

The Christian's Secret to a Happy Life - Service.

~Other Speakers S-Z: Hannah Whitall Smith:

Upon entering this life hid with Christ in God, there is, perhaps, no part of Christian experience where a greater change is known than in the matter of service. In all the ordinary forms of Christian life, service is more or less a type of bondage in that it is done purely as a matter of duty and often as a trial and a cross. Certain things, which at first may have been a joy and a delight, become weary tasks. These tasks may be performed faithfully, without a great desire to do them. The soul finds itself saying, instead of the "May I?" of love, the "Must I?" of duty. The yoke which was at first easy, begins to irritate, and the burden feels heavy instead of light.

One dear Christian expressed it once to me in this way: "When I was first converted," she said, "I was so full of joy and love, that I was only too glad and thankful to be allowed to do anything for my Lord, and I eagerly entered every open door. But after a while, as my early joy faded away, and my love burned less fervently, I began to wish I had not been quite so eager. I found myself involved in areas of service that were gradually becoming very distasteful and burdensome to me. Since I had begun them, I could not very well give them up without causing comment, and yet I longed to do so increasingly. I was expected to visit the sick, and pray beside their beds. I was expected to attend prayer meetings, and speak at them. I was expected, in short, to be always ready for every effort in Christian work, and the sense of these expectations bowed me down continually. At last it became so unspeakably burdensome to me to live the sort of Christian life I had entered upon, and was expected by all around me to live, that I felt as if any kind of manual labor would have been easier. I would have infinitely preferred scrubbing all day on my hands and knees to being compelled to go through the treadmill of my daily Christian work. I envied," she said, "the women in the kitchen."

Some may think this to be a strong statement, but does it not present a vivid picture of some of your own experiences? Have you never gone to work as a slave to some daily task, believing it to be your duty and that you must do it, but later returning to your real interests and pleasures the moment your work was over?

You have known that this was the wrong way to feel, and have been thoroughly ashamed of it, but still you have seen no way to help it. You have not loved your work. If you could have done so with an easy conscience, you would have been glad to give it up altogether.

Or, if this doesn't describe your case, perhaps another example will. You do love your work, but in doing it you find so many cares and responsibilities connected with it and feel so many misgivings and doubts as to your own capacity or fitness that it becomes a very heavy burden. You go to it bowed down and weary, before the labor has even begun. Also, you are continually distressing yourself about the results of your work, and you are greatly troubled if they are not just what you would like. This of itself is a constant burden.

Serving In Love

The soul that fully enters into the blessed life of faith is entirely delivered from all these forms of bondage. Service of any sort becomes delightful to the soul. Having surrendered the will into the Lord's keeping, the Lord works in it to will and to do of His good pleasure, and the soul finds itself really wanting to do the thing God wants it to do. It is always very pleasant to do the things we want to do no matter how difficult they are or how tired we get from doing them.

If a man's will is really set on doing something, he is indifferent to the obstacles that lie in the way of his reaching it. He laughs to himself at the idea of any opposition or difficulties hindering him. How many men have gone gladly and thankfully to the ends of the world in search of worldly fortunes, or to fulfill worldly ambitions, and have scorned the thought of any "cross" connected with it! How many mothers have congratulated themselves, and rejoiced over the honor done their sons in seeing them promoted to some place of power and usefulness in their country's service, although it has involved perhaps years of separation and a life of hardship for their dear ones! And yet these same men and mothers would have felt and said that they were taking up crosses too heavy almost to be borne had the service of Christ required the same sacrifice of home, friends, and worldly ease.

It is altogether the way we look at things, whether we think they are crosses or not. And I am ashamed to think that any Christian should ever put on a long face and shed tears over doing something for Christ which a worldly man would be only too glad to do for money.

What we need in the Christian life is to get believers to want to do God's will as much as other people want to do their own will. This is the idea of the Gospel. It is what God intended for us. It is what He has promised. In describing the new covenant in Hebrews 8:6-13, He says it will no longer be the old covenant made on Sinai that is, a law given from the outside, controlling a man by force. But the new covenant will be a law written within, constraining a man by love. "I will put my laws," He says, "into their mind, and write them in their hearts." This can mean nothing but that we will love His law for anything written in our hearts we must love. "And putting it into our minds" is surely the same as God working in us to "will and to do of His good pleasure." This means that we will desire what God wills and shall obey His sweet commands, not because it is our duty to do so, but because we ourselves want to do what He wants us to do.

Nothing could possibly be better than this. How often have we thought, when dealing with our children, "Oh, if I could only get inside of them and make them want to do just what I want, how easy it would be to manage them then!" How often in practical experience, when dealing with difficult people, we carefully avoid suggesting our wishes to them, and must in some way cause them to suggest the thing themselves so that there will be no opposition. We are a stubborn people who rebel against something if someone else presents the idea to us, while we would think it to be an excellent idea if we had thought of it ourselves.

God's way of working is to get possession of the inside of a man, to take the control and management of his will, and to work it for Him. Then obedience is easy and a delight, and service becomes perfect freedom. If you are in bondage in the matter of service you need to put your will completely into the Lord's hands, surrendering to Him the entire control of it. Say, "Yes, Lord, yes!" to everything. Trust Him to work in you to bring your whole wishes and affections into conformity with His own sweet lovable and most lovely will. I have seen this done often, in cases where it looked to be impossible. In one case, where a lady had been rebelling fearfully for years against an act of service which she knew was right but which she hated, I saw her, out of the depths of despair and without any feeling, give her will in that matter up into the Lord's hands. She said to Him, "Thy will be done. Thy will be done!" And in one short hour that very thing began to look sweet and precious to her.

Strength In Yielding

It is wonderful what miracles God works in wills that are utterly surrendered to Him. He turns hard things into easy things and bitter things into sweet things. It is not that He puts easy things in the place of the hard, but He actually changes the hard thing into an easy one and makes us love to do the thing we hated. When we rebel against the yoke and try to avoid it, we are bitter about it and find it difficult. But when we take the yoke upon us with a consenting will, we find it easy and comfortable. It is said of Ephraim that at one time he was like 'a bullock unaccustomed to the yoke' (Jeremiah 31:18). But afterwards, when he had submitted to the yoke, he was "as an heifer that is taught, and loveth to tread out the corn" (Hosea 10:11).

Many Christians, as I have said, love God's will generally, but carry great burdens in connection with it. There is deliverance from this in the wonderful life of faith. For in this life no burdens are carried, no anxieties felt. The Lord is our Burden-bearer, and we must give Him every care. He says, in effect, "Be careful for nothing, but...(make) your request known. . .to Me, and I will attend to them all" (Philippians 4:6). Be careful for nothing, He says, not even your service. Above all, our service would not amount to anything because we know ourselves to be utterly helpless in regard to it, even if we were careful.

Why should we think about whether we are fit or not? The Masterworkman surely has a right to use any tool He pleases for His own work, and it is plainly not the business of the tool to decide whether it is the right one to be used or not. He knows, and if He chooses to use us, of course we must be fit. In truth, our chief fitness is in our utter helplessness. His strength is made perfect, not in our strength, but in our weakness. Our strength is only a hindrance.

I was once visiting an institution for the handicapped and saw the children exercising with weights. Now we know that it is a very difficult thing for the handicapped to manage their movements. They generally have strength enough, but have no skill to use this strength. Consequently, they cannot do much. This deficiency was very apparent in these exercises. They made all sorts of awkward movements. Now and then, by chance, they would make a movement in harmony with the music and the teacher's directions, but for the most part all was out of harmony. However, I noticed one little girl who made perfect movements. And the reason was, not that she had more strength than the others, but that she had no strength at all. She could not so much as close her hands over the weights or lift her arms. The teacher had to stand behind her and do it all. She yielded up her members as instruments to him, and his "strength was made perfect" (2 Corinthians 12:9) in her weakness. He knew how to go through those exercises, for he had planned them. Therefore, when he did it, it was done

right. She did nothing but yield herself up completely into his hands, and he did it all. The yielding was her part. The responsibility was all his. It was not her skill that was needed to make harmonious movements, but only his. The question doesn't deal with her capacity, but with his. Her total weakness was her greatest strength.

This is a very striking picture of our Christian life, and it is no wonder that Paul could say, "most gladly therefore will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me" (2 Corinthians 12 :9) . Who would not glory in being so utterly weak and helpless, that the Lord Jesus Christ should find no hindrance to the perfect working of His mighty power through us and in us?

Responsibility And Result

Then, too, if the work is His, the responsibility is His also, and we have no room left for worrying about results. He knows everything in reference to it. He can manage it all. Leave it all with Him. It is a fact that the most effectual workers I know are those who do not feel the least care or anxiety about their work, but who commit it all to the Lord. They ask Him to guide them moment by moment in reference to it. They trust Him implicitly for each moment's needed supplies of wisdom and of strength. To look at them, you would almost think that they were too free from care, where such mighty interests are at stake. But when you have learned God's secret of trusting, and see the beauty and the power of the life that is yielded up to His working, you will cease to condemn. You will then begin to wonder how any of God's workers can dare to carry the burdens, or assume the responsibilities, which He alone is able to bear. Some may object that the Apostle Paul spoke of the "care of all the churches" (2 Corinthians 11:28) coming upon him. But we must not fail to remember that it was the constant habit of the Apostle to roll every care off on the Lord, and thus, while full of care, to be "without carefulness."

There are one or two other bonds in service from which this life of trust delivers us. We find out that no one individual is responsible for all the work in the world, but only for a small share. Our duty ceases to be universal, and becomes personal and individual. The Master does not say to us, "Go and do everything," but He marks out a special path for each one of us and gives each one of us a special duty. There are "diversities of gifts" (1 Corinthians 12 :4) in the Kingdom of God, and these gifts are divided to "every man according to his several ability" (Matthew 25:15). I may have five talents or two or only one. I may be called to do twenty things or one thing. My responsibility is simply to do that which I am called to do, and nothing more. "The steps of a good man are ordered by the Lord" (Psalm 37:23), not his way only, but each separate step in that way.

Many Christians make the further mistake of looking upon every act of service as a perpetual obligation. They think because it was right for them to give a tract to one person in a railway train, for instance, that they are always to give tracts to everybody. In this way they burden themselves with an impossible duty. There was a young Christian once who, because she had been sent to witness to one soul whom she met in a walk, supposed it was a perpetual obligation. Thus she thought she must witness to every one she met in her walks. Of course this was impossible, and she was in hopeless bondage about it. She became absolutely afraid to step outside of her own door and lived in perpetual condemnation. At last she confided her distress to a friend, who was instructed in the ways of God with His servants. This friend told her she was making a great mistake. The Lord had His own special work for each special workman. The servants in a wellregulated household might as well take it upon themselves to try to do the work of all the rest, as for each of the Lord's servants to think he or she was under obligation to do everything.

He told her just. to put herself under the Lord's personal guidance regarding her work and trust Him to point out each person to whom He would have her speak. He assured her that the Lord never sends forth His own sheep without going before them and making a way for them Himself. She followed this advice and laid the burden of her work on the Lord. The result was a happy pathway of daily guidance in which she was led into much blessed work for her Master. She was able to do it all without a care or a burden because He led her out and prepared the way before her.

Rest In Service

I have been much instructed myself by thinking of the arrangements of our own households. When we appoint a person for a special part of the work of the household, we want him to attend to that alone, and not run all over the house trying to attend to the work of all the other people. It would make endless confusion in any earthly household if the workers were to act in this fashion, and it makes no less confusion in the divine household. Our part in the matter of service seems to me just like making the junction between the machinery and the steam engine. The power is not in the machinery, but in the steam. Disconnected from the engine, the machinery is perfectly useless. But make the connection and the machinery goes easily and without effort

because of the mighty power behind it. Thus the Christian life, when it is the development of the divine life working within, becomes an easy and natural life. Most Christians live a strained life. Because their wills are not fully in harmony with the will of God, the connection is not perfectly made at every point. It thus requires an effort to move the machinery. But when the connection is fully made and the "law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus" can work in us with all its mighty power, we are then indeed made "free from the law of sin and death" (Romans 8:2). They will know the glorious freedom of the children of God.

The life of faith delivers the soul from another form of bondage. It is reference to these thoughts which always follow any Christian work. These thoughts are of two kinds. The soul either congratulates itself upon its success and is lifted up, or it is distressed over its failure and is utterly cast down. One of these is sure to come. It is my belief that the first one is to be more dreaded, although the second causes greater suffering at the time. But in the life of trust neither will trouble us. Having committed ourselves in our work to the Lord, we will be satisfied to leave it to Him and not think about ourselves in the matter at all.

Years ago I came across this sentence in an old book: "Never indulge, at the close of an action, in any selfreflective acts of any kind, whether of self-congratulation or of selfdespair. Forget the things that are behind, the moment they are past, leaving them with God." This has been of unspeakable value to me. When the temptation comes, as it mostly does to every worker after the performance of any service, to indulge in these reflections, either of one sort or the other, I turn from them at once and positively refuse to think about my work at all. Rather, I leave it with the Lord to overrule the mistakes and to bless it as He chooses. I believe there would be far fewer "blue Mondays" for ministers of the Gospel than there are now, if they would adopt this plan. And I am sure all workers would find their work far less tiresome.

To sum it all up, then, what is needed for happy and effective service is simply to put your work into the Lord's hands and leave it there. Do not take it to Him in prayer, saying, "Lord, guide me. Lord, give me wisdom. Lord, arrange for me," and then rise from your knees, take the burden all back, and try to guide and arrange for yourself. Leave it with the Lord. Remember that what you trust to Him you must not worry nor feel anxious about. Trust and worry cannot go together. If your work is a burden, it is because you are not trusting it to Him. But if you do trust it to Him, you will surely find that the yoke He puts upon you is easy and the burden He gives you to carry is light. Even in the midst of a life of ceaseless activity, you will "find rest unto your souls" (Matthew 11:29).

If the divine Master only had a band of workers like this, there would be no limit to what He might do with them. Truly, one such worker would "chase a thousand, and two would put ten thousand to flight" (Deuteronomy 32:30). And nothing would be impossible to them. For it is nothing with the Lord "to help, whether with many, or with them that have no power (2 Chronicles 14 :11) . If only He can find instruments that are fully given to His working.

May God raise up such an army speedily! And may you, my dear reader, enrol your name among this band. Yielding yourself unto God as one who is "alive from the dead" (Romans 6: 13), may every one of your members also be yielded to Him as "instruments of righteousness" (Romans 6:13) to be used by Him as He pleases!