The next thing is for her to recommit her life—with its grief, its disappointments, its desolation, its broken things—all to Christ. She must not herself undertake to rebuild it. She must not make plans of her own for the years to come. She never needed Christ more than she needs him now, and will need him in the days and the months before her. She must let him lead her, let him plan for her, mark out the way. He must build the life for her. He must have much of the love she has to give.

Bereavement is common. No family long misses a break in its circle. Let the break be met with courage! Courage and unselfishness are developed by great sorrow or suffering. In times of overwhelming danger and disaster, people rise to unusual heroism. George Kennan tells of the remarkable exhibition of courage and generous characteristics shown by the people of San Francisco during the great earthquake and fire. The behavior of the population after the disaster impressed those who witnessed it. One thoughtful and undemonstrative man said he was glad he had lived to see the things that happened the first ten days after the great catastrophe. Those days were the best and most inspiring, he said, of all his life. Cowardice, selfishness, greed, and all the baser emotions and impulses of human character, practically disappeared in the tremendous strain of that experience; and courage, fortitude,

sympathy, good-will, and unbounded self-sacrifice took their places. Men became and for a short time, continued to be all that we may suppose the Creator intended them to be, and it was a splendid and inspiring thing to witness.

A like display of the finer and nobler qualities of human nature, was witnessed that terrible night on the sea, when the Titanic went down. The majority of the passengers and crew behaved with the most remarkable courage, and the most noble unselfishness.

Let God—through your bereavement—bring out the finer and nobler qualities in you.

Comfort Through Personal Helpfulness

Every true Christian desires to be helpful. He longs to make his life a blessing to as many people as possible. He wishes to make the world better, his neighborhood brighter and sweeter, every life he touches, in even casual associations, somewhat more beautiful. It is worth while that we should think just how we must live if our lives—if we would reach this ideal. We cannot come upon this kind of a life accidentally. We do not drift into a place and condition of great usefulness.

The secret of personal helpfulness—is love in the heart. No one can be a blessing to others—if he does not love. Nothing but love will make another person happier, will comfort sorrow, will relieve loneliness, will give encouragement. You never can be of any real use to a man—if you do not care for him, and you care for him only so far as you are willing to make sacrifices to help him, to go out of your way to do a favor. It is never by chance, therefore, that one finds himself living a life that is full of helpfulness. Such a life comes only through a regeneration that makes it new. That is what it meant to become a Christian.

The secret of Christ, was abounding personal helpfulness. We say he gave his life for the world—and we think of the cross. But the cross was in his life from the beginning. He never had a thought or a wish for himself. He never pleased himself. Ever he was ready to give up his own comfort, his own ease, his own preferment, that another might be pleased or helped. With this thought in mind, it will be a most profitable piece of Bible reading, to go through the Gospels just to find how Christ treated the people he met. He was always kind, not only polite and courteous—but doing kindly, thoughtful, helpful things. His inquiry concerning every person was, "Can I do anything for you? Can I share your burden? Can I relieve you of your suffering?"

The Good Samaritan was Christ's illustration of love—and the illustration was a picture of his own life. There is no other way of personal helpfulness—but this way, and there is no other secret of attaining it—but his secret. You cannot learn it from a book of rules. It is not a system of etiquette. It is a new life—it is Christ living in the heart.

It is personal helpfulness of which we are thinking. A man may be useful in his community, may even be a public benefactor, may do much for the race—and yet may fail altogether to be a real helper of the individual lives he touches in his daily associations. A man may do much good with his money, relieving distress, founding institutions, establishing schools, and may not be a helper of men in personal ways. People do not turn to him with their needs. The sorrowing know nothing of comfort ministered by him. The baffled and perplexed do not look to him for guidance, the tempted for deliverance, the despairing for cheer and encouragement.

It is this personal helpfulness, which means the most in the close contacts of human lives. So far as we know—Jesus never gave money to any one in need. He did not pay rents for the poor, nor buy them food or clothes—but he was always doing good in ways which meant far more for them than if he had helped with money. There are needs

which only love and kindness can meet. Countless people move about among us these days starving for love, dying with loneliness. You can help them immeasurably by becoming their friend, not in any marked or unusual way—but by doing them a simple kindness, by showing a little human interest in them, by turning aside to do a little favor, by manifesting sympathy, if they are in sorrow. A little note of a few lines sent to a neighbor in grief, has been known to start an influence of comfort and strength that could not be measured.

It is the little things of love, which count in such ministry—the little nameless acts, the small words of gentleness, the looks that tell of interest and care and sympathy. Life is hard for many people—and nothing is more needed continually than encouragement and cheer. There are men who never do anything great in their lives, and yet they make it sunnier all about them, and make all who know them happier, braver, stronger. There are women, overburdened themselves, perhaps—but so thoughtful, so sympathetic, so helpful, so full of little kindnesses, that they make the spot of the world in which they live, more like heaven.

How can we learn this lesson of personal helpfulness? It is not merely a matter of congeniality of disposition; it is not a matter of natural temperament. A selfish man can learn it—if he takes Christ for his teacher. Self must be displaced in the thought and purpose and affection—by "the other man." If love fills the heart—every expression of the life gives out helpfulness.

A young woman, speaking of the way different people had been a comfort to her in a great sorrow, said: "I wish some people knew just how much their faces can comfort others." Then she told of an old gentleman she sometimes sat beside, on the bus. He did not know her—but she was always helped by just seeing his face. There is a great deal of this unconscious helpfulness in the world. Indeed many of the best things we do—we do without knowing we are doing them. If we are full of love—we will be helping others wherever we go—and

the things we do not plan to do when we go out in the morning—will be the divinest things of the whole day!

Not only is the life of personal helpfulness most worth while in the measure of good it does, in its influence upon others—but no other life brings back to itself such rewards of peace, of strength, of comfort, of joy. What of love you give to another—you have not really given away—you have it still in yourself in larger measure than before! No gain one gets in this world—is equal to the love of hearts that one receives, from those one serves in unselfish love!

Christ and I are Friends

If we ask what was the beloved disciple's religion, we may put the answer into phrase—Christ and John were friends. It was a great, all-absorbing, overmastering friendship, which transformed John. This friendship began that day when the Baptist said to two young men, as Jesus passed near: "Behold the Lamb of God!" The two young men followed Jesus and were invited to his lodgings, spending the afternoon with him. What took place during those hours we do not know—but we do know that a friendship began between John—then scarcely more than a boy—and Jesus, which bonds have never slackened since. For three years this friendship grew in sweetness and tenderness, and during those years it was that the wonderful transformation took place in the disciple.

We know a little about the power of a strong, rich, noble human friendship—in shaping, inspiring, uplifting lives. There are many lives that are being saved, refined, sweetened, enriched—by a human friendship. Here is one of the best of the younger Christian men of today—who has been lifted up from a life of ordinary ability and education—into refinement, power and large usefulness—by a gentle friendship. The girl he loved was rich-hearted, inspiring, showing in her own life the best ideals and attainments, and her love for him and his love for her lifted him up to love's nobility. She stayed with

him only a few years and then went home to heaven—but he walks among men today with a strength, an energy and a force of character born of the holy friendship which meant so much to him.

Silas Marner was a miser who hoarded his money. Someone took away his hoard, and his heart grew bitter over the wrong to him. Then a little child was left at his door. His poor starved heart, took in the little one, and love for her redeemed him from sordidness, bitterness, and anguish of spirit.

God has saved many a life by sending to it a sweet human friendship. A Christian lady climbed the rickety stairs to the miserable room where a woman lay in rags on a pile of straw. She bent over the poor woman, all vile with sin, said a loving word and kissed her. That kiss saved her. Christ comes to sinners and saves them with love. That is the way he saved the prodigals of his time. He came to them and became their friend. It is to a personal friendship with himself, that Christ is always inviting men. He does not come merely to make reforms, to start beneficent movements, to give people better houses, and to make the conditions of life better. He does not try to save the world by giving it better laws, by founding schools, by securing wholesome literature. Christ saves men by becoming their friend.

John surrendered his heart and life, to this friendship with Jesus. He opened every window and door to his new Master. The basis of John's friendship with Christ, was his trust. He never doubted. Thomas doubted and was slow to believe. This hindered the growth of his friendship with Jesus. We cannot enter into the joy and gladness of friendship, unless we believe heartily. Peter was one of Christ's closest friends—but he was always saying rash words and doing rash things which interrupted his fellowship with Christ. Such a spirit as Peter's, however loyal and courageous, cannot realize the sweet and gentle things of the holiest friendship.

But John loved on in silence and trusted—his friendship was deep and strong. At the Last Supper he leaned on the Master's bosom.

That is the place of confidence—the bosom is only for those who have a right to the closest intimacy. It is the place of love, near the heart. It is the place of safety—in the secret place of the Most-High. The bosom is the place of comfort too. It was the darkest night the world ever saw, that John lay on the bosom of Jesus. But he found comfort there. The bosom is the place of trust also. That is what leaning on Christ's breast means. Do not think that that place of innermost love, was for John only—and has never been filled since that night. It is like heaven's gate—it is never closed, and whoever will may come and lie down there. The bosom is also a place for those who sorrow—oh, that all who have known grief, knew that they may creep in where John lay—and nestle there!

John's transformation is the model for all of us. No matter how many imperfections mar the beauty of our lives, we should not be discouraged. But we should never consent to let the faults remain. That is the way too many of us do. We condone our weakness and imperfections; we pity them and keep them. We should give ourselves no rest until they are all cured. But how can we get these evil things out of our lives? How did John get rid of his faults? By letting the love of Christ possess him! Lying upon Christ's bosom, Christ's sweet, pure, wholesome life— permeated John's life and made it sweet, pure and wholesome.

It is the friendship of Christ—which alone can transform us. You are a Christian, not because you belong to a church, not because you have a good creed, not merely because you are living a fair moral life—you are a Christian because you and Christ are friends. What can a friend be to a friend? Let us think of the best that earth's richest-hearted friend can be to us and do for us. Then lift up this conception, multiplying it a thousand times. If it were possible to gather out of all history and from all the world—the best and holiest things of pure, true friendship, and combine them all in one great friendship, Christ's friendship would surpass the sum of them all. Even our human friendships, we prize as the dearest things on earth. They are more precious than rarest gems. We would lose everything

else we have—rather than give them up. Life without friendships, would be empty and lonely. Yet the best earthly friendships, are but little fragments of the friendship of Christ. It is perfect. Its touch is always gentle and full of healing. Its help is always wise. Its tenderness is like the warmth of a heavenly summer. If we have the friendship of Christ, we cannot be utterly bereft, though all human friends be taken away. To be Christ's friend—is to be God's child, with all a child's privileges. This is one essential in being a Christian.

We could not say that Paul is our friend, or John—but Jesus is living, and is with us evermore. He is our Friend—as really as he was Mary's or John's.

Christ is our Friend. That means everything we need, will be supplied. No sorrow can be uncomfoted. No evil can overmaster us. For time and eternity—we are safe. It will not be the streets of gold, and the gates of pearl, and the river and the trees—which will make heaven for us—it will be the companionship, the friendship of Christ!

But we must not forget the other part of this friendship. We are to be Christ's friends too. It is not much we can give to him, or do for him. But he would have us loyal and true. Surely the consciousness that Christ is our friend and we are his—should check every evil thought, quell every bitter feeling, sweeten every emotion—and make all our life holy, true and heavenly!

More than Conquerors

"In all these things we are more than conquerors—through him who loved us!" Romans 8:37

It is better that we should not sing of sadness. There are sad notes enough already in the world's air. We should sing of cheer, of joy, of hope. This is what Paul did when he said: "We are more than conquerors through him that loved us!" We do not need to be

defeated in our battles, to sink under our loads, to be crushed beneath our sorrows. We may be victorious. We all have our struggles. Life is not easy for any of us; or if it is—we are not making much of it. A useful life is never easy. It must be from first to last, in the face of opposition.

Jacob saw life visioned as a ladder, its foot resting in the earth, its top reaching up to heaven, into God's very glory. That meant that man could go up from his earthliness, his sinfulness, into nobleness and holiness of character, gaining at last likeness to God and a home with God. But it meant also that the ascent never could be easy. A ladder bids us to climb, and climbing is always toilsome. It is slow, too, step by step. It never becomes easy, for heaven is ever above us and the climbing cannot cease until we enter the pearly gates.

Paul constantly pictured life as a battle—a warfare. We are soldiers with enemies to fight. The enemies are strong, not flesh and blood—but evil angels, spiritual foes, wicked spirits. They are invisible. They lurk in the darkness. They hide in ambush. Too often they nest in our own hearts! They take forms of good angels, to deceive us. The battle is great—and it never ends until we overcome the last enemy and pass within the gates of blessedness.

Every life has its cares, its duties, its responsibilities. There are sicknesses and sorrows and pains and losses—and a thousand things, which make it hard to live victoriously. It is possible for us, if we are Christians, to overcome in all these struggles and trials.

"In all these things we are more than conquerors." To be more than conquerors is to be triumphant conquerors, not merely getting through the battle or the trouble—but coming out of it with rejoicing, with song and gladness. Some people bear trial and are not overcome by it—but bear it without any glad sense of victory. Others conquer their sorrow, and all through it you hear as it were, the notes of triumph. Paul himself was this sort of conqueror. His life was one unbroken series of struggles. It never became easy for him to live

nobly. He gives us glimpses sometimes of his experiences. He was beaten with rods. He was stoned. He was shipwrecked. He was in perils of robbers, in perils in the wilderness, in the sea, among false brethren, in watchings, in fastings, in cold and nakedness. He spent years in prison. Then he had enemies in his own heart—read the seventh of Romans to find what it cost him to live right. But in all these things he was "more than conqueror."

Someone compares Paul's life to one who goes along the street in a dark stormy night, singing sweet songs; or to a whole band of music moving through the rain and darkness, playing marches of victory. That is the way we should all try to live as Christians, not merely enduring our trials and coming through our struggles—but doing so enthusiastically—"more than conquerors." Not only may we be conquerors—but if we are Christians we must be conquerors. We dare not yield. We believe that we should be conquerors in temptation, that we should not sin. We know that the evil in us, and the evil around us—should not be allowed to overcome us. We know that appetites and base passions and bad tempers should not be permitted to rule us. But this is not the only phase of life, in which we meet resistance and opposition, and must be conquerors, if we would live nobly.

This is true in physical life. Health is simply victory over disease and weakness. It is true in mental life. It is never easy to have a trained mind. It can be gotten only through long and patient study and severe discipline. It is so in all experiences in life. We should never yield to discouragement or depression, for there is no reason that we should. In the description of the godly man, in the first Psalm, where he is compared to a tree planted by streams of water, we read: "And whatever he does shall prosper." There is no real failure possible in a true Christian life. There may be seeming failure; indeed oft-times there is. Christ's life failed, as it appeared to men. Paul's life failed. Henry Martyn's life failed. But you know what glorious successes all these lives were in the end.

If we are truly Christians, in Jesus Christ, it is impossible for us to fail. Hence in all adversity, in all loss, in all feebleness of health, in all persecution, injustice, wrong—we have but to remain true to Christ, and we cannot fail. "Whatever he does shall prosper." Hence we should never yield to discouragement. We should be more than conquerors.

The same is true in sorrow. Sorrow comes into every life. We cannot shut it out. But we can be conquerors in it. When the snows melt away in the springtime, I have often seen under them sweet flowers in bloom. The very drifts were like warm blankets to keep them safe. So it is in sorrow. Under the cold snows of sorrow—the flowers of the Christian graces grow unhurt. We can overcome in sorrow; we ought to overcome. This does not mean that we should not shed tears in our sorrows. The love of Christ does not harden the heart—it really makes it more sensitive. The grace of Christ does not save us from suffering in bereavement. Yet we are to be conquerors. Our sorrow must not crush us. We must go through it victoriously, with sweet submission, and joyous confidence.

In the same way must we meet worldly losses and adversities, the failures in our human plans and hopes, the fading of our human joys. "More than conquerors" is the motto which is written upon our crown!

But do not forget the closing words of Paul's statement: "In all these things we are more than conquerors—through him who loved us!" The text would not be true if these last five words were left off. We cannot leave Christ out of life—and in anything be true overcomers. The Roman Emperor saw the symbol of the cross blazing in the sky and over it the legend: "By this shall you conquer!" Before every young soldier of the cross, as he goes out to begin life's battles, shines the same symbol, with the same legend. "By this shall you conquer!" "We are more than conquerors—through him who loved us." It is only through Christ, that any of us can overcome sin or sorrow or trial.

Some of you may be asking, with deep eagerness—in what way Christ helps us in our battles and struggles. How can we overcome through him? One part of the answer is, that he has overcome all things himself. He came in the flesh for us. He was the captain of our salvation. He entered into life for us. He met every enemy that we have ever met. And he was more than conqueror in every struggle. He was tempted in all points like as we are—yet without sin. That is, he conquered all sin.

Then he met poverty, and was victorious in that, living sweetly, patiently, trustingly, in it, without discontent, without envy, without repinings. He worked as a carpenter—but he never chafed at the hardness of the work or the smallness of the pay. Later, he had nowhere to lay his head, even the foxes and the birds being better homed than he—but he never complained. When the people scattered off to their homes in the gathering shadows, leaving him alone, he quietly climbed the mountain and spent the night under the stars in peace. Thus he was more than conqueror in poverty.

So he was victorious in all the wrongs he had to endure. From enemies and from friends, he suffered wrongs. His enemies pursued him with hate and persecution, and at last nailed him on the cross. His own chosen friends did many things to pain and trouble him—one of them at last betraying him for money, another denying him in his darkest hour. Enmity and hate and wrongs cannot hurt us—unless they rouse us to resentment, to anger, to bitter feelings, to acts of revenge. But Jesus was victorious in all his endurance of injury. His love never once failed in any of its sore testings.

He was also conqueror in his struggle with death—the last enemy. It did not seem so at first. Death overcame him on the cross, and bore him captive into its dark prison. But it could not hold him. He burst the bars of death and triumphed over the grave. He came forth a glorious conqueror, out forever from death's power, with all the radiancy of life. Thus Christ is universal conqueror. There is no enemy we shall ever have to meet—that he has not met and

vanquished. If we are in his army—he will lead us also to victory. We cannot overcome ourselves—but he will fight the battles for us. We are more than conquerors, but only through him who loved us.

But again—he does not merely fight our battles for us; he helps us to become victorious. "We are more than conquerors, through him." We must not get the impression that Christ merely wraps us up in the folds of his mighty love, and carries us over the hard places in life. When we are in the presence of temptation, he does not with his divine hand smite down the adversary. We must fight the battle—and he will strengthen us. There is a verse which says, "The Lord will bruise Satan shortly," but that is not all of it. "The Lord will bruise Satan—under your feet shortly." You must tread down the enemy beneath your feet—but the Lord will bruise him. We must become the conquerors, through him. He wants to make us strong and therefore he does not do all things for us, and fight all our battles. He sends us out to meet the enemies, the trials, the oppositions—and then he goes with us to help us. He does not take the burdens off us—but he sustains us in bearing them.

What then is our part? It is implicit, unquestioning obedience. Do you remember those cases in the gospels when people were healed, as they obeyed? The man with the withered arm was bidden to stretch it out—an impossible thing, in a human sense; but as he sought to obey—he was enabled to do it. Health came into his shriveled arm. The ten lepers were bidden to go away and show themselves to the priest. "And as they went—they were cleansed." Obedience made them overcomers.

So it is always in the receiving of divine help. We stand in the presence of some opposition, some hindrance, some trial. We say we cannot go through it. But we hear the voice of God commanding, "Go—and lo, I am with you always!" If we quietly and believingly go forward—the difficulties will melt before us; the sea will open and make a path for our feet; the mountain will remove and be cast into

the sea; the enemy will flee as we advance. Christ never gives a duty—but he will give also the strength we require to obey.

There is a blessed secret in this very simple teaching. If we do God's will—we are invincible, and shall always be more than conquerors. You stand face to face with a sorrow or a discouragement or some adversity. The problem now, is to overcome in this experience—not to get rid of the experience—but to meet it and pass through it victoriously, so that it shall not hurt you—but that you shall get blessing out of it. Now, how can you do this? Never by resisting and rebelling. You cannot by doing this, repel the trial or evade it. You might as well try to fight a cyclone, and by resisting it, turn it back. Your resisting can only hurt and bruise your own life! But if you sweetly and quietly yield to the trial or the sorrow and bow before it—it will pass over you and you will rise again unhurt.

Such meeting of trial changes the curse in the bitter cup—to blessing. He who overcomes in temptation, gets new strength out of his conquest. He who is patient and submissive in the sick room, gets a blessing out of the pain. He who overcomes in adversity and keeps faith and love bright, has changed its loss into gain. So it is in all things. To be conqueror in the battles and struggles of life—is to climb ever upward toward glory and blessedness.

God so shapes all our life's events and experiences, that in everyone of them there is a blessing for us. We miss it if we resist and rebel, and thus fail of victoriousness. But if we let God's will be done in us, some good will come out of every cup he puts into our hand. So we shall go on, conquering and to conquer, overcoming in all life's sorrows and getting blessing out of them. So we shall go on, victorious over sins and rising into sainthood out of them, as lilies spring up out of black bogs; putting the old nature under our feet more and more as the new nature grows in us into strength and beauty. So we shall go on, triumphing over all the ills of life, over all adversities, until at last, rising out of death, we shall stand before God, without spot or blemish, wearing the image of Christ!

Reaching for the Mountain Splendors

Christ clearly stated the purpose of his mission to the world when he said: "I came that they may have life—and may have it abundantly." We do not begin to understand the possibilities of our lives in the hands of Christ—what he will make of us if we truly submit ourselves to him. There are enemies about us. The thief comes to kill, to destroy. Christ comes to give life and to give it in fullness. When the English laureate was asked what Christ was to him, he replied by pointing to a rose-bush, full of glorious roses, and said: "What the sun is to this rose bush, Christ is to me!"

Think what Christ was to John, the disciple, whom he found resentful and virulent—whom he made into a disciple of love, and whose influence fills the world today like a holy fragrance. Think what Christ has been to believers in all the Christian centuries, what he is to the saints who today are living in the world. Think what it is to have the life of Christ in you. One of Paul's remarkable words is, "Christ lives in me," and the words mean a literal indwelling of Christ. That is what it is to be a Christian.

Christ wants us to live richly, abundantly. He is ever calling us to something larger and better. Looking back over our life at the close of a year, we see how often we have failed. But failures, if we are faithfully following Christ—are not final. They are but beginnings which are left for completion in the future.

We say that we find these high things unattainable, and that we never can reach them. No—we shall reach them if we continue to strive. We are at school, only learning, and learning is always slow. We try to get the lesson, and we fail—but that is not defeat. We will try again and again, and at last we shall master the hard lessons. Nothing we can think of, is beyond ultimate possible attaining. Last year's failures were not final; they were only things we tried to do—and did not quite master. Some day we shall finish them. We are

immortal. Our failures now are only immaturities; some day they will reach maturity.

Paul gives us a good lesson for progress, when he counsels us to leave the things that are behind, and to stretch toward the things that are ahead. Some things, of course, we are not to forget. It would be a sin to forget our mercies—the kindnesses we receive, the self-denials and sacrifices others have made for us. We should cherish with most sacred regard and gratitude, the memory of friendships that have meant so much to us. But there are some things which we should resolutely and determinedly forget and leave behind.

We should forget our worries. We see afterward how foolish they were, and how useless. Some of the things we fretted about a year ago, and allowed to vex and harry us—we now thank God for! They were among the best things of the whole year.

We should forget our sorrows. "No," we say, "we never can. They were too bitter." Yes—but they brought blessing in their bitterness. It may be too soon yet for us to give thanks for them—but some day we shall. At last we shall see that the greatest good to our lives—has come out of the things which at the time, seemed disastrous.

We should forget the sins of our past. Should we indeed? Should we ever forget our sins? Not until we have confessed them and given them up. But when they have been forgiven, we should forget them in the love and praise of our hearts. We must not make light of sin—it is an exceedingly bitter thing. Sin has filled the world with ruin. It blots and stains and spoils, everything which it touches. We need to make very sure that we have repented of our sins—and that they have been forgiven. It will never do merely to forget them, to cover them up and pass them by. Only God can safely cover sins. Sins which only men themselves cover, will plague them afterward. But the sins which God has blotted out and ceased to remember—we may forget while we go on in the joy of our new life.

We should not drag our old habits with us. There are habits which marred last year—which we should leave behind amid the rubbish.

There are companionships which we should give up today. Only at our soul's peril—can we continue them. Our friendships, if they are pure and good and uplifting, we should nourish—they are making our lives rich, strong, true, beautiful. But if they are unholy, if they are corrupt in their influence, if they are hurting us in our character, drawing us toward evil—the only true thing to do is to break them off, not to carry them with us into the new, bright, clean life of the new days.

One is grieving over a lost friendship. Once it was everything to you. It was in all your thoughts. You built no dream fabric—but this friendship was in it. You made no plans for the future—but this friend and you were close, side by side. How can you go on without this friendship but of your life? How can you begin the new year and know that it has forever passed away? Let Christ answer your questions. Let him take your life, and he will give you a joy that will fill your heart. He will be better to you than all the earth. You ask "How?" "I do not know. Trust the way with him. He came to give you life abundantly.

Another class of things we should not carry forward into a new life is our quarrels, our angers, our resentments, our grudges. "Do not let the sun go down upon your anger," says the inspired teaching. We may not live over night, and we may never have a chance to ask forgiveness, if we do not do it before we sleep. Most positive is the Master's teaching—that we must forgive, if we would be forgiven. "When you stand praying, forgive." The prayer the Master taught us is, "forgive us our sins, just as we have forgiven those who have sinned against us." If it was wrong to carry the unforgiveness for one day, and through the night—it must be still worse to carry the resentments, the quarrels, the angers, over into the new year.

We should carry nothing but love with us into any tomorrow. Bitterness is most undivine; only love is divine. If any one has wronged you, and a bitter feeling has lingered in your heart toward him—forgive the wrong and let love wipe out the bitterness! If you remember before God, that you have done an injury to another, spoken some angry word, spoken anything unloving, hurt a life by anything you have done—do not enter the new year without seeking forgiveness.

These are suggestions of what Christ means by abundant life. He came that we may have life—and that we may have it abundantly. Have you noticed that to live and to love seem to be parts of the same verb? To live is to love. Loved is the perfect of live. Christ is love. Abundant life is abundant love. A new year calls us to better life, that is, to love better. When Jesus bids us to be perfect, he means perfect in living. "If you love only those who love you, what good is that? Even corrupt tax collectors do that much. If you are kind only to your friends, how are you different from anyone else? Even pagans do that." The Pagans go that far. "But you are to be perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect." You say, "I never can be perfect." True, the lesson is hard, and it will take you a long time to learn it. It is hard to learn to love unreasonable people. It is hard to love your enemies. It is a long lesson to become perfect in loving; nevertheless, there the lesson stands —"But you are to be perfect, even as your Father in heaven is perfect." And it must be learned—not in a day, or in a year—but like all great lessons, slowly, today a little, and tomorrow a little.

Someone writes among New Year's resolutions: "Speak a shade more kindly. Pray a little oftener. Love a little more. Cling a little closer to the Father's love." This is the way in all our learning and growing. It is thread by thread—that makes the spider's web. It is note by note—that makes the thrilling music of the great oratorio. It is block by block—that builds the majestic temple. It is touch by touch of the brush—that paints a marvelous picture. It is line by line—that makes the beautiful life.

"Speak a shade more kindly" until you have learned always to speak kindly. "Pray a little oftener," until your whole life becomes a prayer. "Love a little more," until you have learned to love every sort of person, and can give your life in loving, serving the worst.

We must remember that it is not in any easy or self-indulgent life—which Christ will lead us to greatness. The easy life leads not upward—but downward. Heaven always is above us, and we must ever be reaching up toward it. There are some people who always avoid things which are costly, which require self-denial or self-restraint and sacrifice. But toil and hardship are the only way to nobleness. Greatness comes not by having a flowery path made for you through the meadows—but by being sent to hew out a roadway by your own hands.

Are you going to reach the mountain splendors?

Life's Open Doors

Life is full of doors. A door is a very simple thing. It may be only a plain, unadorned piece of board. Its significance is not in the material of which it is made, or in its costliness or its artistic beauty—but in the fact that it is a door which opens to something. One door may open to a noble gallery of pictures; enter, and you stand amid the finest works of art. Another door opens into a great library; enter, and you find about you the works of the wise men of the ages. Another door opens to a school, a great university; enter, and you are listening to distinguished teachers whose learned teachings will enrich your mind. It is not the door itself that matters—but that to which the door is the entrance.

Life's doors are not shut and locked. They may not be ornate, and they may not invite to ease and pleasure—but they open to the truest and best things, to the finest possibilities of character and attainment, and to the noblest ultimate achievements. There are

doors which open to good. They may not invite us to easy things. The best things do not offer themselves to us as self-indulgences. The doors which we ought to enter may not be attractive—but they open to the truest and best life, to the finest possibilities of character and attainment and to the noblest ultimate achievement.

There is the door of education. All life is a school. People may have graduated from college and university—but their education is not finished. This should go on in the occupations and struggles that follow. It is there, that we learn the real lessons of life.

There is the door of hardship and pain. One of our newspapers pays tribute to one unnamed man who died recently after years of intense suffering. He never asked pity or any concessions because of his suffering—but grew more and more devoted to his work. There are many people who permit their pain and misfortune—to make constant appeal to human sympathy, instead of bearing these burdens quietly and heroically. Suffering, properly endured, develops power and adds to usefulness. The school of hardship and pain is where we learn many of the finest things.

Another of the doors which opens to us in life, is the door to kindness. Many people think of kindness as only a kindergarten lesson—but one who accepts the task, finds it very long. Kindness begins in unselfishness, the crucifying of self. It is sacrificial in its every feeling and act. Wherever self reigns in the heart—there will be unkindness in the life, in some form. To be kind is to be gentle. Kindness will not break a bruised reed, nor quench the smoking wick. Kindness is thoughtful, so sensitive of other people's conditions, that it refrains from every act, word or look that would give pain. Kindness is sympathetic, touched by suffering and quick to give comfort. It is a wonderful door, which opens into the school of kindness.

Another of life's doors opens into the school of helpfulness. When we begin to be like God—we begin to be helpful. We think we love each

other—but the love is only mere sentimentality, until it has been wrought into sacrificial act, into service which costs. Personal helpfulness is the test, as well as the measure, of the quality of the mind of Christ which is in us. Evermore people need to be helped. This does not mean that we are to carry their burdens, pay their debts, do their work, fight their battles. Such helpfulness does evil—rather than good. We help others truly when we make them strong and brave, that they may carry their own burdens and meet their own struggles! Helpfulness should cheer, encourage, inspire, impart larger visions and greater hope and confidence. There are men everywhere who are pressed down, beleaguered, ready to sink and perish, whom strong brotherly sympathy would save. They are in sorrow, disappointment has staggered them, or they have been defeated in their purposes. To be able to help these is the highest service which we can render to the world. "To be a strong hand in the dark to another in the time of need," says Hugh Black, "to be a cup of strength to a human soul in a crisis of weakness, is to know the glory of life." There would seem to be no limit to the possibilities of this higher helpfulness.

The true Christian life is reached—by the emptying of self and the filling of the emptiness, with Christ. When Christ is in us—we are able to help others with his strength. It is a wonderful door which opens into a noble Christian life. Men are trying to make us believe that there is nothing in Christianity, that taking Christ into one's life does nothing for a person. But what has Christ done for the lives of his friends along the centuries? What did he do for John and Peter? What did he do for Paul? What is he doing continually for those who follow him in faith and consecration?

Robertson Nicoll, in a recent address, referred to John G. Paton's work in the New Hebrides. "His wife died when he and she were laboring in a savage island and had made practically no converts. The missionary had to dig her grave himself and to lay her there with the dark, hostile faces round him. 'If it had not been for Jesus,' Dr. Paton says, 'and the presence he gave me there, I would have gone

mad and died beside that lonely grave!" If it had not been for Jesus the world would never have seen the glorious ministry of Dr. Paton. Nor is that splendid life singular in its story. Say what we may about the failures of Christians, which so sadly mar the beauty of the Christian life—we know that thousands of believers have realized wonderful things, which if it had not been for Jesus—they never could have done.

By and by, we all come to a door which opens into old age. Many are disposed to feel that this door can lead to nothing beautiful. We cannot go on with our former tireless energy, our crowded days, our great achievements. But there is altogether too much letting go, too much dropping of tasks, too much falling out of the pilgrim march—when old age comes on. We may not be able to run swiftly as before. We tire more easily. We forget some things. But old age may be made very beautiful and full of fruit. This door opens into a period of great possibilities of usefulness, a true crowning of the life. Old age is not a blot—if it is what it should be. It is not a withering of the life—but a ripening. It is not something to dread—but is the completion of God's plan.

Last of all we come to the door of death. Into what does this door lead? Is there anything beyond—anything beautiful, anything glorious? Our Christian faith tells us that death is not a wall—but a door. We do not in dying, come to the end of anything beautiful and good—but only pass through into blessedness and glory! We are immortal and shall never die! All the lessons we have been learning in earth's schools—we shall go on practicing forever. We shall enter into the joy of Christ—when we pass through this last door of earth!

Some Lessons on Spiritual Growth

Jesus loved nature. He saw in it—the tokens and expressions of his Father's love and care. What could be more exquisite, for example, than the thoughts of a little flower—as we find them expressed in the

Sermon on the Mount? He was urging people never to be anxious. Just then, his eye fell on a lily growing in its marvelous beauty by the wayside, and he used it to teach a lesson about the care of God. God cares even for the smallest flower—and his hand weaves for it, its exquisite raiment. "And why are you anxious concerning raiment?" Thus our Lord saw in every flower which blooms, something which his Father had made and beautified, something he cared for with all gentleness. And of whatever other use the flowers are, he at least wants us to learn from them, this truth of trust, so that we shall never be anxious. The flowers never worry.

One of the most suggestive of our Lord's parables of growth, is given by Mark. "This is what the kingdom of God is like. A man scatters seed on the ground. Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how." Mark 4:26-27. In our modern agriculture we are losing much of the picturesqueness of the farmer's life—as it was in our Lord's day. Still the lesson of the seed is the same whatever way it may be planted. It is a very little thing—but Jesus notes in it, and in its mode of growing, a picture of something very wonderful, a picture of the kingdom of God. The same laws prevail in things natural and things spiritual.

We are all sowers. We may not be farmers or gardeners—yet everywhere we go we are sowing seeds. We talk to a friend an hour, and then go our way, never giving thought again to what we said—but years afterward something will grow up in the friend's life and character from the seeds we dropped so unconsciously or without purpose, that day. We lend a friend a book and he reads it. We never think of the book again; our friend never tells us whether he liked it or not. But many years later there is a life moving about among other lives, and leaving upon them its impress, which was inspired by the book we lent, something in it which influenced the course and career of the life.

Seeds are astonishing things. There is mystery in the secret of life which they carry in them. Diamonds or pearls have no such secret in them. Men do not plant them. They never grow. We do not know what marvelous results will come from some slightest word of ours spoken any day. It may not always be good—it may be evil; all depends upon the seed.

The farmer sowed good seed, expecting a rich and beautiful harvest. An enemy came one night, while the farmer was sleeping, and sowed tares, and the tare seeds grew and spoiled the harvest. We need to watch what we are sowing, lest a trail of evil and unbeauty shall follow us. We need to watch what we say in our little talks with the people we meet through the days, or in our influence over them, lest we leave stain or hurt behind.

But it is of the growth of the seed that our Lord speaks in his parable. "A man scatters seed on the ground. Night and day, whether he sleeps or gets up, the seed sprouts and grows, though he does not know how." He does not stay out in the fields and watch his seed growing. He only casts it into the ground—and lets it grow as it will. When the seed is once in the soil, it is out of the sower's hand forever. Good or bad, it is gone now beyond his reach.

You may write a letter full of bitter words. You were angry when you wrote it. Your conscience told you you ought not to send it, for it would only cause bitterness. You went out to mail it. All along the way as you went toward the mailbox, the voice within you kept saying, "Don't mail it!" You came to the box and hesitated, for still there was a clamorous voice beseeching you, "Do not send it!" But the anger was yet flaming—and you put the letter in the box. Then you began to wish you had not done so. You began to think of the unlovingness in the bitter words. It was too late, now, however, for the cruel letter was beyond your reach.

So it is—when one drops a seed into the ground, whether it be good or evil. The die is cast. The seed is in the ground. There is no use to

watch it. So it is when one has dropped an evil influence into a life. Until the word was spoken, or the thing was done—it was in your own power and you could have withheld it. Until then you could have kept the word unspoken or the deed undone. But now it is out of your power. No swift messenger can pursue it and take it back. The seed is sown—and you can only let it stay and grow.

A man goes on with his work, busy in a thousand ways, and the seed he dropped is growing continually, he knows not how, or into what form. The word he spoke, the thing he did, is in people's hearts and lives, and its influence is at work, he knows not how. And no power in the universe can arrest it—or get it back. You may pray—but prayer cannot get back the regretted word or deed.

There is something startling in this thought—of how what we have once done passes then forever out of our hand, beyond recall, and how it goes on in its growth and influence in the silence, while we wake and while we sleep. The time to check evil things, to keep them from forever growing into more and more baleful evil—is before we cast the seed into the ground. We need to think seriously of this truth—that there is a line beyond which our power over our words and deeds and influences ceases forever.

There is a marvelous power, too, in the earth, which, when it receives the seed, begins to deal with it so as to bring out its mystery of life. If the seed is not cast into the ground—it will not grow. Its life can be brought out, and it can grow—only through being cast into the ground. The planting is all we have to do—it is all we can do. "The soil produces a crop by itself." We cannot help the soil take care of the seed—and we do not have to help God take care of the good words we speak to others. The seed is divine, and the influences which act upon it are divine. So all we have to do is to get the truth into the hearts of those we would save and build up; God will do the rest. We are not responsible for the growth of the seed, for the work of grace in a human heart.

Great is the mysterious power in the earth which touches the seed, enfolds it, quickens it and causes it to grow. But this only illustrates the power that works in human hearts and lives—the power of the divine Spirit. This holy life receives the heavenly truth that is put into the heart, and brings out its blessed possibilities, until we see a new life like unto God's own life, a Christ life, blessing the world with its beauty and its love!

The Thanksgiving Lesson

Gladness may not be thanksgiving. It certainly is not all of thanksgiving. One may have a heart bubbling with joy, without a note of thanksgiving. The task of happiness is one to which we should all firmly set ourselves. To be miserable in this glorious world, is most unfit. We should cultivate joyousness. But our present lesson is a larger and deeper one. Thanksgiving implies thought of God. One may be glad all the day—and never think of God. Thanksgiving looks up with every breath, and sees God as Father from whom all blessings come. Thanksgiving is praise. The heart is full of gratitude. Every moment has something in it to inspire love. The lilies made Jesus think of his Father, for it was he who clothed them in beauty. The providence of our lives, if we think rightly of it, is simply God caring for us. Our circumstances may sometimes be hard, our experiences painful, and we may see nothing in them to make us glad. But faith teaches us that God is always good and always kind, whatever the present events may be. We may be thankful, therefore, even when we cannot be glad. Our hearts may be grateful, knowing that good will come to us even out of pain and loss.

This is the secret of true thanksgiving. It thinks always of God and praises him for everything. The song never dies out in the heart, however little there may be in the circumstances of life to make us glad. Thanksgiving is a quality of all noble and unselfish life. No man is so unworthy, as he who never cherishes the sentiment of gratitude,

who receives life's gifts and favors—and never gives back anything in return for all he gets.

Until we think seriously of it, we do not begin to realize what we are receiving continually from those about us. None may give us money, or do for us things which the world counts gifts or favors, but these are not the best things. Our teachers are ever enriching us by the lessons they give us. Those who require hard tasks of us and severely demand of us the best we can do, are our truest benefactors.

Sometimes we complain of the hardness of our lives, that we have had so little of ease and luxury, that we have had to work so hard, bear so many burdens, and sometimes we let ourselves grow bitter and unthankful as we think of the severity of our experience. But of all times—it has been in these very severities that we have got the richest qualities in our character. If we are living truly, serving God and following Christ, there is no event or experience for which we may not be thankful. Every voice of our lips should be praise. Every day of our years should be a thanksgiving day. He who has learned the Thanksgiving lesson, well has found the secret of a beautiful life.

"Praise is lovely," says the Hebrew Psalmist. Lovely means fit, graceful, pleasing, attractive. Ingratitude is never lovely. The life that is always thankful is winsome, ever a joy to all who know it.

The influence of an ever-praising life on those it touches, is almost divine. The way to make others good—is to be good yourself. The way to diffuse a spirit of thanksgiving—is to be thankful yourself. A complaining spirit makes unhappiness everywhere.

How may we learn this thanksgiving lesson? It comes not merely through a glad natural disposition. There are some favored people who were born cheerful. They have in them a spirit of happiness which nothing ever quenches. They always see the bright side of things. They are naturally optimistic. But the true thanksgiving spirit is more than this. It is something which can take even an unhappy

and an ungrateful spirit—and make it new in its sweetness and beauty. It is something which can change discontent and complaining into praise; ingratitude into grateful, joyful trust.

Christian thanksgiving is the life of Christ in the heart, transforming the disposition and the whole character. Thanksgiving must be wrought into the life as a habit—before it can become a fixed and permanent quality. An occasional burst of praise, in the midst of years of complaining, is not what is required. Songs on rare, sunshiny days; and no songs when skies are cloudy—will not make a life of gratitude. The heart must learn to sing always. This lesson is learned only when it becomes a habit which nothing can weaken. We must persist in being thankful. When we can see no reason for praise—we must believe in the divine love and goodness, and sing in the darkness. Thanksgiving has attained its rightful place in us, only when it is part of all our days and dominates all our experiences.

We may call one day in the year Thanksgiving Day, and fill it with song and gladness, remembering all the happy things we have enjoyed, all the pleasant events, all the blessings of our friendships, all our prosperities. But we cannot gather all our year's thanksgivings into any brightest day. We cannot leave today without thanks, and then thank God tomorrow for today and tomorrow both. Today's sunshine will not light tomorrow's skies. Every day must be a thanksgiving day for itself.

The Indispensible Christ

One of Christ's words to his disciples was, "Without me you can do nothing." If anyone is thinking of giving up Christ, let him wait a moment and ponder the question, whether he can afford to do it or not. What will it mean to him to give up Christ? There are some losses which do not take much from us; there are some friends whom

we might lose and be little the poorer. But what would it take out of our life to give up Christ? "Without me," he says, "you can do nothing."

An old writer tells of dreaming that a strange thing happened to his Bible. Every word in it that referred to Christ had faded from the pages. He turned to the New Testament to find the Gospels, and found only blank paper. He looked for the prophecies about the Messiah, which he used to read, and they all had been blotted out. He recalled sweet promises which he used to lean on with delight--but not one of them could be found. The name of Christ had faded from every place where once it had been. What would it mean to us to find ourselves some day without Christ, to find that we had lost him, to look for him in some great need and find that we do not have him anymore?

There is a striking little story by Henry van Dyke, called the Lost Word. It is a story of one of the early centuries. Hermas had become a Christian. He belonged to a wealthy and distinguished pagan family. His father disinherited him and drove him from his home when he accepted the new faith. From being one of the richest young men in Antioch, he was now one of the poorest. In the Grove of Daphne one day he was sitting in sadness by a gushing spring, when there came to him a priest of Apollo, a pagan philosopher, who, seeing his unhappy mood began to talk with him. In the end the old man had made this compact with Hermas. He assured him of wealth, of favor, of success, and Hermas was to give him only a word--but he was to part forever with the name of Him he had learned to worship. "Let me take that word and all that belongs to it entirely out of your life, so that you shall never need to hear it or speak it again. I promise you everything," said the old man, "and this is all I ask in return. Do you consent?" "Yes, I consent," said Hermas. So he lost the word, the Blessed Name.

He has sold it. It was not his anymore. He went back to Antioch, to his old home. There he found his father dying. For hours he had been

calling for his son. The old man received him eagerly, said he had forgiven him, and asked his son for his forgiveness. He then asked Hermas to tell him the secret of the Christian faith which he had chose. "You found something that made you willing to give up life for it. What was it you found?" The father was dying and his pagan belief gave him no comfort. He wanted now to know the Christian's secret. Hermas began to tell his father the secret of his faith. "Father," he said, "you must believe with all our heart and soul and strength in -" Where was the word? What was the name? What had become of it? He groped in darkness--but could not find it. There was a lonely soul, crying out for the Name--but Hermas could not tell even his own dying father what it was. The word was lost.

Love came into his life and happiness was heaped on happiness. A child was born to him. But in all the wondrous joy something was lacking. Both he and his wife confessed it. They sought a dismantled shrine in the garden and Hermas sought to pour out his heart. "For all good gifts," he said, "for love, for life, we praise, we bless, we thank -" But he could not find the word. The Name was beyond his reach. There was no one to thank. He had lost God.

The boy grew into wondrous beauty. One day Hermas was victorious in the chariot races. Then he took his boy in the chariot and again drove round the ring to show him to the people. The tumult frightened the horses and they ran away. The child was tossed off and when his father turned to look for him, he was lying like a broken flower on the sand. His distress was great. Days passed. "Is there nothing that we can do?" said the mother. "Is there no one to pity us? Let us pray for his life." Hermas sank on his knees beside his wife. "Out of the depths," he began "- out of the depths, we call for pity. The light of our eyes is fading. Spare the child's life, O merciful -" But there was only a deathly blank. He could not find the Name. The word he wanted was lost.

This story has become true in actual life thousands of times. People have given up the name of Christ, sold it for money, or pleasure, or

power, or sin. Then when times of need came, and they turned to find help, there was only blankness. In a home there is some great distress. One is near unto death, and friends want to pray for him. But they cannot pray. In childhood they were taught the words. "Our Father," but long since they have lost the holy Name, and now, when they would give worlds to go to God--they cannot find the way.

In all the world, there is no sadness so deep as the sadness of one who has lost Christ and then in some great need is trying to find him. There is no ear to hear. It is a fearful thing to give up Christ, to lose him. "Without me you can do nothing."

We must not press these words too far. Of course there are certain things men can do who are without Christ, who have no connection with him. There are people who are very useful, benefactors to others, who never pray, who do not love Christ. One may be an artist and paint lovely pictures, pictures which the world will admire, and yet may not believe in Christ, or even think of him. One may be a writer and prepare beautiful books which shall interest others and enlighten, cheer, and inspire many lives to noble deeds--and yet really disregard Christ, be altogether without Christ. One may be a patriot soldier, fighting the battles of freedom or country, or a statesman leading his land to honor--and yet not know Christ, nor be able to get to him. A man may be a good father, kind to his family, making his home beautiful with the loveliest adornments, and rich with refinement and gentleness, providing for his children not only things their bodies need--but providing also for their mental needs and cravings--and know nothing of Christ. There are homes of luxury and refinement, homes of culture, in which there is no prayer, where Christ is never welcomed as a Guest. There may be natural affection, father love, mother love, love of husband and wife, love of friends--yet no love for Christ.

When Jesus says, "Apart from me you can do nothing," we must understand his meaning. He does not say we cannot live good lives, cannot be good merchants, good lawyers, good teachers, good fathers

and mothers--but what he means is that we cannot have the joy and blessing of spiritual life--we cannot do the things of God.

The relation between Christ and his friends is closer than any human relation. No one can say to any friend, "Without me you can do nothing." The mother cannot say it to her child. It is a sore loss when the mother of a baby is taken away--but how sore a loss no words can explain. Even God cannot twice give a mother. No other one, however loving and tender in spirit, however gentle in care, however wise in guiding and helping the young life--can be to it all that its own mother could have been. Yet even the best and holiest mother cannot say to her child, "Without me you can do nothing." The child, though so bereft, lives and may live nobly without a mother.

There are other earthly friendships that become so much to those to whom they are given that they seem to be indispensable. The trusting, clinging wife may say to her husband, who is being taken away from her: "I cannot live without you. If you leave me, I will die. I cannot face the cold winds--without your shelter. I cannot go on with the tasks, the cares, the struggles, the responsibilities, the sorrows of life--without your comradeship, your love, your cheer, your strong support, your brave confidence and wise guidance." So it seems to her as she stands amid the wrecks of her hopes. But when he is gone--the strong man on whom she has leaned so confidently, she takes up the duties of life, its cares, its trying experiences, its tasks, its battles--and goes on for long years with splendid faithfulness and great bravery.

"I never dreamed that I could possibly get along as I have," said a woman after a year of widowhood. Then she told of her utter faintness when she realized that she would no more have her husband's comradeship. She had never had a care or a responsibility unshared by him. As she turned away from his grave it seemed to her that now she was utterly alone. But Christ was with her. Peace came into her heart, calmness came, and then courage began to revive. She grew strong and self-reliant. She was a marvel to her friends as she

took up her work. She showed resources which none ever dreamed she had. Her sorrow had elevated her. She lived and lived grandly now, without the one who had seemed essential to her very existence.

So we learn that no human life however close it has been is ever actually indispensable to another life. To no one, no human friend, can we say, "I cannot live without you." The taking away of the human, reveals God.

But note what Jesus says, "Apart from me you can do nothing." As the vine is essential to the life of the branch, so is Christ essential to us. We cannot meet any of the serious experiences of life, without Christ. A wonderful change came upon the disciples as they lived with Christ, heard his teaching, let his influence into their lives. They were transformed. They never could have done anything without Christ.

Do without Christ! You do not know what Christ has been to you, even when you were not aware that he was your Friend. You think he has not been doing anything for you, when, in fact, he has been crowning you with loving kindness and tender mercies all your days. If we were to lose Christ today out of our life, as Hermas in the story lost him, if his name were utterly blotted out, his friendship and help taken utterly from our life--what a dark, sad world this would be for us! Think of going out tomorrow to your duty, struggle, danger, responsibility, without Christ, unable to find him in your need. Think of not having Christ in your day of sorrow! Think of dying without Christ!

But we do not have to do without Christ. Only by our own rejection, can we cut ourselves off from him.

In That Which Is Least

One of the secrets of a full and rich life, is in being always watchful of the little things. We could accomplish marvels in the quarter-hours we are wasting. We hear of men who have learned a foreign language at their dressing-bureaus; or have read volumes in the minutes they have had to wait in reception rooms of friends they were calling upon. Notable achievements in the way of study and research have been made by men with only minutes of leisure, little interstices of time between their absorbing occupation in great tasks. There have been men with feeble health, who could work only in little quarter hours, who have achieved amazing results in a short lifetime, or men with poor eyes, who could read only a few minutes at a time—but who have amassed great stores of knowledge and attained distinction, even eminence, in years of masterful diligence.

The way we use the fragments of our time, what we do with the moments, determine largely what we will make ourselves in the end. Hurry is a dreadful waste of time. A great surgeon said to his assistants when he was beginning a serious operation, "Do not be in a hurry, gentlemen; we have no time to lose." We never can do our work with celerity, and we never can do it well, if we hurry. We must have full possession of all our powers if we would do our best. "He who believes," wrote the great prophet, "shall not be in haste."

Most people employ but a fragment of the capacity of their life, and then allow great measures of capacity to lie undeveloped, and in the end to atrophy. A volume could be filled with a description of a human hand, its wonderful structure, and the things it can be trained to do. Yet how many hands ever reach the limit of their possible achievements? Think of the powers folded up in a human brain and of the little of all these powers most of us ever bring out in life. Now and then a man starts in ignorance and poverty and reaches a greatness in ability and in achievement which amazes the world. Doubtless thousands and thousands who never attain anything

beyond mediocrity have just as great natural capacity—but the splendid powers of their life are allowed to run to waste. They are lacking in energy and do only a little of what they might do.

In Christian life and character, the same is true. Jesus came to give his disciples not life merely—but abundant life. We know what he did with his first disciples, what wonderful men he made of them and what they did with their lives. Is there any reason to think that these men were capable of greater things, than the men whom the Master is calling in these days? They were not beings of a different order from the mass of men; the difference was in the way they used their gifts. Not a particle of power in them was allowed to waste.

There is capacity enough in every little company of Christian people, to transform the community in which they live, into a garden of the Lord. It is to such consecration that we are called. We are letting our powers and abilities run to waste, instead of training them and using them to bless the world. We are not making the most of ourselves.

There is a great waste of power also, in our failure to appreciate our opportunities. "If I only had the gifts that this man has I would do the large and beautiful things that he does. But I never have the chance of doing such things. Nothing ever comes to my hand, but opportunities for little commonplace things." Now, the truth is--that nothing is commonplace. The giving of a cup of cold water is one of the smallest kindnesses any one can show to another—yet Jesus said that God takes notice of this act amid all the events of the whole world, any busy day, and rewards it. It may not be cabled half way around the world and announced with great headlines in the newspapers—but it is noticed in heaven.

We do not begin to understand what great waste we are allowing, when we fail to put the true value on little opportunities of serving others. Somehow we get the feeling that any cross-bearing worth while, must be a costly sacrifice, something that puts nails through our hands, something that hurts until we bleed. If we had an

opportunity to do something heroic, we say we would do it. But when it is only a chance to be kind to a neighbor, to call at his house when he is in trouble, to sit up with him at night when he is sick, or to do something for a child--we never think for a moment that such little things are the Christlike deeds, which God wants us to do, and so we pass them by, and there is a great blank in our lives where holy service ought to be.

When the great miracle of the loaves had been wrought, Jesus sent his disciples to gather up the broken pieces, "that nothing be lost." The Master is continually giving us the same command. Every hour's talk we have with a friend, leaves fragments that we ought to gather up and keep to feed our heart's hunger or the hunger of others' hearts, as we go on. When we hear good words spoken, or read a good book, we should gather up the fragments of knowledge, the suggestions of helpful thoughts, the broken pieces, and fix them in our hearts for use in our lives. We allow large volumes of the good things we hear or read, to turn to waste continually, because we are poor listeners or do not try to keep what we hear. We let the broken pieces be lost and thereby are great losers. If only we would gather up and keep all the good things that come to us through conversations and through reading, we would soon have great treasures of knowledge and wisdom.

Portions for Those Who Lack

After eating the fat and drinking the sweet of the feast in their own homes, the returned captives were bidden by Nehemiah to send portions to those for whom nothing had been prepared. "For this day is holy," was added to the exhortation. Part of the holiness of worship, is loving service. We are never to eat our bread alone; we are to share it. In Job's self-justification, when his friends had spoken bitterly against him, he says among other things: "If I have withheld the poor from their desires, or have caused the eyes of the widow to fail, or have eaten my morsel alone, and the fatherless has

not eaten thereof, then let my shoulder fall from the shoulder-blade, and my arm be broken from the bone." We may never eat our morsel alone, while others are hungry. This lesson was taught thus emphatically in the Old Testament and still more earnestly in the New.

In the Lord's Prayer, we are bidden to pray not for our own bread alone—but for bread for others as well. "Give us this day our daily bread." While we are feasting at our own table, we must remember those who are hungry outside, and send portions to them. The days are holy—all the days are holy, and no day set apart for God must be stained by selfishness. The direction that the people, after eating the fat and drinking the sweet of their feast, should send portions to those for whom nothing had been prepared, is in keeping with the teaching of the Bible throughout. The poor were always to be remembered. The stranger was never to be forgotten. He who let the needy go hungry when he had plenty on his own table, was severely condemned.

In the New Testament, the lesson was taught with marked emphasis. Generosity is a quality of all true Christian character. To think only of ourselves and give no thought to others, is contrary to the Spirit of Christ, who teaches us to share our plenty with those who lack.

Stinginess is always condemned. Generosity is always praised. It is a large word. It has a root which means excellence, goodness. It is a word of rank. Its first definition in the dictionary is "nobility." The word was applied only to the good, the brave, the noble. Christ was generous. He had largeness of heart, magnanimity. He taught his followers to be generous. The lack of generosity in one who calls himself a Christian, is a blot on his name. It marks him as unworthy. It dishonors him, as cowardice dishonors the name of him who calls himself a man. The brightest deeds that shine in the story of humanity, are the deeds of generosity.

Generosity does not merely return good for good, does not merely measure its giving by what it has received. Like Christly love, it blesses the hand that has smitten, it repays cruelty with gentleness, it serves most unselfishly, those who have done the sorest wrong.

Generosity is the perfect flower of love. It does not think who it is, who is in need—but gives and serves the unworthiest. It thinks only of the fact that there is one for whom nothing has been prepared, and sends a portion to him that he may share love's fat and sweet. Love is very sweet when it pours out its gifts for those who love us; but it reaches its sweetest and divinest--when it brings its blessing to those who do not love us, perhaps, who will never thank us, nor remember what we have done, nor return gratitude for our kindness. Let us cultivate the spirit of generosity, thinking ever, in our enjoyment of God's goodness, of those who lack the blessings we enjoy, and sending to them love's portion. Thus shall we continue the work which our Lord began in this world. Thus shall we enlarge our own hearts and the ministry of love we have been sent here to perform. Thus shall we come nearer and nearer to those who need us and more and more able to be a blessing to them. This is a lesson we cannot learn too well, nor fix too deeply in our hearts.

We sometimes forget that nothing is given to us--for ourselves alone. When abundance of blessing or prosperity in any form comes to us, we may not shut ourselves in with it, and use it only for ourselves. We are to think of those outside who have no such blessing or favor as we are enjoying, and are to send portions to them.

Slow and Steady Advance is the Best

Many young men are impatient of slow success. In their enthusiasm, they expect to advance rapidly and without hindrance in their chosen career. The young physician is eager to find at once a large and remunerative practice. The young aspirant for literary honors is disappointed if immediately his work is not accepted and his name

written high in the list of popular writers. The young business man expects to have success from the day he begins. The artist thinks that the excellence of his work should win fame for him the day his pictures are shown to the public. The same is true in all professions and callings. The fact is, however, that, with very few exceptions, beginners in every occupation must be satisfied for a time with but meager recognition and slow results. Many young men who know that this is true in general, have the feeling that their own case will be an exception. We like to think ourselves a little different from other people. We may as well make up our minds, however, to the fact that there are few exceptions to this rule. The only genius that counts is the capacity for hard work. The men who have achieved the greatest success in the various callings, have had to struggle for it most intensely.

There are reasons why it is better that young men should not get on too rapidly or too easily at the beginning. No matter how gifted they may be or how well prepared, they are not ready at once for full responsibility. At the best, their preparation is theoretical, not practical. They need to learn by experience, and it is better that they should do so leisurely, without too great pressure. A young physician who should have the responsibilities of a large practice thrust upon him at once, could only fail. A young business man who, immediately after leaving college, should take sole charge of a large establishment, would find himself unable for its management. It is better that every young man should begin in a quiet way and grow up with his growing practice or business. It is also better for a young man's personal development, that his progress should not be too rapid. Easy success is the bane of many a life. It is struggle with difficulty and hardship, which brings out the best that is in a man. Those who rise quickly, without much effort, too often fail to grow into noble character meanwhile.

The object of living in this world is not to make a brilliant career—but to build up a worthy manhood. To have large worldly success, and not to grow into strength of character, is a great misfortune. In

putting up tall buildings, a great deal of work is done on the foundations. The workmen dig down deep until they find rock or solid ground. They will spend weeks in work below the surface of the ground, and all this is covered up and hid out of sight. It is necessary to have a strong and secure foundation, if an imposing and durable superstructure is to be reared upon it.

In the building of character, it is the same. The foundations must be strong and secure. There may be a mushroom success, without any really worthy character—but the end can be only failure. A one-storied man may be built on a cheap and flimsy foundation. But a twenty-story man, who is to face the storms and stand foursquare to all the winds that blow--must have strength of character, principles from which nothing ever can swerve him, and almost infinite power of endurance; and these qualities can be gotten only in life's common experiences. While a young man is struggling to get a foothold in his profession or occupation, he is meanwhile building up in himself the qualities of a noble manhood, which will endure the severest tests.

What to Do with Our Unequal Chance

Some people feel that they do not have a fair chance in life. They look at others who seem to have more advantages and fewer hindrances, and they conclude that the allotments of providence are not just and equal. Some young people let their minds run in this unwholesome channel. They have to work hard and live in the plainest way, without luxury, not enjoying opportunities for pleasure and for education that they long for. They see other young people in easy circumstances, lacking nothing, with no hardships to endure, called to no self-denial, living in ease, with every opportunity for study, travel, and recreation. It is not easy for them to avoid a feeling of envy in such circumstances. Nor is it easy to accept the limitations of condition complacently, without any feeling of being unfairly treated. Yet the problem to be worked out by those who appear not to have an equal chance, is to accept their place with its disadvantages and its

inequalities, and to live just as sweetly and cheerfully as if they were in the most luxurious circumstances.

The danger always is that we may be hurt by life in some way. Yet nothing can really hurt us, so long as we keep love and peace in our hearts. No hardship of any kind can do us actual harm, if we meet it victoriously. But when we allow ourselves to chafe and fret because things are hard, or to complain because things seem unfair, or to grow bitter because we do not have a fair chance, that moment life is hurting us. The worst mistake anyone can make in such a case, is to brood over what seems to be unfairness in his lot in life, indulging the feeling that he has not been justly dealt with. The result is that his heart grows bitter and hard, that he begins to pity himself and to look upon others, more highly favored, with envy, which soon grows into hatred. Nothing but harm can come out of such a feeling. It does not reduce the inequalities in any degree. It does not make it easier to get on. On the other hand, it spoils the life, turning its sweetness to bitterness. It also lessens the heart's enthusiasm and diminishes its power to live nobly.

The only worthy way to meet such a condition, is with courage and purpose to master disadvantages. One who does this, disarms life of all its power to do him harm, and makes even the hardships and disadvantages, elements in his success. A hindrance conquered makes us stronger.

When one accepts his place in life and makes it a school, he is going to get out of it lessons which will fit him for worthy and noble living. Handicaps become uplifts, and occasions for fine attainment and achievement, when they are faced with courage and determination. There is a good philosophy here for him who is wise enough to carry it out in his life.

It is well known that the men who have risen to the loftiest heights of excellence and have done the most for their race, have not come as a rule from the ranks of those who have been reared in luxury—but

from among those who began in lowly ways, with few advantages and many hindrances. The very struggles they had to make to overcome the obstacles, lifted their feet higher on the stair. The efforts it cost them to get an education, made men of them. Thus they easily found compensation for the hard things in their lot in their early days.

The least worthy thing that any young fellow can do with an unequal chance--is to allow himself to be disheartened by it and give up. Nothing really noble or valuable is ever got easily. One does not find gold lying about on the streets. We have to dig our way through rocks to get to earth's treasure-houses. We always have to work hard, to achieve anything worth achieving. An unequal chance, as it seems to human eyes, oftentimes proves to be the very pearl of chances. It wakes up in men's souls sleeping possibilities of energy, which never would have been awakened in the experiences of ease.

We are not put in this world merely to have a good time, to enjoy ourselves, to eat and drink and dress well, and move about in paths of pleasantness. We are here to grow into the nobleness and strength of the best manhood we can attain. He who misses this, though he lives in luxury all his days, has missed all that is really worth while in life! Young people should always remember, too, that in their school of life they must do their own toiling; nobody can do it for them. There are some who like to dream of fortunate surprises by which they shall find themselves lifted to positions of ease and prosperity, without struggle or effort of their own. It is not often that such surprises come, nor is it always really "fortunate" when they do come.

A few years ago, a young man, struggling with peculiarly hard conditions, became suddenly the possessor of a large sum of money. Instead, however, of being good thing for him, the money proved the end of whatever hope there was of the young man's making anything of his life. He dropped the work which was to train him into manliness and usefulness, and entered upon a course of ease and

extravagance, which in a brief time left him penniless and with all the high ideals of his early days of struggle shattered.

The best thing one can do with hard conditions is to take up his own burdens courageously and bear them. Then in carrying them he will grow into noble manhood.

If Two of You Shall Agree

Why two? Would it not be the same for one? Is not the gate of prayer open to everyone? May not a lonely soul anywhere call upon God and be sure of answer? Why then does the Master say two—"If two of you shall agree--the prayer will be granted?" Certainly he did not mean that God does not hear one who prays alone. Jesus oftentimes prayed by himself. He went apart from his disciples up the mountain, into the depths of the Garden. Yet there is a special promise when two agree.

For one thing, when two pray together, each is drawn out of self to think of something besides his own needs. We are naturally selfish. We easily form the habit of thinking only of our own things, of seeking only our own good, of looking only after our own interests. One of the tendencies of praying alone, is to ask for only things we need or desire for ourselves. "Forgive my sins, prosper my affairs, heal my sickness, bless my daily bread, make me holy, give me joy," our prayer is apt to run. To pray only thus, is to allow ourselves to narrow our life into sheerest selfishness.

We may pray alone and yet train ourselves to think of others, to reach out to the needs and experiences of others. Only thus will we make our secret prayers spiritually wholesome.

When we pray together the selfish tendency is corrected. We think of the other and his condition. We are trained to sympathize with him in his trouble, to reach out our hand to strengthen him when he is

weak. We forget our own danger--in thinking of his. His needs seem so much greater and more pressing than ours--that we plead for his deliverance and altogether forget our own. We beseech God to lift away his crushing burden--and cease to think at all of our own lesser load. Our own sorrow, which, if there were no other one suffering by our side, would seem immeasurably great--seems now, too small even to mention in the presence of our friend's overpowering grief; so we pray for his comforting and only thank God that our affliction is so light.

Another good that comes from two praying together, is in the influence of life upon life. We need the impact of others. We cannot reach our best alone. It is a happy thing for one child in a home when another child comes to be its companion. A child living alone is in danger of growing into selfishness and all undiscipline. It never learns to share its possessions, its happiness. When two children are brought up together they are trained to think of each other, each to give up for the other, to seek to make the other happy. One of the blessings of marriage, is that the two learn to live for each other. Then they inspire each other. The woman who thinks only of what she can get from her marriage, has not begun to learn the real secret of love. Wedded love reaches true splendor, only when it thinks of can do for the other. When we pray together, the one quickens the other and both become better Christians. When two love God and then talk about him, the love of both grows warmer. One stimulates the other.

We need companionship in our Christian life. It is not good for us to be alone. Jesus had a wise purpose in sending out his disciples two by two. They would have been lonely if they had gone out singly, and would not have done their best work. Thus the one supplemented the other. Two together, did more than two apart. They had their limitations of capacity, and one supplied the other's lack. But perhaps the chief advantage in going out two and two, was that each kindled and inspired the other. We do not know how much we owe to

each other. Our unconscious influence on the life and actions of those close to us is immeasurable.

Peter's rugged force acted on John's sensitive nature at the empty tomb. John hesitated to enter until Peter came up and went in boldly. "Then the other disciples entered in also." We do not know how often or in how many ways the older disciples quickened the younger. Soldiers say that the hardest of all experiences in battle is to stand or fight alone. Two together make each other brave. We do better work and live our life better in every way, two by two, than we would do separately.

Again, when two pray together they will be more likely to widen their intercessions. We may not appreciate the value of prayer for others. Jesus lived with his Father in unbroken communion—but we are sure that the burden of his prayer was for others, for his disciples, for the need and suffering ever about him. The best work we can do for those we love, usually is prayer. Of course there are things love should do—acts of kindness, ministries of good; we must never withhold help that is needed. But oftentimes we cannot tell what really is kindness to another. Perhaps the effort we make to help only harms. The taking away of a friend's burden may only interfere with the plan of God for making the friend strong. Much of our helping is over-helping. It would be better, to let our friends struggle through themselves without relieving them. When we see people with their loads, their cares, their difficulties, their hard tasks, we really do not know what we ought to do for them, or whether we ought to do anything but encouragement them. But we may always pray for them, and perhaps this in most cases, prayer is all we can wisely do. At least prayer is always a safe way of helping. We need never be afraid that it will do them harm, for we only ask God to give the help that is wise, and that will make them better, nobler, stronger and truer. We may not ask God to make all hard things easy for them—we may ask only that he will watch that the burden is never too heavy for them, the temptation too sore, the sorrow too great, and that they never faint or fail. Always, prayer is love's great duty! Pray for whom

you love! Not to pray, is to sin against one's friend and against God. People always need our prayers. Those need them most, who seem to have least need. We pray readily for those in trouble—but those in no apparent trouble are in greatest peril.

When We Are Laid Aside

We do well when we let God shape our lives. God "writes straight on crooked lines." He has a plan for every life, and his plan goes on without interruption,, through all the ambitions, the mistakes, the failures, of our aims and strivings. The problem of faith is to accept God's will--when it breaks into our will, and believe that always it is right, and that there can be no mistake and no failure when it is his way we take. It is here too often, that our faith fails.

A Christian man was telling how hard it is for him to maintain the peace and joy of his life, in the experiences through which he is passing. For long years he had been in Christian work of great importance. He had devoted his best energies to the development of this work, and seemed about to see all his hopes realized. Then his health gave way, months he has been compelled to lie on his bed unable to do anything. It is by no means certain that he can ever again resume his work and carry to completion, the plans and schemes upon which he has been so long engaged. He was speaking to a friend of his condition. "It is very hard," he said, "to remain quiet and be at peace in all this uncertainty. It is hard to be still and do nothing, while there is so much yet to be done. It is hard, after having wrought so long in the work, to lie still in a sick-room, inactive, not taking any part in the work to which he has given his strength all his years, letting others carry it on."

In varying forms, this is a problem of faith which very many people are going through. We are in the midst of pressing activities which fill our hands and require our best energies every hour. What we are doing seems essential. If our hands should willingly slack, there

would be a blank in the work we are doing, and this would be disloyalty to God. Besides, it requires the full wages of all the days, to provide for our family. Then suddenly one morning we cannot leave our bed to go to our work. The doctor says it will be weeks before we can leave our bed. We are in consternation.

We were happy in our trust before this interruption. All things were going well. We thanked God every day that he was providing for us so abundantly. But how shall we meet this new problem? The first thing to remember is--that this is our Father's world, and that all its events are in his hand. He is not dependent, in his care of us, upon what we can do for ourselves. He indeed needs us; and, while we are able to do our part, his providing for us depends on our doing our part. If we fail to do our part, and, growing indolent, drop our tasks while we have strength to do them, we are proving unfaithful, marring God's plan of providence, and must suffer. But if we are stricken down and can no longer go on with our task, God is not at the end of his power to care for us. We may trust his love to provide for us--when we cannot do it.

The sick man thinks he is losing time when he must stay on his bed and do nothing, day after day, for weeks. But really he is not losing. He is no longer essential. Nothing will suffer because his hands are not doing his accustomed tasks. Work in stone or wood--is not all that the builder is in the world for. There is building to go on in his own life and character, which is far more important than what he does in the house on which he is working. Sometime he will know that his days of illness--were his best building days. As to his family, God has a way to provide for them while the natural bread-winner is not able to do it. While he was busiest in material things, accomplishing most in earthly labors he was leaving untouched the work in his own life and character, which was absolutely essential to the spiritual completeness of his life according to God's purpose.

One of the busiest men of our generation, busiest too in the best things, who has devoted his life to others with self-forgetful ability,

said the other day to a friend--that he was discovering he had left a whole section of his life-work undone. While he was caring so diligently for the comfort, the good and the spiritual culture of others, he had not been giving due attention to his own inner life. When he was shut in and the work for others could not be done as heretofore, he found quite enough to do in the things that were waiting for his hands. The months when he was laid aside from active duty, he had found serious work to do in getting right within--in the cultivation of the graces of humility, and love, and patience, and unselfishness. If he had come to the end of his life when he had finished his active tasks, he would have stood before God most incomplete in spiritual maturity. He needed the period when his hands must be still and he must suffer, in order to make his life complete. This was not lost time.

The principle thus stated, applies in all relations of life, whatever the circumstances may be. While we are able to work, we way never slacken our diligence. Our own hands must earn our daily bread. But when we cannot longer work, work is not our duty; God does not require it of us. It is some other one's duty then, not ours. If you are a teacher, you cannot evade the responsibility of meeting your class regularly, if you are well enough to do so. But if you are really ill and cannot be in your place, you have no duty there, and no responsibility. If you are a minister and for years have never missed a service, and then are sick and unable to get to your pulpit, your Master does not expect you to be there; he has no message for you to deliver to the people that day, and nothing will go wrong with your work because you are not there.

A pastor who had wrought long and had hardly ever been absent from his church, was broken down and for months could not come to his accustomed place. During his long absence he wrote to his people words like these: "I understand that when I am physically unable to do the work I would be doing gladly if I could--it is not my work at all. It would have been mine if I were well—but now my only duty is to be quiet and still. Duty is not all activity; sometimes it is to wait

patiently. Nothing is going wrong in my life because I am not in what would be my place, if I were well. My ministry is not broken or even interrupted by this experience. My work for my Master has not been stopped—its form only has been changed." No doubt this pastor was doing as much for his people those quiet days away from them--as he had ever done in his active days in their midst.

We dare not take comfort from this teaching--if we are not called from our duty in some providential way. Some of us are too easily taken away from our work. Small excuses are allowed to draw us away. Obstacles are not always meant to interrupt our efforts—ofttimes they are meant to be overcome, making us more earnest and persistent. There is altogether too much resignation in some Christians. Their resignation may be indolence. We must be sure the Good Shepherd calls us to "lie down in green pastures" before we stop in our service. But if lying down is our duty, then we must do it as joyfully as ever we listened to a call to move strenuously forward.

This lesson is not easily learned. For many it is very hard to accept interruptions in happy activities, without chafing and fretting. It is hard for a man to break down in the midst of some great task, and be as trustful and songful in his disappointment, as if he had been allowed to go on in his busy way. Some people find it very hard to grow old, to let go the work of years, and see others do it. The lesson is, that our faith shall not fail when interruptions of any kind break in—but shall keep our hearts brave and sweet and strong in all human weakness and disappointment. We must take care that our religion does not fail in these testings. We say that Christ will suffice us in every experience; we must show that he does. If he does not--the trouble is with us.

There is marvelous power in a witnessing life. A young Christian woman wrote to a teacher who through years had taught her to love Christ and trust him, and who was now broken in health and a sufferer—but joyous as ever: "I want to thank you for teaching me this beautiful lesson of all your life, this peaceful and joyous

acceptance of all trouble. You are living out now, all that you have taught me. I am glad you let Christ speak so plainly through you." Suppose this teacher, having taught the lesson of faith and trust and peace for years, had then in pain and loss and trouble--chafed, complained and fretted--how different would the effect have been upon the pupil!

We may be laid aside from our active work--but God never lays us aside for himself. So we need never lay aside our joyous witnessing for him, his love, and his keeping power. If that witness has counted for much when we were active, it can count for more in our inactivity. If we wasted the days of our activity by failure to witness for him, we may yet, in Christ's strength, start today, in our new helplessness, upon a showing forth of God's presence in a life that shall gladden him and change his world.

Face to Face with One's Own Life

A writer in one of the magazines said recently, that if he were a preacher he would raise his voice in behalf of the individual life. He thinks the individual is lost sight of by too many preachers, in considering the needs of Society in general. The personal human soul is starving--while men are discussing the problems of mankind. "If I were a preacher," he says, "I would talk usually just to one person." Everyone who has received any good thing, ought straightway to begin giving it out that others may have it too. But one must receive--before one can give.

So the personal life must come first. You must feed your own soul--or you cannot feed another's soul. This is universally true. There is the duty of helping others--the strong are bidden to help the weak--but one must have in himself the ability and the resources of helpfulness, before he can do for others what they need. If you are to teach others, you must be taught yourself. Before you can lead men, you must know the paths yourself. No one about to climb mountains, would

accept a guide who had never acquired skill in mountain-climbing in experiences of his own.

You must face life's problems yourself and master them. No one can do it for you. "Each man shall bear his own burden," says the Scripture. Another Scripture says, "Bear one another's burdens." There is no conflict in these teachings, which seem contradictory. It is everyone's duty, always, to put his shoulder under his brother's load—but always it is true, that everyone must bear his own burden, and that no one can bear it for him.

Each man must build his own house. The work is continually going on. Every life we touch, leaves something of itself in us. Every book we read, puts some mark on our character. Every temptation either makes us stronger--if we resist it; or weaker--if we yield to it. Every sorrow which befalls us--either makes us better--or spoils our beauty. The effect of all these experiences upon us, is not accidental, but depends upon the way in which we receive them.

God's purpose in all our life, is our spiritual maturity. This up-building is not all wrought out in church services. Christ is building men all the while--in love filled homes, in places of labor, in daily companionships and associations, as well as at church meetings.

We say that the business of a carpenter, is to make the things which a carpenter usually makes. But God's purpose for the carpenter, is the making of a man. The work of a farmer, we say, is to till the soil and reap harvests. But the thought of God in the farmer's work, what He looks for as the real outcome, is a beautiful life. If this result is not reached--the farmer's life is not successful, however prosperous he may be as a farmer. We say that a man's circumstances make him; but at the center of all the circumstances the real, determining factor, is the man himself. Whether the hard knocks you experience through the years makes a man of you, or wrecks your life--depends upon the way you meet them! It is you, not your circumstances, which will determine the outcome in your life!

There is need, therefore, for personal preaching at this point. It will not do to tell men merely that their lives are plans of God, that God thought about them before he made them, and then made them to fill a certain place and to do a certain work. This is not the whole truth. The other part of the truth, is that we have now to fulfill this divine purpose and live out this divine plan. We can spoil God's beautiful plan for our life—every man does who lives in sin, rejecting the will of God for him and taking his own way instead. We can fall far below God's perfect plan for us--by living indolently, self-indulgently. Every man is required to do his best, if he would measure up to the divine plan.

An English writer says the three words, "That will do," have done more harm than any other three words in the language. Men get easily into the habit of looking at something they have made or done, and, though knowing it is not what they ought to be, or what they could make it—yet indolently let it pass, saying, "That will do." Thus they allow their work to deteriorate in quality, and fall far below God's plan, which requires the best. It is said that the great violin maker, Stradivarius, would never allow any violin to leave his hands which was not as nearly perfect as he could make it.

We rob God, when we do any of our work less well, than we could do it. God will help us to do our best—but we must work with him. He will not do our work without us. He will not do our best for us--if we work indolently. "He could not make Antonio Stradivarius' violins, without Antonio." Thus at every point we need this lesson of individual responsibility. We must meet life as individuals. We are responsible in a certain way for the good of all men. We owe a duty to "the other man" which we dare not fail to pay. But we must not forget, that our first duty is to let God have his full way with ourselves. Keeping other people's vineyards will not be enough, if meanwhile we have neglected our own. Doing a great work for others is not enough, if we have not let God care for our own life.

The Meaning of Immortality

Nearly everybody believes in immortality, although not everyone is enthusiastic over the subject. Not long ago, when a distinguished man was asked if he believed in personal immortality, he is said to have answered: "Yes, I cannot help believing in it. Everything points to it. But I do not want it." He does not accept the Christian faith, and yet he believes that man is immortal. But the belief has no comfort for him. He does not want to live forever. Immortality, however, is not merely continuance of life forever—that alone might give no joy. Some lives have been so sad here, that the thought of living ten thousand years in the same way would be intolerable!

There is a story of one who prayed that he might never die—but forgot to pray that he might not grow old. His prayer was granted, and he lived on century after century, becoming more and more feeble continually, all the infirmities of age increasing in their burdensomeness, until he prayed to die! Mere prolonged life would not be a blessing. We must die to attain an immortality of blessedness. "For the perishable must clothe itself with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality. When the perishable has been clothed with the imperishable, and the mortal with immortality, then the saying that is written will come true—Death has been swallowed up in victory." 1 Corinthians 15:53-54

But immortality ought to have a meaning for us now while we are in this world. We say we are immortal—how then should an immortal man or woman live here and now? We have the answer suggested in one of Paul's epistles. The writer is speaking of Christ's resurrection, and he says that believers are risen too, in Christ. Then he adds, "Since, then, you have been raised with Christ—set your hearts on things above, where Christ is seated at the right hand of God. Set your minds on things above—not on earthly things!" Colossians 3:1-2

That is, you are risen with Christ. You have not gone to heaven with him yet. He has left you here for a while. You have a work to do in this world for him, and there is also a work to be done in you before you will be ready for heaven. But you are to remember that you are now risen with Christ, and are now living the resurrection life. What sort of a life ought that to be? The question is not, "What sort of a life will you live when you get to heaven?" but "What kind of a life should you live right here, right now, in the present world?"

When Jesus was speaking of eternal life which those who believed should enter into, he said, "He who hears my word, and believes him that sent me—has eternal life." He did not say, "He will have eternal life when he enters heaven," but he "has it," that is, from the moment he believes. He is not to wait until he reaches heaven—before he begins to live his eternal life. He is on the earth yet, and cannot get away from his earthly relations. He must take up his tasks, he must do his duties—having eternal life does not release him from these. He is to practice eternal life now and continually.

If you die tonight, being a child of God—you will enter at once upon the heavenly life. We do not know just what the heavenly life is—but we do know that it is loving, unselfish, holy, without sin. It is joyous. It is contented. We cannot think of anyone in heaven being unhappy, discontented, fretful. Nobody there grumbles, complains, is a murmurer. Nobody in heaven ever worries. When you die and go to heaven—you will begin at once to live as other people in heaven live. You will find it easy to fall into the heavenly habits. Heaven is a holy place. Nobody sins there, nobody lies, nobody gets angry, nobody does a mean thing, nobody speaks evil of another. If you die tonight and go to heaven—you will begin to live tomorrow morning the heavenly life.

But if you do not die tonight—but stay in this world longer—living the eternal life will mean that you shall rise tomorrow morning and live that life here, wherever you may be, and live it just as you would do if you had died and lived now in heaven!

In the story of our Lord's last night with his disciples, we have this remarkable statement, "Jesus knew that the Father had given everything into His hands, that He had come from God, and that He was going back to God. So He got up from supper, laid aside His robe, took a towel, and tied it around Himself. Next, He poured water into a basin and began to wash His disciples' feet and to dry them with the towel tied around Him." John 13:3-5. He knew the glorious being he was, that he was the Son of God, divine—and yet, with this consciousness fully in his mind, he performed the lowliest service for his disciples that any man could do for others.

You know that you are risen with Christ, that you are immortal, that you have eternal life; now what are fit things for one to do who knows that there is such glory, such splendor in his life?

First of all, no service of love is beneath him. His life should be devoted to the sweetest, most helpful ministries of kindness that his hand can find to do.

John the Baptist, in the gloom of his dungeon at Machaerus, began to wonder if after all Jesus was the Messiah, and sent some of his disciples to ask him. When the men came, Jesus did not enter upon a set program to show his deity—he just went on with his everyday work of kindness and then told the men to go back to their master and tell him what they had seen and heard—the blind receive their sight, the lame walk, the lepers are cleansed, the deaf hear, the dead are raised, and the poor have good tidings preached unto them. These were the truest and best evidences of Messiahship. That is the way the man who knew he was the Son of God—lived his common days.

For another thing, Jesus, knowing his divine glory, did not separate himself from other people—to show that he was not an ordinary man. He did not live in a way that would demonstrate to the world his divine character in unearthly ways. He took his place among working-men. He was a carpenter, and for eighteen years wrought at

his lowly trade. It scarcely seems to us quite fitting that the Son of God should be a carpenter—but there was nothing undivine in that. It left no dishonor on him, and indeed it made his glory all the more radiant. In all his earthly life—we see in Jesus his divine life. He was always practicing immortality, living eternal life.

This practice of immortality suggests to us how we may live the heavenly life here. We may not do it in any strained or unnatural efforts at holiness or heavenliness—but by doing the will of God in the simplest way, which will always mean the common tasks and duties of the days as they come to us. The heavenliest life we can live here—will be the one that will best fulfill our common duties in our natural relationships.

We, too, may live the resurrection life in the shop, at a trade, in the kitchen, in any lowly work or calling. Doing the will of God wherever we may be—is the immortal life.

The Apocryphal Gospels are a number of stories about Jesus written by men who thought that a divine being never should do anything natural or common. So they invented stories of childish miracles that they said he did when he was a boy.

The true Gospels show Jesus like other children in His childhood, without anything fantastic, finding his Father's business in being a dutiful son, living a sweet, sinless life, doing no miracle, and working at the carpenter's trade. Then, even the greatest miracles in His public life—were never unnatural, or showy—but simple deeds of love. You may learn from your Master—that eternal life in this world is a life of kindness, gentleness, usefulness, unselfishness.

Holiness is not dignity which is above noticing the poor; or greatness that cannot condescend to the lowliest person or the most menial service that is needful. Centuries ago Aristotle said, "Live as nearly as you can the immortal life." This is wise and lofty counsel.

There is a book called "The Practice of the Presence of God." The title is suggestive. As a Christian, you believe that the presence of God is always with you, that you never can get where God is not. Practice that! Act as if you fully believed it, realized it.

You could not do an sinful thing, nor say an evil word, nor think an unholy thought—if you saw Christ beside you! You know that he IS beside you—practice his presence. You will find wondrous power in this practice—power of restraint, of inspiration, of transformation. That is what true religion is.

When the disciples had been on the Mount of Transfiguration for a short time—they wanted to stay there always and continue the transfiguration companionship and glory. But they could not do this—they had to return to the struggles and temptations of the lower world. We, too, have our transfiguration visions—but they come only to give us new assurance and strength. We have to return again at once to our work and our daily life of care. But the Master wants us always to live the transfiguration life, to live every moment—as if the holy vision were shining before our eyes! We cannot always be at the Holy Communion—but we are to carry the communion act and spirit with us when we go back to our homes, to our place of business, to our offices and shops and farms. We are to live the immortal life wherever we go.

Perhaps we ought to think more of the glory of our lives. We do not think half enough of what we have and are in Christ—of our greatness, of the glory of our being, of the divineness of our destiny. It is not self-conceit in which we are deficient—there is enough of that hateful thing in the most of us—not self-conceit—but what we have and are in Christ. Perhaps the greatness of this—is not often enough impressed upon us. We are not accustomed to think of the splendor of our nature. We were made in the image of God. The old Psalm says that "Man was made only a little lower than the angels." The Revised Version changes this, however, and makes it read, "but little lower than God." Jesus said that a man's soul is worth more

than this whole great world, and that anyone, even the lowliest, would make a bad bargain if he sold his soul—for the whole world.

Now what are you doing with this glorious life of yours? The beloved disciple in one of his letters says, "Beloved, now are we children of God." That is the first glory. That surely is great glory. But there is more of the honor. It is not yet made manifest clearly and fully—what we shall be—the future is veiled in mystery—but "we shall be like him"—that is the final glory. We shall be like Christ in our heavenly life. Then the writer tells us how we should live in this world—if this is to be our future distinction. "Everyone who has this hope set on Him—purifies himself, even as He is pure."

It is pitiful how men throw away their crowns. Made only a little lower than God, children of God, destined to be like Christ at length—they yield to appetite, lust, and passion, and debase themselves in the dust! With this glory set before us, we should keep ourselves pure and our lives white, and should strive even here to reach up to the honor that is prepared for us!

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