

## Catching the Upper Currents

**J.R. Miller:**

Earth always needs heaven. Without sunshine and rain, no plant will live or grow. Human lives need God; not to get his blessingâ€”is to shrivel and perish. It is indeed the love of God that this poor old world needs. Yet, though this love breathes everywhere, there are those who miss it, who get none of it into their lives, and then wonder why they are not happy.

Doctor Peabody, in one of his inspiring talks to the students at Harvard, draws a picture of a vessel lying becalmed in a glassy sea. There is not a breath of air to fill a sail. While the men wait and watch, however, they notice that all at once the little pennant far up on the masthead begins to stir and lift. There is not a ripple on the water, nor the faintest moving of the air on the deck; but when they see the pennant stirring they know that there is a wind rising in the higher air, and they quickly spread their upper sails to catch it. Instantly the vessel begins to move under the power of the higher currents, while on the surface of the water there is still a dead calm.

In life there are lower and higher currents. Too many set only the lower sailsâ€”and catch only the winds which blow along on earthly levels. But there also are winds which blow down from the mountains of God. It would be an unspeakable gain to us all if our lives fell more under the influence of these upper currents. We would be wise if we so adjusted our relations with others that all our days we would be under the sway of the good, the worthy, the pure-hearted, the heavenly.

Then as their friends we should seek ever to bring into the lives of others only the highest, the most uplifting and inspiring, the most wholesome and enriching influences. We should aim always so to live Christ, that the Christ in us shall become the very breath of God to everyone whose life we touch. If we do not, we are living below our possibilities in the character and reach of our influence.

There are many ways of helping others. We can bring them bread if they are hungry, garments to wear and fuel for their heat if they are cold, money to pay their debts if they are in need, or medicines and care if they are sick. We can brighten a dull hour for them by our presence if they are lonely, and warm their hearts by our compassion if they are sorrowing. But there are better ways of helping. George Macdonald says, "If, instead of a gem, or even a flower, we should cast the gift of a lovely thought into the heart of a friend, that would be giving as the angels give." There are friendships in which this kind of love is given by one to the other. Great thoughts, sweet, inspiring, cheering thoughts, have been put into the heart to bless, enrich, and transform the life.

It was such a friendship as this of which Charles Kingsley spoke when, in giving the secret of his own rich life, he said, "I had a friend!" If that friend had ministered to him only in lower and earthly waysâ€”he would never have been lifted up into the sublime reaches of character which he attained. But she was not content to please him in the light and trivial ways which are the only charm of too many friendships. She was not satisfied to walk with him as his companion in the dusty paths of earthly toil and care. She brought into his life lovely thoughts, visions of radiant character, glimpses of lofty heights, and incited him continually toward whatever things are true, whatever things are pure, whatever things are lovely. That is the kind of friend we should seek to have and to be. No other conception of friendship's ministry is worthy of an immortal life.

Yet are there many friendships which realize this lofty ideal? Are there many who seek the higher, better things either for their friends or themselves? Are there many whose life is the very wind of heaven blowing upon all who come within the circle of their influence? Yet nothing else is really worthy in a friend. He who comes to us in this sacred relation, should always bring a breath of heaven's life down to us. He should touch our life on its spiritual side.

There are influences enough to call out the earthly side of our nature. The world's fascinations play about us continually. Our eyes see only material things, and, therefore, material things make strong appeal to our taste, our feeling, our desire. Many of the friends, too, who come into our lives minister to us only along earthly levels.

Two young people sit together for an evening, and not a word is said by either, which starts in the other a thought above the range of the material. The conversation runs on in neighborhood gossip, trivial personalities, criticisms of people, compliments, bits of playful humorâ€”but with not one serious word in it all. In marriage two lives are united and move on together, perhaps in ideal fashion, blending in love, in interest, in fellowship, in care, in self-denial, in sorrow. Each exerts over the other a strong, transforming influence. They give much

pleasure the one to the other in all love's tender and helpful ways. But too often there is a whole great section of each life which is never entered nor touched by the other. As it were, these two are dwelling in a house with lower and upper stories. In the lower apartments is found all that belongs to the physical and earthly life. In the upper apartments are the higher things, things of the mind, of the spirit. But our friends always stay downstairs and never go up into the rooms, where thought and reason and hope and faith hold their court. It is a pity that friendship and love should miss so much, for it is only in the upper ranges, that the things which are worth while are found.

At the Beautiful Gate of the temple a beggar sat one day, asking alms of those who entered the sacred place. Peter and John were passing in and the poor man reached out his hand, hoping to receive a little money. Peter said to him, however, "Silver and gold have I none; but what I have—that give I you." Then he bade the man arise, and, giving him his hand, helped him to get up. Peter was a far better friend to this man, than if he had given him a coin. This would only have provided for a few hours more of the poor life he was now living, leaving him still in the same condition as before. Peter brought healing down into the man's crippled body, and restored him again to strength. He need not beg of others any more, for now that he was healed he was able to earn his own bread.

The best and truest help we can give to others is not mere present gratification—but strength, courage, and cheer, that they may rise into nobler, worthier life, and go on continually with new energy and hope. It may be easier, when you find one in need through his own indolence, to give him money to supply his needs—than to help him into a position in which he will learn to earn his own bread. It may be easier—but after you have provided for his necessities for a time, short or long, you leave him just where you found him—in poverty, with no more power than before to care for himself. But if you have ignored his plea for alms and, instead, have taught him to work, and inspired him to do it, you have lifted him above the need of asking charity and have set his feet in the path toward manhood.

It may be easier to walk along low levels with your friend, adapting yourself to his trivial ways of thought and conversation, not trying to lift him up to anything better. But in so doing you are not true to him. Try to lead his steps upward, toward the rugged hills, whence he shall get wider visions. Tempt him with the sweets of nobler life—and seek to woo him to enter with you into its enjoyment.

It takes tact and patience to get one who has never learned to read good books, to begin to read such books—but it is worth while to do it at whatever cost. It is not easy to teach one used only to a life of earthly commonplaces, to care for things that are unseen and eternal—but in no other way can we do others such real, enduring good—as by seeking to lift them. That is the kind of friendship Christ shows to us. He came from heaven, down into earth's lowest places, to exalt us to worthy life and eternal blessedness. We begin to be Christlike friends to others—only when we do for them what Christ has done and is ever doing for us.