

J.R. Miller:

## The Every Day of Life

J. R. Miller, 1892

### Loving the Unseen Friend

"The world sits at the feet of Christ,  
Unknowing, blind, and unconsoled;  
It shall yet touch his garment's fold,  
And feel the heavenly Alchemist  
Transmute its very dust to gold."

Love for Christ is transforming the world. Love always transforms. Many a life is made beautiful by a pure, sweet, strong, human love. Who has not seen a young wife, with light, girlish nature, without seriousness, caring only for herself—until a baby came, when all was changed? She became serious, thoughtful, and earnest. Self died, and her soul flowed out in unsparing service. She lived now for her child. The hands that heretofore had been idle became ministering hands. Too dainty before, for any toil, or any rough touch, they were now used without thought, in caring for her child. Her whole being was transformed and shown now in noble beauty. Love had wrought the change. Children are God's angels to thousands of young mothers, sent to bless them by drawing their heart away from self. For we never learn to live—until we cease to think of ourselves and begin to live for some object outside of self. Selfishness destroys the life, blights its beauty, withers up its powers, and lays a curse upon it. Love saves the life, develops its faculties, and calls out its best.

There was a childless home. Husband and wife grew up together in mutual love—but having no interest outside of their own lives; they became selfish, grasping, and covetous. Years passed, and they were growing rich—but were miserly, saving every possible cent. They pinched themselves, living almost like beggars, with thin clothing, poor fare, in fire-less rooms. They gave nothing away to the relief of the need and distress about them. Appeals for God's work met with no response. Thus time passed until they had reached mid-life. Then the breaking up of another home by the death of the parents, brought a little child into the cold, loveless dreary home. At once the child found her way into both your withering hearts, and little by little the love awoke. Almost instantly there was a change. The home was brightened. The hoarded money was brought out and was spent more freely. The poor were remembered, God's cause received help. The faces that were growing old and cold with the lines of greed and grasping desire—became soft and warm with love's subtle warmth. The two lives were transformed. God had saved them through a child.

These are only familiar illustrations of what even human love does continually in this world. We do not know what God is doing for us when he give us friends to love, especially when he give us those, the loving of whom costs us something. The blessing comes through the serving, through the giving out of life. An invalid or suffering one in a home is oftentimes the means of softening, refining, and enriching all the household lives. When God sends one to love—who becomes a burden upon your heart, who call for sacrifice, service, patient care and cost—lift up your eye and reverently thank him, for there is divine blessing for yourself in this ministering in Christ's name. This is a losing of life, which is in reality—the finding of it.

But it is the loving of Christ, which works the most wonderful transformations. It has changed millions of lives from sin, sordidness, cruelty, degradation, and crime—into beauty, gentleness, refinement, and holiness. It is nearly two thousand years since Christ died upon the cross, rested in the grave, and arose from the dead. All these centuries, multitudes in each generation have believed in him and loved him; and love for him has changed their lives, lifted them up and drawn them after him in holy devotion.

His followers have learned the lessons of patience, unselfishness, endurance of wrong, forgiveness of injuries, compassion for the weak, pity for the lost, and kindly ministry to the needy and the sorrowing. The whole blessed work of Christianity, is simply the influence of the love of the unseen Christ in human hearts and lives.

"But how can we love one whom we have not seen and cannot see?" This is a question, which many ask. For one thing we may learn all the story of Christ as told in the Gospels, until we are familiar with it. Then we may

remember that while Christ is unseen on the earth, he is as really present as he was during the years of his abode in Palestine. He promised, "I am with you all the days," and he certainly meant just what he said. His presence does not depend on our seeing him.

Indeed, we never really see any of our friends. It is not the human form you can see—that is the person you love. It is not your mother's face and hair and hand and body that you love; it is her soul, her spirit. It is not her body that is gentle, patient, kind, thoughtful, and unselfish. A body cannot love. Even the loveliest face cannot itself be a blessing to you. It is the life which dwells in the body, that is your mother. You can say of her, in a sense that is true, "Whom having not seen—I love." Take any friend whom is much to you, on whom you lean, and it is not the body that you love. There is sweetness in a face, kindly warmth in an eye, thrilling inspiration in a touch. Why? Because of the soul that is in the body. But the body is not your friend, whom you have really never seen, since you cannot see truth, purity, love, sympathy, constancy, and strength.

We cannot see Christ—but if we have become his, he is indeed our personal friend and is really to us all that such a divine Friend can be.

What is it in your best human friend that is most to you, on whom you lean most in weakness, who comforts you most in sorrow, who is the best help to you in any need or trouble? Is it anything in your friend—that you can see? Is it not his truth, his wisdom, his love for you, his sympathy, his faithfulness, and his constancy? Even if he is not with you at all so that you can see him, is he not still a strength to you, a comfort, a refuge, a help? The consciousness that he is your friend; that whatever else may fail you—he will not; that he sympathizes with you, understands you, will be patient with you; the assurance that if need be—he will help you with all the capacity for helpfulness there is in him—makes you strong, blesses you, gives you peace, though you see him not.

You cannot see Christ—but you believe that he is true, loving, faithful, touched with sympathy when you suffer; that he knows all about you and loves you with a personal, deep, tender, strong, everlasting love. You know, too, that he has all power and that all his power is yours to support, keep, bless, deliver, and protect, save you. You know that he has all wisdom—wisdom that never errs, that never counsels rashly, indiscreetly, short-sightedly, and that all this wisdom is for the guidance of your life, the ordering of your steps. As we think along these lines the unseen Christ becomes very real to us. Loving this Friend whom we cannot see, becomes then blessed power in our life. For one thing we learn to trust him and leave in his hands all the affairs of our life.

Many people have altogether too narrow a concept of what Christ does for them. They think of him as forgiving their sins, changing their hearts, helping them only in spiritual affairs, and bringing them home at last to heaven. But there is nothing in our life, which is not of interest to him, and true believing in Christ implies the putting into his hand, of all our affairs. This may not always be easy. We like to have our own way, to carry out our own plans. We do not like to have sorrow and disappointment break in upon us. Yet if he is to fashion our life into heavenly beauty, he must have his way with us. Thus we get a glimpse of the meaning of trial. If sorrow comes in place of the joy which you have planned for yourself, it is because sorrow is better than joy would have been. Christ may oftentimes seem to be spoiling the beauty of our life; but it is ours to trust him even then, and by and by, we shall know that his way was wiser than ours. Tapestry weavers see only the wrong side as they weave.

"My life is but a weaving  
Between my God and me;  
I may but choose the colors—  
He works steadily.

Full oft he weaveth sorrow;  
And I in foolish pride  
Forget he sees the upper  
And I the under side."

Loving this unseen Savior—will draw us into his service. No transformation into his character is complete, which does not make us like him in the devotion of our life to the good of the world. Perhaps we sometimes overlook this, thinking of Christ-likeness as gentleness, patience, meekness, purity, truth, without the active element. But when Christ put the thought of his mission into a sentence it was: "The Son of man came not to be served—but to serve, and to give his life a ransom for many."

Not otherwise can we conceive of our mission as followers of Christ. We must follow him in self-denial and sacrifice, in the true laying of our life upon the altar of love. It is this which the world needs today—the life of Christ repeated in the lives of his people, in humble services which shall fill the earth with the fragrance of love, and carry blessing into every nook and corner of it. Not long shall he be with us—as an Unseen Savior. We shall soon go to be with him!

### The Secret of Peace

Peace is possible to every believer in Christ. No Christian can say, "That is beautiful. It shines in my friend's face like heaven's radiance. But it is not for me." The peace of God is for the believer. God shows no favoritism in dispensing this blessing. There is great diversity in the natural gifts and abilities bestowed upon individuals. A violet could never be a rose. An apple-tree could never become an oak. A sparrow could never reach the eagle's flight. An owl could never learn the canary's song. Not all men can become fine artists. Not all women can become sweet singers. If it were art, or music, or eloquence, or the poet's power, which was set before us as the ideal of a true life, many of us might say, "I never can attain that!" In matters of natural endowment God divides to each one—as he will.

But best of God's grace is open to all of his children. The divine peace is not for a few: it is a blessing which all may obtain. No matter how restless, how turbulent, how full of care, how naturally given to worry and anxiety one may be—this sweet, quiet, restful peace of God is possible of attainment.

Yet there are a great many godly people, who have not yet learned the secret of peace. There are Christian men in business, and in the midst of life's affairs, who are always full of care, fearful of the outcome of their ventures, restless, tossed on the bosom of life's rough sea like leaves on the billows. There are women, Christian women, who love Christ and read their Bible, and pray, and partake of the Lord's Supper, and work in the Sunday school, and in missionary societies, and who are very dear to Christ, yet whose lives are certainly full of little anxieties. They are easily annoyed. Their faces show lines of care and fret. Now and then they have brief seasons of restful trust, when they seem to have gotten the victory—but in a little while, they are back again in the old broken restlessness.

This is not the best that the religion of Christ can do for us. More than two hundred and fifty times does the word "peace" occur in the Bible. Paul, the homeless, hunted, suffering apostle, used it more than forty times, writing it oftentimes in prison, with a chain rattling on his wrist as he wrote. One of our Lord's sweetest farewell words was, "Peace I leave with you;" and when he came from the grave, three times did the blessing fall from his lips: "Peace be unto you." The ideal life for a believer in Christ—is one of peace.

It is very evident that this life of peace is not a life without care. Christ nowhere suggests the thought that his disciples are lifted out of the common conditions of life—into a sheltered pilgrimage, where the storms do not beat upon them, where sickness and pain do not reach them, where there are no disagreeable people to live with, and no adversities and disappointments to mar the calmness and quietness of the life from year to year.

He said expressly, that he did not want his disciples taken out of the world. The Christian is called to live in the midst of the ordinary conditions of life. The winds blow no more softly for him. The wicked are no more gentle, because one of God's children is beside them. Sickness turns not away from a home, because one of Christ's little ones dwells there. Circumstances are no more kindly, because it is a Christian who is being hurt by their pitiless grind.

Care is one of the conditions of human life. The birds have no care. The lambs that feed in the meadows have no care. As life grows in the things that ennoble it, and make it worthy, care increases. The love, which the religion of Christ teaches, makes our hearts more and more sensitive, and instead of taking us out of the world's trying experiences, it makes us feel its hardships and burdens all the more. Life's relationships all bring with them burden and anxiety. The peace, which Christ promises, is not made by emptying a little spot of all the darkness, suffering, and troubles—and setting us down into it.

Nor, is this peace produced by so changing our nature that we shall not feel the things which cause pain and disturbance. To do this, our hearts would have to be robbed of the very qualities in them, which are noblest and divinest. Only think what it would mean to you—to have taken out of your life, the possibility of suffering from the trials, the losses, the injustices and wrongs, the sorrows of life. To be made so that you would not feel these things—would be to lose out of your heart, the power to love and to sympathize.

Our purest joys, and our deepest sufferingsâ€”lie very close together. To have the capacity to love and be happy, is to have also the capacity to suffer. Religion makes our hearts gentler, more thoughtful, more sympathetic, and prepares us to be pained moreâ€”not lessâ€”by the frictions, the trials, and the frets of life. The Christian suffers no less in sorrow, trial, and care, because they are Christian; he probably suffers more. It is no easier, in human sense, for a friend of Christ to meet disappointments, adversities, bereavements, and losses, and to endure the frictions and annoyances of lifeâ€”than it is for the worldly person; it may be harder. It is not by dulling the sensibilities, that Christ gives peace. It is a peace in the heart which he gives, a peace which one may have within, while without storms are raging; a calm in the soul in the midst of external agitations and tumults; a quiet restfulness which holds the life in a serene composure even while all things seem to be disastrous; a spirit unperturbed, unfretted, unruffledâ€”in the midst of life's multitudinous cares.

What is the secret of this peace? How is it to be gotten? Paul gives the answer in two very definite counsels. The first is, "In nothing be anxious." Anxiety is worry. We cannot help having things in life that would naturally make us anxious. Yet come what mayâ€”we are not to be anxious.

There are reasons for this counsel. Worry does no good. It changes nothing. Worrying over a disappointment does not give us the thing we wanted. Worrying about the weather does not make it cold or warm, cloudy or sunny. Worrying over a loss does not give us back the thing we prized. Our Lord reminds us of the uselessness of worry when he says that by being anxious about our stature we cannot make ourselves any taller.

Anxiety enfeebles and wastes one's strength. One day's worry, exhausts a person more than a whole week of quiet, peaceful work. It is worry, not overwork, as a rule, which kills people. Worry keeps the brain excited, the blood feverish, the heart working wildly, the nerves quivering, and the whole machinery of the life in unnatural tension, and it is no wonder then that people break down.

Anxiety mars one's work. Nobody can do the best work when fevered by worry. One may rush and always be in great haste, and may talk about being busy, fuming and sweating as if he were doing ten person's duties, and yet some quiet person alongside, who is moving leisurely and without any anxious haste, is probably accomplishing twice as muchâ€”and doing it better. Fluster unfits one for good work.

Anxiety irritates and frets oneself. A sweet spirit is an essential feature of every beautiful life. Ungoverned temper is not only unchristianâ€”but is also most unlovely. There may be a difference of taste concerning many matters. What one thinks very beautiful in dress or manner, another may condemn. But no one thinks bad temper, lovely. Yet worry leads to irritability, makes one censorious, querulous, of a complaining, repining spirit. One cannot have a uniformly sweet spirit, patient, gentle, amiable, without peace in the heart. Peace makes the face lovely, even in homeliness.

Peace curbs the tongue, that it shall speak no hasty, ill-advised, impatient words. It gives quiet dignity to all the movements. Anxiety spoils many a disposition, and writes lines of unrest and care upon many a face, which ought to keep lovely into old age.

Then, anxiety is sin. It is not a mere unhappy thingâ€”which wastes the strength, mars the work, and hurts the temper; it is also distrust of God. We say we believe in the love of God, and then we worry over what he sendsâ€”the circumstances he appoints for us, the tasks he sets for us, the place he assigns us, the path in which he leads us, the way he deals with us. Worry is sin.

Hence we are to set it down as a positive ruleâ€”that we are never to be anxious. There are no exceptions. We are not to say that our case is peculiar; than even Job would be impatient if he had our trials; that even Moses would lose his temper if he had our provocations; or even Paul would worry if he had our cares. This law of life has no exceptions, "In nothing be anxious." What then shall we do with the things, which would naturally worry us? Paul tells us "In nothing be anxious; but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God."

That is, instead of being fretted and distracted over the things which we cannot control, we are to put them out of our own hands into God'sâ€”by specific prayerâ€”and leave them there. No human wisdom can explain the mysteries of life. No human hand can take the strange complication of life's events and so adjust them that they will make beauty and happiness. But there is One to whose wisdom all life's mysteries are open and clear. There is no confusion in this world as God's eye looks upon events. What is keen trial to us todayâ€”he sees resulting in blessing and good a little while hence. The thousand apparently tangled circumstances and events, amid which our life is movingâ€”are to him, threads with which perfect lovingness is being woven.

We are not to try, therefore, to thrust from us the cares and trials which come to us clearly as God's will—but are quietly to submit to them. It is this restless struggle against the things we cannot compel out of our life—which makes such pain and bitterness for so many of us. The bird which when put in the cage flies against the wires in wild effort to be free, only bruises its body and beats its wings into bleeding wounds in unavailing struggle. Far wiser is the bird which when put in a cage, begins to sing. If we would but learn this lesson and cheerfully accept the things we cannot resist—as our Father's will for us—we would have peace in our heart and would get a blessing out of every trial.

We are told that the peace of God shall guard our hearts and thoughts. It is a military figure which is suggested—when men slept in quiet confidence in their tents, with enemies all about, because waking sentinels kept watch through all the night. Our hearts were quiet and confident in any danger, because God watches. "The Lord is your keeper." "He who keeps you shall not slumber." It is not a mere philosophy of self-preservation which is taught us. There is a keeping, which is not our own. "The peace of God shall keep your heart and thoughts." It is possible; therefore, for us so to commit all our life's sorrows, cares, and troubles to Christ, that the divine love shall wrap us around like a blessed atmosphere, quieting all fear and filling us with holy peace.

Is not the lesson worth learning at any cost? It can be learned; it has been learned. Its one secret, is perfect submission to the will of God. Every resistance or disobedience causes unrest and sorrow; but quiet acceptance, with loving confidence and joyous song, will bring the peace of God into the soul.

#### Time of Loneliness

Loneliness is one of the most pathetic of all human experiences. The yearning for companionship is one of the deepest of all yearnings. The religion of Christ has something to meet every human need; what is its blessing for loneliness? We may turn to the Master's own life for answer to our question. He met all the experiences that ever come to ours, and he found himself the best there is to be found, in the divine love to meet each experience. Thus he showed us what we may find in our times of need and how we may find it.

Christ's loneliness was one of the bitterest elements of his earthly sorrow. All great people are solitary people, for there are so few other people, in whom they can find companionship. Christ was the greatest man who ever lived on the earth. His very greatness of character, made it impossible for him to have any real companionship among men. Besides, those whom he came to bless and save, rejected him. "He came unto his own, and his own received him not." The only human relief to his loneliness along the years of his public ministry was in the love of his chosen friends, and this was most imperfect and unsatisfactory.

But we know where he ever turned for solace and comfort in his experiences. After a day of pain and suffering, he would climb the mountain and spend the night in communion with his Father, returning in the morning renewed and strong for another day of beautiful life. In his darkest hour he said that though left alone as to human companionship, he was not alone, because his Father was with him.

The comfort of our Lord's heart in his loneliness is for us too, if we are walking in his steps. We too have our experiences of loneliness in this world, and we too may have the blessed companionship which shall fill the emptiness. In a certain sense, all life is lonely. Even with sympathetic companionships all about us, there is an inner life which each of us lives altogether alone. We must make our own choices and decisions. We must meet our own questions and answer them ourselves. We must fight our own battles, endure our own sorrows, and carry our own burdens. Friendship may be very close and tender—but there is a sanctuary of each life into which even the holiest friendship may not enter

Blessed are they, who in loneliness can say, "Yet I am not alone, because the Father is with me." God's is the only friendship that can really meet all our soul's deep needs and cravings. Human companionship helps us at a few points; the divine has its blessing for every experience. We never shall be left alone—when we have Christ. When other helpers fail and comforts flee—he will ever stand close beside us. When other faces fade out of view—his will shine out with tender love, pouring its light upon us.

There are special experiences of loneliness in every life, for which Christ is needed. Youth is one of these times. Youth seems happy and light-hearted. Companionships swarm all about it. But oftentimes a young person feels lonely even amid such scenes and friendships. All life is new to him. As his soul awakens, a

thousand questions arise demanding an answer. He is in this world with a thousand paths, and he must choose in which he will walk. Everything is mysterious. There are perils lurking on all sides. Choices must be made. Lessons must be learned. All is new, and at every step the voice is heard, "You have not passed this way before!" This loneliness of inexperience, when a young soul is taking its earliest steps in life, is one of the most trying and painful feelings of all the years. If Christ were not then the companion, lonely and perilous indeed is the way! But if he walks beside the young soul in its inexperience, all is well.

There are those who are lonely because they are homeless. It is impossible to estimate too highly the value and the helpfulness of a true home of love. Home is a shelter. Young lives nest there and find warmth and protection. There is also guidance in a true Christian home. A wise mother or father answers many of life's hardest questions. Blessed is that a young man or a young woman who can take every perplexity, every mystery, every doubt or fear, every hunger, home to the sacredness of love's sanctuary, and who gets there true sympathy, patient counsel, and wise guidance.

Home has also its blessed companionship. It is the one place where we are absolutely sure of each other, and do not need to be on our guard. Youth has its unspeakable longings, its deep hungers, and its cravings for tenderness. In the true home these are all met. Those who have such a home do not realize the half it is to them. It is the very shadow of Christ's wings over their lives, the very cleft of the Rock, and the very bosom of divine love. Life's loneliness means far less to them, while its companionships and its gentle, patient, wise, helpful, nourishing love.

But sometimes the home is pulled down over youth and its shelter broken up. Few things are sadder than homelessness. Loneliness begins to be really felt when the home is gone, when there is no longer a wise and loving mother to give her counsel in life's inexperience, to lay her hand on the head in blessing, to listen to eager questions and answer them, to restrain the impetuous spirit, to quiet the soul when it is perturbed and when its peace is broken, to lead through perplexing paths, to fill the hungry heart with the comfort of love when it longs for sympathy and companionship. Bitter indeed is the sense of loneliness when a young person, used to all that a mother's love means, turns away from a mother's grave to miss thenceforward the blessings which have been so much in the past. Nothing earthly will in any full and adequate measure, compensate for the loss. Other human friendships may be very sweet but they will not give back home, with its shelter, its affection, its trust, its guidance, its soothing, and its security.

Only less lonely is it for the young people, whom circumstances take them away in early years, from the home where through childhood their life has been gently nourished. The home still stands, and the love is still there with all its blessed warmth, and letters can be sent and received, and now and then there can be a return for a brief stay in the sacred shelter.

This mitigates the loss and the loneliness; yet even this experience is oftentimes a very sad one. Away from home there is always a loss not of love only but also of protection. The young people, who leave quiet rural homes, for life in the midst of a great city, plunge into perils from which only Christ can shield them.

But blessed is the life, which in any earthly homelessness can say, "Yet, I am not alone, because Christ is with me." Blessed is that loneliness or homelessness, which has Christ to fill the emptiness. With Christ unseen yet loved and made real to the heart by love and faith even a room in a boarding-house may become a home, a sanctuary of peace, and a shelter of divine love.

Another time of special loneliness is when sorrow strips off the sweet friendships of life. Old age is an illustration. Old people are oftentimes very lonely. Once they were the center of groups of friends and companions who clustered about them. But the years brought their changes. Now the old man stands alone. Still the streets are full; but where are the faces of forty, fifty years ago? There is a memory of vacant chairs, of marriage altar with the un-bindings and the separations that followed. The old faces are gone. It is young life that now fills the home, the street, the church and the old people are lonely because their old friends are gone.

Yet in Christ even old age can say, "I am not alone." No changes in life can take him away. He is the companion of life's feebleness. He loves the old people. There is a special promise for them: "I will be your God throughout your lifetime until your hair is white with age. I made you, and I will care for you. I will carry you along and save you." Christian old age is very near to glory. It will not be long until the old people reach home to stand again amid the circle of loved ones who blessed their youth and early years.

But not the old people only are left lonely by life's change; sorrow touches all ages, and if we have not Christ

when other friends are taken, desolate indeed shall we be. Blessed is that life, any life, which, when human friends are taken away, finds the friendship of Christ all-filling, all-satisfying, and can say, "Yet I am not alone" for Christ is with me."

The loneliest of all human experiences, is that of dying. We cannot die in clusters—we must die alone. Human hands must unclasp ours as we enter the valley of shadows. Human faces must fade from our vision as we pass into the mists. "I cannot see you," said one dying, as the loved ones stood about his bed. So it will be with each one of us in turn. Human love cannot go beyond the edge of the valley. But we need not be alone even in the deepest of all loneliness, for if we are Christ's we can say, "Yet I am not alone, for my Savior is with me." When human hands unclasp—his will clasp ours the more firmly. When human loved faces fade out—his will shine above us in all its glorious brightness. Death's loneliness will thus be filled with divine companionship.

The inference from all this, is our absolute need of the friendship and companionship of Christ, without which we can only sink away into life's loneliness and perish. One reason, no doubt, why our lives are so full of experiences of need—is that we may learn to walk with Christ. If earth's human companionships satisfied us, and if we never lost them—we might not care for Christ's. If earth's homes were perfect, and if they never crumbled—we might not grow homesick for heaven.

### The Blessedness of Not Knowing

Some people say they wish they could know their future. They are sincere enough; they wish they could. But this would not be a blessing. It is better that we should not know. It would shadow and sadden our lives—if we knew from the beginning all the trials and sorrows we shall have. This was one of the peculiar elements of the life of Christ; he knew what lay before him. The cross cast the shadow over the manger where he slept his first sleep. This foreknowledge made his life sadder, than if he had gone on unaware of what was awaiting him.

It is one of the mercies of our life—that we do not know what shall come to us. In the unopened years there may be waiting for us trials, disappointments, and losses. None of us know what chapters of sorrow will yet be written before our life-story is finished. Would it be a blessing if the veil were lifted today, showing us all, down to the close, what will be painful or sad?

There are old people now well through life's journey. They have had many cares and trials. Friends have failed them. Children have been taken away. They have had struggles and hardship. They have endured sicknesses and losses. They have not found what they hoped to find in life. Supposing they had known all this, seen it all from some lofty spot when they set out in sunny youth; would it have been a blessing to them? Would it have made their life a happier, richer, better one? No—it would have cast a tinge of sadness over it. It would have taken out of it much of that zest and interest, which have been such inspiration to them through all their years.

If a man had known, for example, that after all his toil, pain, struggle, and self-denial, that a certain great undertaking would fail, he would not have begun it. Yet perhaps that very labor of years, though it proved in vain at last, has been the richest blessing of his life. It drew out his soul's energies. It developed his strength. It taught him lessons of diligence, patience, courage, and hope. It built up in him a splendid manhood. The mere earthly result of our work in this world—is but means to a higher, nobler end, and is of small importance in comparison with what our work does in us. But if a man had known in advance that nothing permanent would come out of all his toil, economy, and self-denial, he would have said, "I may as well take an easy path. What is the use of working like a slave for forty or fifty years, and having only weariness and emptiness of hand at last?" Not knowing, however, that his efforts would fail in the end, hoping that they would succeed—he lived earnestly, laboriously, putting his whole soul into them. His work failed—but he did not fail. There is no material result to show others of any achievement—but there are imperishable results in the man himself—in life, in character, in manhood—results far nobler than the noblest he could have achieved in mere material forms. It was better that he did not know that all would fail, for if he had known it—he would have missed all this good.

People say sometimes, in hours of great sorrow, that they wish they had never known the friend that they have now lost. The friendship was deep, rich, and tender. It absorbed the whole life. It brought sweetest joy. It filled the heart during precious years. It was faithful to the end. There was no stain upon its memory. No falseness ever marred its nobleness. But just because the friendship had been so pure, so rich, so tender, so unselfish, so satisfying, its loss at last was such an overwhelming sorrow that it seemed as if it would have been better never to have had it at all.

Our deepest joys and our bitterest griefsâ€”grow on the same stalk. To loveâ€”always involves suffering, sooner or later, for one or other of the friends, for there must some time be separation. One must be taken and the other left. One must go on alone from a new-made grave, with the head bowed, and the heart frozen numb.

If we know that ours must be this deep anguish and loneliness some time, we might be tempted to say, "It is better to go through the years unblessed by tender loveâ€”than to take into my life this joyâ€”only to lose it yonderâ€”and then walk on without it, all the lonelier and more desolate for having had it so long."

But to do this would be to miss rich blessing and good. It might indeed be easier in a sense, for us never to have any friends. It might spare us the pain and sense of loss, when they are taken away from us. But we would miss meanwhile all that which rich, pure friendships bring into our life. Love blesses us with unspeakable blessings. It saves us from ourselves. It inspires us for noble living. It transforms our dull nature and transfigures it. No depth of sorrow that can possibly follow the loss of the companionship, could overbalance the blessing of a holy friendship given to us even for a few years. Tennyson says most truly,

"Tis better to have loved and lost  
Than never to have loved at all."

To have known of the sorrow and loneliness, and to have shut one's heart against the friendship in dread of its loss, would have been to rob one's life of its best blessing. Even grief is not too great a price to pay for love. Love's blessing stays in the beloved one is gone. Its influence is permanent. The work it does is on the soul's very substance abides forever. Its impression is ineffaceable. Tennyson says again,

"God gives us love; something to love  
He leads us; but when love is grown  
To ripeness, that on which it throve  
Falls off, and love is left alone."

So it is better that we do not know the end of friendship's stories, from the beginning, lest we might rob ourselves of love's blessing and good.

It is better, too, that we should not know the time of our death. If we knew it, it would take out of our life one of the strongest motives for earnest and noble living.

If a young man knew, for example, that he would live to be eighty years old, he would be strongly tempted â€”human nature being what it isâ€”to live leisurely, not to be in haste to begin his life-work, to postpone important duties, even to delay his preparation of death. The fact that he does not know how long he will live, that he may die even tomorrow, that he really has but today, and that he must put into the swift passing hours, the best that he can doâ€”acts as a constant pressure upon him in all duty. He dare not loiter, or something will be omitted that ought to be done, and the end may find him with his tasks unfinished.

If, on the other hand, a young man would die at thirty, while it would make him intensely earnest, if he were a true-hearted man and eager to crowd his brief days with noble living, it would tend to keep out of his life-plan all such things as he could not hope to finish before the end. Not knowing, however, how many years he may live, that possibly he may have until old age to workâ€”he begins many things, which will require scores of years to complete. He does not finish themâ€”but he starts them. He plants trees, which will bear fruit, long after he is gone to his grave.

And, after all, none of us really finish anything in our short life. We only begin things, and then leave them for others to take up and carry on. It is better, therefore, that we should work; as for the longest life, though our days are but few. Hence it is better we should not know the time we are to live. It keeps in our heart all the whileâ€”the element of expectation and hope, for we may live to reach fourscore. At the same time it holds upon us perpetually the pressure of urgency and hasteâ€”for any day may be our last.

Not knowing what is before us teaches us trust in God. If we could see all our paths open in advance and knew just what is coming, what temptations, what rough places to be gone over, what heavy burdens to be carried, what enemies to be encountered, what duties to be doneâ€”we would grow self-confident, would try to direct our own lifeâ€”and would not feel the need of God's guidance, help, shelter, and wisdom. One of the blessings of not knowingâ€”is that we must walk by faith; and nothing could be better than this. Self-confidence is the bane of Christian life. It is by faith that we are savedâ€”and by faith that we must walk.

A young mother holds in her own, her baby's little hands. She knows that folded up in them is the tangled skein of life's destiny. She knows that she must teach those hands to do life's duties. A deep sense of responsibility and fear fills her heart as she holds these little hands in hers and prints passionate kisses upon them.

"How will they build, these little hands?  
Upon the treacherous, shifting sands,  
Or where the rock eternal stands?  
And will they fashion strong and true  
The work that they shall find to do?  
Dear little hands, if but I knew!  
Could I but see the veiled fate?  
Behind your barred and hidden gate!"

Thus the mother's heart longs and cries as she holds her child's little hands in hers. But it is better that she should not know what her child's life will be. It is better that this should lie wholly in God's hands.

Her part is only to be faithful in the training of her child. She must lead its young feet in true and holy paths. She must fill its mind with pure thoughts and desires, and awake in its soul all heavenward longings. All the rest she must commit to God and leave with him. That is better than if she could know all, and herself be her child's guide. God is better than even the best, wisest, and most loving human mother is.

In personal life also, as well as in work for others, it is better that we should trust God. The walk of faith is always the safest and the best of all earth's paths. If we knew what the day would bring to us we could not pray in the morning as trustingly, as when we know only that our times are in God's hands, not knowing what they shall be. Not only is there safety in thus leaving all in the divine hands; there is also an element of interest in moving ever amid surprises, new scenes, new experiences, and new circumstances. We can say,

"It may be that he keeps waiting  
Until the coming of my feet  
Some gift of such rare blessedness,  
Some joy so strangely sweet  
That my lips can only tremble  
With the thanks they cannot speak.

So on I go, not knowing;  
I would not if I might;  
I would rather walk in the dark with God  
Than go alone in the light;  
I would rather walk with him by faith  
Than walk alone by sight.

My heart shrinks back from trials  
Which the future may disclose;  
Yet I never had a sorrow  
But what the dear Lord chose;  
So I send the coming tears back  
With the whispered word, 'He knows!'"

Thus all along our earthly life, we are shut in with God, as it were, in little places. We must live a day at a time. The mornings are little hilltops from which we can look down into the narrow valley of one little day. What lies over the next hill we cannot tell. Perhaps when we come to it, it may reveal to us a lovely garden through which our path shall go on. Or it may show us a valley of shadows, or a path amid briars. It does not matter we have but the one little valley of the day now in sight. Evening is our horizon. Here in this one little day's enclosure, we can rest as in a refuge. Tomorrow's storms and cares cannot touch us.

We should be thankful that life comes to us in such little bits. We can live one day well enough. We can do one day's duties. We can endure one day's sorrows. It is a blessing that this is all God ever gives us. We should be thankful for the nights which cut off from our view our tomorrows, so that we cannot even see them until the dawn. The little days, nestling between the nights, like quiet valleys between the hills, seem so safe and

peaceful.

"I thank you, Lord, that you do lay  
These near horizons on my way.  
If I could all my journey see,  
There were no chances of mystery,  
No veiled grief, no changes sweet,  
No restful sense of tasks complete.  
I thank you for the hills, the night,  
For every barrier to my sight,  
For every turn that blinds my eyes  
To coming pain or glad surprise;  
For every bound you set nigh  
To make me look more near, more high;  
For mysteries too great to know,  
For everything you do not show;  
Upon my limits rests my heart;  
Its safe horizonâ€”Lord, you art."

I am glad I do not have to know the future. I am glad I do not have to understand things. It is such a restful experience to be able to leave all in God's hands.

There may come times, when it will seem to us that that if we could have known a little of the future, it would have saved us much trouble. If we had known that this business would turn out so badly, we would not have gone into it. But the experience has done us good, and we could not have had the lesson without the experience. If we had known that this person was so dishonorable, we would not have taken him as our friend. But one of Christ's lessons was learned through a betrayal; and this brings us into fellowship with him at a new point. If we had known that a certain journey would have made us ill, we would have not taken it. But our sickness has been a blessing to us. If we had known that we would never see our friend again, we would not have parted from him in angry or impatient mood. But we have learned gentleness and thoughtfulness through our pain, and will never forget the lesson. No doubt in all such cases, there is some reason why it is better that we did not know.

We have no responsibility for results. It is ours only to be faithful to our dutyâ€”the results belong to God. The engineer down in the heart of the great steamer does not know where the force he sets free will propel the vessel. It is not his place to know. It is his only to obey every signal, to start his engine, to quicken, or slow, or reverse it, as he is directed. He has nothing whatever to do with the vessel's course. He sees not an inch of the sea.

It is not our part to guide our life in this world, amid its tangled circumstances. It is ours just to do our duty. Our Master's hand is on the helm. He knows allâ€”he pilots us.

We may thank God that we cannot know the future, and that we do not have to know it. Christ knows; and it is better to go in the dark with himâ€”than to go alone in the light, choosing our own way.

### Words About Consecration

"I do sincerely and earnestly want to give everything to the Lord, my whole self and all that he has given me in trust. But I do wish he would show me more definitely what he wants me to do. I do not feel at all certain, that my life up to the present time has been what he would have it to be. How much easier it would be if he would only say to me each day, 'Eliseâ€”do this.'"

Thus writes one who eagerly desires to be altogether Christ's. Yet the desire seems to outrun the attainment. The difficulty, is in knowing what the Master would have his disciple to do. She is ready, she believesâ€”to do anything, to go anywhere, to take up any duty, to render any service, to make any sacrifice; but she cannot hear her Lord's voice telling her his will. She longs for direct, definite, personal guidance.

But it is not thus, that Christ guides us in duty. No pillar of cloud moves in the air above our head. No bright angel goes before us to show us the way. No divine voice is heard giving instructions as to the details of our

work or service. Yet doubtless there is a way in which we may learn at each step what Christ would have us do. He would not require service of us—and yet hide from us what that service is. If everyone's life is a plan of God, it must be possible for us to learn the divine plan for our own life. God would not expect and require us to fill a certain place and do a certain work—and yet not be ready to give us clear and sure guidance. There is nothing unreasonable or unjust in our Father's requirements. He would never demand any duty of us—and not be willing to tell us what the duty is. We may be sure that he will in some way direct us as to what he would have us to do.

How, then, may we learn God's will for us—his plan for our life, what he wants us to do? The first condition must always be entire readiness to accept his will for our life—when it is made known. It is not enough to be willing to do Christian work. There are many people who are quite ready to do certain things in the service of Christ, who are not ready to do anything he might want them to do. Many of us have our little pet projects in Christian work, our pleasant pastimes of service for our Master, things we like to do. Into these we enter with enthusiasm. They are according to our special liking. We give ourselves to them eagerly, and with ardor. We suppose that we are thoroughly consecrated to Christ's work—because we are so willing to do these agreeable things. Possibly we are—but there is a severer test. It is not whether we are ready to do things for Christ, which we like to do—but whether we are ready to do just as heartily, anything which he may give us to do.

The heart of consecration is not devotion to this or that specific kind of service for Christ—but devotion to the divine will. It may not be any form of activity; sometimes it is quiet waiting. It is not bringing a great many souls to Christ, visiting a great many sick or suffering ones, attending a great many meetings, talking a great deal. Some weary one, shut away in the darkness, in the chamber of pain, may be illustrating true consecration far more beautifully, than those whose hands are fullest of Christian activities in the bustling world. Consecration is devotion to the will of Christ. It is readiness to do, not what we want to do in his service—but what he gives us to do. When we reach this state, we shall not need to wait long to find our work. When the continual prayer is, "Lord, what will you have me do?" the answer will soon be given in each case.

The next condition of consecration, resulting from this, is the holding of our life directly and always at the disposal of Christ. Not only must we be willing to do this will, whatever it is—but also we must actually do it. This is the practical part. The moment Christ wants us for any service—we must drop everything and respond to the call. Our little plans must be made always under his eye, as fitting into and as parts of his perfect plan for our life. This is the meaning of the prayer we are taught to make continually, "May Your will, not mine, be done."

We are to hold everything of our own most loosely, knowing that it is not our own, and that it may be asked for, at any moment. We make our arrangements and engagements, with the consciousness that the Master may have other use or other work for us, and that at his bidding we must give up our own plan for his.

We are apt to chafe at interruptions, which break in upon our own favorite work. We anticipate a quiet, unbroken day in some retirement, which we have sought in order to obtain, needed rest. We hope that nothing will spoil our dream for the day. But the first hour is scarcely gone before the quiet is broken. Someone calls. The call is not one that gives personal pleasure. There seems no real necessity for it. Perhaps it is to ask a favor or some service, which we do not see how we can render. Or it may seem even more needless and purposeless—a neighbor just dropped in to sit a while, someone without occupation comes to pass away an hour of extra time. Or you are seeking rest and there breaks in upon your quiet—a call for thought, sympathy, and help, which can be given only at much cost to yourself.

In all such cases the old nature in us rises up in protest. We do not want to be interrupted. We want to have this whole day for the piece of work we are doing, or for the delightful book we are reading, or for the little pet plans we had made for it. Or we are really very tired and need the rest for which we have planned, and it does not seem to be our duty to let anything interrupt our quiet.

This is the way one voice within us meets these demands for time or service. But there is another voice which says: "You are not your own. You belong to Christ. You have recognized and also voluntarily accepted his ownership in you and his absolute rights to command you and all you have. You gave yourself to him this morning and gave him your day. You asked him to prosper your plans if they were his plans; if not, to let you know what he had for you to do."

It soon becomes very clear to you—that the calls, which have so disturbed you, have some connection with your consecration and with your Morning Prayer. The people who called, Christ sent to you. Perhaps they need you. There may be in one a discouragement that you should change to cheer; possibly a despair, which you

should change to hope. With another it may be an hour of sore temptation, a crisis-hour, and the destiny of an immortal soul may be decided in a little talk with you.

Or if there is no such need in any of those who come in and spoil your dream of quiet, perhaps the person may bring a blessing to you in the very discipline, which comes in the interruption. God wants to train us to such condition of readiness for his willâ€”that nothing he sends, no call that he makes, shall ever disturb us or cause one moment's chafing or murmuring. Oftentimes it takes a long while, with many lessons, to bring us to this state of preparedness for his will. The more resistance and chafing there is when any bit of God's will breaks into our plansâ€”the more need there is for such interruptions, until the lesson is well learned.

Once our Lord himself took his disciples apart to rest awhile, since there were so many coming and going that they had scarcely time to eat. But no sooner had they reached their place of restingâ€”than the eager people, flocking around the shore of the lake, began to gather about them with their needs, their sorrows, and their sicknesses. But Christ did not murmur when his little plan for rest was thus broken in upon. He did not resent the coming of the throngsâ€”nor refuse to receive them. He did not say to them that he had come to this quiet place for needed restâ€”and they must excuse him. He forgot his weariness and gave himself at once, without reluctance or the slightest withholding, with all of his heart's loving warmth and earnestness, to the serving and helping of the people who had so thoughtlessly followed him to his retirement.

At the well of Jacob, too, though so weary that he sank down exhausted to wait alone until his disciples came with food for his hungerâ€”he yet turned instantly to the serving of the poor, sinful woman who came to draw water. He might have pleaded that he was too tiredâ€”but he did not. He even spoke of what he had done for the womanâ€”as the will of his Father.

From the example of our Master, we get our lesson. He may follow us into our vacations and to our vacation-resorts with fragments of his will. He may call us out into the darkness and the stormâ€”on errands of mercy after we have wrought all day and have put on our slippers and prepared ourselves for a cozy rest with our loved ones around the home lamp. He may wake us up out of our sleep by the loud ringing of the bell, and send us out at midnight on some ministry of kindness.

We would seem to have excuse for not listening to these calls. It would not appear greatly unreasonable, if we would say that we are exhausted and cannot go on these errands. There are limits to human strength and endurance. Perhaps, too, these people who want us, have no just claims on us. Besides, why did they not send for us at an earlier hour, instead of waiting until this most unreasonable time? Or why will not tomorrow do? Then we will be fresh and strong, and the storm will be over.

But ordinarily none of these answers will quite satisfy the spirit of our consecration. It is the will of God which rings our door-bell and calls us out. Somewhere there is a soul who needs us, and we dare not shut our ears. A beautiful story is told of Francis Xavier. He was engaged in his missionary work, and hundreds kept coming until he was literally worn out. "I must have sleep," he said to his servant, "or I shall die. No matter, who comesâ€”do not disturb me. I must sleep." Hastening to his tent, he left his faithful attendant to watch. In a little while, however, the servant saw Xavier's white face at the tent-door. Answering his call, he saw on his countenance a look of awe, as if he had seen a vision. "I made a mistake," said the missionary. "I made a mistake. If a little child comes, waken me." There are needs to which we dare not deny ourselves. When Christ sends the least of his little ones to us for any ministry â€”hungry to be fed, thirsty to receive a cup of cold water, in trouble to be helpedâ€”to refuse to answer the call is to neglect Christ himself.

This true consecration becomes very practical. There is no place in it for beautiful theories, which will not work, for splendid visions, which will not become hands and feet in service. "Consecration meetings," with their roll-call and their Scripture verses and their pledges and their hymns, are very pleasing to God, ifâ€”if we go out to prove our sincerity in the doing of his will.

Another condition of consecration is humility. It does not usually mean great things, showy servicesâ€”but little humble things, for which we shall probably get neither praise nor thanks. Most of us must be content to live commonplace lives. Ninety-nine percent of the work which chiefly blesses the world, which makes the bulk of human happiness, and which most sets forward the kingdom of Christ, and must always be inconspicuous, lies along the lines of common duties, in home relationships, in personal associations, in neighborhood helpfulness. It is in these humble spheres, that consecration must prove itself. It is here too that the noblest lives of the world have been lived.

When we speak of consecrating our lives to Christâ€”it is to the common deeds of the common days that we

must think of turning. Consecration must first be a spirit in us, a spirit of love, a life in our hearts, which shall flow out to everyone we desire to bless and help and make better. Thackeray tells of one who kept his pockets full of acorns and whenever he saw a vacant place in his estate he took out one and planted it. In like manner, he exhorts his readers to do with kind words as they go through life, never losing a chance of saying one. "An acorn costs nothingâ€"but it may sprout into a prodigious tree." To such a life true consecration prompts and inspires. It takes humility of mind in many of usâ€"to accept such obscure services. We think too often of some great things to be given to us to do when we devote ourselves to Christ.

My soul was stirred; I prayed: 'Let me  
Do some great work so purely  
To right life's wrongs, that I shall know  
That I have loved you surely.'  
My lips sent forth their eager cry,  
The while my heart beat faster.  
'For some great deed to prove my love,  
Send me, send me, my Master!'

From out the silence came a voice  
Saying, 'If God you fear,  
Rise up and do, your whole life through,  
The duty that lies nearest.  
The friendly word, the kindly deed,  
Though small the act in seeming,  
Shall in the end unto your soul  
Prove mightier than your dreaming.

'The cup of water to the faint,  
Or rest unto the weary,  
The light you give another life  
Shall make your own less dreary,  
And boundless realms of faith and love  
Will wait for your possessing;  
Not creedsâ€"but deeds, if you would win  
Unto your soul a blessing.'

These reflections may help us to answer the question at the beginning of this chapter. Christ tells us through our various relationships, what he wants us to do each day, each hour. To the little child he gives duty through the parents' guidance, command, example, and teaching. In home life all relative duties become plain and clear. In our contact with friends and neighbors the voice of Christ speaks to us continually in the human needs which appeal to us, and in the opportunities of usefulness which comes to us. In our church life, also, work is bought to our hand in the calls for service.

True, we cannot do everything that offers. There are many things, too, which we could not doâ€"if we were to try. "To everyone his own special work," according to his gifts. There is wide room for good judgment in choosing the things we can do and ought to do. God has given us brains to be used. We ourselves are to think. It is very foolish for any one to try to have a hand in all manner of good work. "This one thing I do," is a motto, which it is wise to follow in all lines of life. It is usually better that we do one thing wellâ€"than give ten things a touch and then leave them.

The most useful people in any community are the plodders who make choice of one class of workâ€"and devote themselves to it year after year. It is better for most of us that we devote ourselves to the helping and uplifting of a few peopleâ€"than that we scatter our influence over hundreds. Then we can make impressions on their lives which will last forever. Jesus gave his whole public life to twelve menâ€"but he so stamped his impression on their lives that they went out and moved the world!

We cannot expect the guidance that little children get in finding the duties of our consecration; but we shall never lack true guidance if only we will follow. One day's work leads to another. One duty opens the way to another. We are never shown maps with all the course of life projected on them; but we shall be shown always the next duty, and then the next. If only we are obedient, there shall never come a time when we cannot know what our next duty is. One disobedience, however, breaks the continuity of the guidance, and the thread may be hard to find again. Those who follow Christ, never walk in darkness.

There is need of preparation. The life must be holyâ€”which Christ will employ. The vessel must be clean, that the King will use. The heart must be broken, through which God's love may flow. Someone gives a Consecration Prayer: "Lord, take me, break me, make me," and tells the story of a golden cup which had been made out of old coins. These had lost the image and superscription originally upon them, and were then thrown into a melting-pot and wrought into a beautiful cup. Likewise, oftentimes a human life has lost its beauty; and then the Master takes it, breaks it, and makes it over again in form of beauty. Then the King will use it.

### Duty of Speaking Out

"In the desert where he lies entombed  
He made a little garden and left there  
Some flowers that for him had never bloomed."

No doubt there is a duty of silence. There are times when silence is golden. But there is also duty of speech. There are times when silence is sin. There are times when it is both ungrateful and disloyal to God, not to speak of his love and goodness, or witness for him before men in strong, unequivocal words.

We ought to speak out the messages given us for others. God puts something into the heart of every one of his creaturesâ€”that he would have that creature utter. He puts into the star a message of light, and you look up into the heavens at night and it tells you its secret. Who knows what a blessing a star may be to the weary traveler who finds his way by it, or to the sick woman lying by her window, and in her sleeplessness looking up at the glimmering point of light in the calm, deep heavens? God gives to a flower a mission of beauty and sweetness, and for its brief life it tells out its message to all whom can read it. Wordsworth says,

"To me the meanest flower that blooms can give  
Thoughts that do often lie too deep for tears."

Who can count up the good that even a flower may do, as it blooms in the garden, or as it is carried into a sick-room, or into the cheerless chamber of poverty?

Especially, God gives to every human soul a message to deliver. To one it is some revealing of science. A great astronomer spoke of himself as thinking over God's thoughts after him, as he traced out the paths of the stars and the laws of the heavens. To the poet God gives thoughts of beauty, which he is to speak to the worldâ€”and the world is richer, sweeter, and better for hearing his message. We do not realize how much we owe to the men and the women, who along the centuries have given forth their songs of hope, cheer, comfort, and inspiration.

To every one of us, God gives something which he wants us to say to others. We cannot all write poems or hymns, or compose books which will bless men; but if we live near the heart of Christ, there is not one of us into whose ear he will not whisper some fragment of truth, some revealing of grace or love, or to whom he will not give some experience of comfort in sorrow, some new glimpse of glory. Each friend of Christ, living close to him, learns something from him and of him, which no one has learned before, which he is to forth-tell to the world.

Therefore, each one should speak out their own message. If it were only a single word, it will yet bless the earth. If only one the flowers that bloom in summer days in the fields and gardens had refused to bloom, hiding its little gift of beauty, the world would be poorer and less lovely. If but one of the myriad stars in the heavens had refused to shine, keeping its little beam locked in its breast, the nights would be a little darker than they are. And every human life that fails to speak out, keeping it locked in the silence of the hea