

About Your Shadow

J.R. Miller:

There is in the New Testament a beautiful story which tells of the power of a good man's shadow. The people brought out their sick, and laid them along the sides of the road when the apostle Peter was to pass, that his shadow might fall upon them; and we are told that they were healed "every one."

Of course it was a supernatural power which wrought so wondrously in Peter's shadow. God was pleased to use it in this way to impress the people with the divineness of Christianity.

We cannot expect that we shall be able to work miracles of healing through our shadow. But we all cast shadows wherever we go, and our shadow has either wholesome or unwholesome influence over other lives.

We think of a shadow as something DARK. It is made by an object coming between us and the light. It is therefore an intercepting, a cutting off, of brightness. Night is a shadow "the shadow made by the earth coming between us and the sun. It is not an altogether unwelcome phenomenon, however, though the sun is hidden for a time and darkness gathers about us. Even night has its compensations. One is the glorious revealing of the stars, which we would never see, but for our passing into the shadow of the night.

There are other shadows which in like manner reveal more than they hide. There are sorrows which darken the world for us "but show us meanwhile the stars of divine promise.

Everyone who approaches us or stands by us casts a shadow upon us. There are some human shadows which make the world darker for us. There are people whose presence does not bring light and joy to us. They make us less happy. They make it harder for us to live sweetly, cheerfully, and victoriously. They come in with their sadness, their fears, their worries, their doubts "and cast deep gloom over us.

There are other people whose shadow is WHITE. Instead of intercepting the light, the brightness appears to stream through them and to be all the brighter. The rainbow is a kind of glorified shadow. A sunbeam falls upon a drop of water, and its wonderful threads are unraveled, disentangled, as it shines through, and we have seven beautiful colors spread abroad. There are some people who act on the light of Christ's love, as the crystal drop of water acts upon the beam of sunshine, separating it into elements of wonderful beauty "interpreting it into the loveliness of human tenderness, sympathy, and helpfulness, and bringing it down into the sphere of common life.

Every Christian should cast a rainbow shadow, not cutting off from friends the brightness of the light of Christ's face "but making it all the richer because of its human interpreting. The blessing of the love of Christ, should be in the influence of every Christian. Wherever we go, there should be healing in our shadow. Others should be better and truer, for seeing and knowing us. Wherever we go, we should carry cheer and gladness. It should be easier for our friends to be good, because they know us and see our life. Our shadow, even as we pass along the street, should heal those upon whom it falls. We should always be inspirers of the good possibilities in those whom we influence.

This subject is a very personal one, for every one has a shadow of his own. The question is, What kind of shadow do you cast? What is the effect of your presence on other people? Do you inspire cheerfulness, gladness, and hope wherever you go? Or is the effect of your influence depressing and disheartening?

There are people who suppose themselves to be very sympathetic with others in trouble, who really make trouble and pain harder to bear, or, rather, make their friends less able to endure. When they sit down beside the sick, the whole drift of their words is towards the emphasizing and intensifying of the illness. They draw out from the patient a recital of his sufferings and of his own feelings, and by look and word express their sense of the seriousness of his condition. But they do nothing to put new strength or cheer into his heart. They think they have been playing the part of a very gentle and sympathetic friend "whereas they have only aggravated the illness, and made it harder for the patient to endure. They only deepen life's shadows for others.

When they find a man discouraged over any unfortunate circumstances in his life, they listen to his plaint with tender feelings, expressing their pity, assenting to all that he says about his difficulties or misfortunes "but not saying one uplifting and heartening word.

They come to a friend who is in sorrow, and sit down beside him in his darkened home, weeping with him, and entering into all the painful elements of his grief; but they fail to bring to him any strong comfort. They make it

only harder for him to endure his sorrow.

In each case these good people think they have shown deep and tender sympathy, because they have consoled with their friends in their trouble. But in each case they have left a depressing influence. They have entered fully enough into the painful elements of the experience which they wished to alleviate; but there is no help in this, if that is all that one does. Such sympathy is hurtful. It only makes the burden heavier and the way darker, while the heart is left with less hope and comfort for its struggle. There are too many people that cast such shadows as these. They intercept the light, and leave darkness and chill on the life on which their influence falls.

Peter's shadow had healing power in it. The sick upon whom it rested even for a moment, as he passed by "became strong and well, and rose up cured and happy. There are those in every community who carry with them, wherever they go, a like influence of healing and blessing. They bear into a sick-room a delicate sympathy, which not only enters into the experience of the suffering "but puts new cheer and hope into the heart of the sufferer. They speak encouraging and inspiring words. Their face has in it a message of cheer wherever it appears. They bring some promise of God, some word of hope and encouragement. The discouraged man they meet, is made to feel not only that he has found a friend who is truly interested in him "but also that, after all, his case is not so hopeless as he imagined it to be, and that he need not despair. He is ready to try again. The mourner whom they visit, is made conscious of a friendship that not only understands his sorrow and is truly sympathetic "but that also puts into his heart a secret strength, which, though it does not take away any part of his grief "yet leaves him better able to bear it.

These are illustrations of the power of a healing shadow. There are people who carry blessings wherever they go. Every life they overshadow, even for a moment, receives some blessing from them. The secret is that they are filled with love the love of Christ abiding in them. Love is always self forgetful, and desires . . .

to do good to others;
to minister, not to be ministered unto;
to help, not to be helped.

Love is thoughtful also; careful never . . .
to give pain,
to add to another's burdens,
to make life harder for another.

Another element in a healthful and health-giving shadow, is victoriousness. We must be overcomers ourselves "before we can help others to overcome. One who himself yields to discouragement cannot be an encourager of others. One who is crushed by sorrow, and does not get God's comfort for himself "cannot be a comforter of others in their sorrow. It is frequently said that one who has suffered, is fitted to be a helper of others because he understands what pain and struggle are, and knows how to help. But this depends on how he has come through his suffering or his trial. If he has not been victorious, if he lies still in the shadows of defeat "he has no experience that fits him to enter into helpful sympathy with others in like experiences. But one who has been a victor in life's battles is able to be a comforter, and an inspirer of those he meets who are in the midst of struggle or trial. If you would have a healing shadow, you must learn the secret of Christ's victoriousness.

Every young person should seek to have an influence which will be a blessing wherever it reaches. The way to have such a shadow, is to be filled with the mind that was in Christ Jesus. Then our name will be as ointment poured forth "a holy fragrance. Then our life will be full of wholesome and healthful inspirations. Then wherever we go, we will make it easier for others to live victoriously. Someone makes this little prayer:

May every soul that touches mine,
Be it the slightest contact, get therefrom some good,
Some little grace, one kindly thought,
One aspiration yet unfelt, one bit of courage.

The other day one who is ill wrote to a friend: "You are such a comfort. You make people forget half their pain when you are near them." This friend has learned the secret of the healing shadow.