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SERMON DLXXV.

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“HERE A LITTLE, AND THERE A LITTLE.”

“Here a little, and there a little.”—ISAIAH XXVIII. 10.

THE application of this text is first of all to the impressions produced by the Word of God, and the efficacy of constant religious instruction. But it is in this same way, by little and little, that all great and lasting impressions are made, and the mightiest results accomplished. Habit, which is the strongest thing in nature, and which forms a second nature, is thus produced. As the largest cable is formed out of strands so small that a child may snap them asunder, yet all put together the strain of the largest ship may not break them, so it is with the formation of character and the fixtures of our habits for time and eternity. They are completed by here a little, and there a little.

So it is in the invisible growth of all things, gradual and imperceptible, yet constant and sure. So it is in all the processes of nature. Mighty and sudden changes are not the rule, but gradual and prepared ones. The seasons and the months melt quietly and imperceptibly into one another, the day fades softly and silently into the night, and the night retires just as gradually from the stealing steps of day. The most beautiful processes of creation are gradual, and so are the works of grace; and the beginnings of some of the mightiest works are so small, and from such minute apparent causes, that sometimes it is difficult to

believe that any work at all, of permanence, is possible. Yet the work goes on. The seed cast into the heart may be smaller, more imperceptible, than any of the seeds ever dropped into the earth for the harvest, and how it germinates, or when, you may not be able to see, yet it grows. Just as the husbandman casts his seed into the ground, and goes his way, and it groweth while he is waking and sleeping, he knoweth not how, and first comes forth the tender blade, then the ear, then the full corn in the ear. Also the kingdom of heaven is as leaven, which a woman took and hid in three measures of meal, till the whole was leavened. Almost invisible and indistinguishable at any one moment, yet the work is mighty in the end.

It is by little and little, too, that every man's character is formed. Most persons' *guilty* character is made of little sins. They may be scarcely noticed at the time, but a constant succession of them makes a great weight. Whether impulses or actions, the succession of them, uninterrupted for years, may make habits as unchangeable as the skin of the Ethiopian, spots as unremovable as the spots of the leopard. Most persons' *Christian* character, too, is made up of little things. The *Christian spirit* must enter into *all* things, and then all things become great in the light of heaven. But the Christian character may be almost spoiled by little sins, or what are called such. If our consciences were tender and wakeful, and our hearts filled with love to our Saviour, no sin would seem a little sin. How much meaning there is in that exclamation of Wesley's, "I want a sensibility to sin, a pain to feel it near." Sensibility to sin is what we very much want, especially in a time of worldly conformity so great as the present. Little sins, whether of omissions or commissions, make sad havoc with a man's piety. If a man is heedless in regard to them, he cannot walk closely with God, nor have peace of conscience, nor the comforting presence of the Saviour. They render fervent prayer impossible. Watchfulness against sin of every kind constitutes a part of that faithfulness which the Lord Jesus inculcates, when he commands us to be sober, and to watch unto prayer. Christians must watch against little sins, in conduct and conversation, in their temper and disposition, and daily deportment; for if they give way to little evils daily, there is a great amount of sin unnoticed and unrepented of upon the conscience, but which grieves the Spirit of God, and prevents a filial access to the mercy-seat. The conscience of some persons is like a carpet never swept, into which the particles of sand and coal are ground and trodden, till the texture is all worn away.

Almost every important thing depends upon little things often repeated. Any great change of character taking place in one day is not frequent. There is preparation for it in many things,

many influences. Ordinarily, the particular impression which our days make, the seal which they leave upon us, for evil or for good, is scarcely noticed, scarcely to be measured, and yet, in the end, their work with us is great and eternal. Three hundred and sixty-five days in a year! Every day comes down a blow from the hammer of time upon the anvil of circumstance, for the forming of character. Sometimes the blows are stronger, sometimes weaker, but no one of them alone does the work. Three hundred and sixty-five days! Not one of them but might have been dropped out, and no great change of character have been the result, yet all of them important, all of them contributing to the character of the year. There may have been particular days that, by reason of some peculiar visitation from God, have been so marked as never to be forgotten, and so filled with impression and power, by his word, his providence, or his grace, as almost to govern all the rest of the year. This may have been the case with some particular Sabbath; but ordinarily, one day is much like another, one Sabbath like the rest, and, alas! with very many persons the Sabbath is very like the week. The sun ariseth and the sun goeth down; the wind goeth toward the south, and turneth about unto the north; the thing that hath been, it is that that shall be, and that which is done is that which shall be done, and there is no new thing under the sun. But when the year is gone, a great mark has been made, a great journey has been travelled, a great record has been written for the judgment, a great confirmation has been made of signs and anticipations in regard to a man's career and character one way or another; and yet it may seem as if the absence of any one day would have made no great difference.

It seems a very little thing to live near to God one day; it is a very great thing: but still, to do it for one day does not seem so great a task; not so great a thing but that the Christian, by the help of God, may easily accomplish it for one day. But if this little thing were accomplished *every day, every one day* in the year, then the whole would be infinitely glorious. On the other hand, to a man forgetful of God, it seems but a very little evil which is wrought with the character in one day, perhaps none at all, if there be no marked crime. A man does not ordinarily feel worse to-day than he did yesterday. There is no self-recording log-book in the conscience, or calculation of the latitude and longitude, or moral barometer to tell him what the weather is, or how far he has gone. And yet he has gone on. He may have gone but a little farther; nevertheless, a certain number of those imperceptible advancements bring him to his destiny, both of character and retribution, for eternity.

All the steps, successively, that lead either to heaven or hell, are small, one by one, except in great crimes, and even then

there has been a gradual preparation for them, a great many unobserved steps towards them; or, on the contrary side towards heaven, the steps are small one by one, except in the great interposition of the Holy Spirit in the work of conversion, and the great first turning of the soul towards God; and even *there* also, there have been a great many steps, on the part both of God and man, unheeded, unknown at present in their bearing and influence. All the successive steps, in the way either to heaven or hell, are small, one by one, yet in the aggregate how mighty is the journey! Every separate step, however small, takes a vast meaning and importance from the character that directed it; and again reacts for the strengthening and confirming of character. Every thing, moral and physical, is an aggregate of minor things. All the steps between two distant cities are small one by one, but the journey is a great thing. All the revolutions made by the wheels of a great steamer are small one by one, but the motion is mighty, and the progress great. All the coral insects of the sea are helpless and almost invisible one by one, yet the aggregate of their individual work and deposit may construct islands and continents, that shall rise from the ocean, to remain till the globe perishes. All the evaporations from the sea and the land are in particles of moisture, insensible one by one, yet the streams that water the earth, the sounding cataracts and mighty rivers, are sustained by the process. All the thoughts, words, and actions of a man may be minute and commonplace, undistinguished, each by each, for any thing remarkably good, or remarkably evil; and yet the result is CHARACTER for ETERNITY.

Besides, any one of those thoughts, words, or actions may have led to *results* of eternal and immeasurable consequence for good or evil. What is more commonplace than vain and wandering thoughts? Yet a vain or wanton thought indulged may, by itself alone, ruin the soul, and ruin other souls. What is more commonplace than idle words? Yet one idle word, falling into a prepared place, may do a world of mischief, just as a single spark, falling on a train of gunpowder, may blow up a fortress, and destroy thousands. The greatest actions, both of good and evil, have begun with thoughts, sometimes random thoughts. A thousand such may come and go so idly that you cannot trace them, but at length one among a thousand is pursued, and not only comes *from* the heart, but afterwards leads and governs both heart and life, permanently. Or it is dropped in a casual remark, and being received as a germ in some other mind, takes root, and produces vast results for time and eternity. A little spring lost among the marshes, a strain of poetry has said, is a little and a helpless thing; but if some kind and careful hand, under a benevolent impulse, recovers it, walls it in, and hangs a ladle at the brim, thousands of thirsty wayfarers may

be refreshed by it, and even some dying life may be saved. Thus it is that consequences of infinite moment may depend on what we call little things, so that there is no safety for us except in having *all* our *little* things as well as great ones under the care of our heavenly Father. We must put them at his disposal, seek his guidance in all things, seek him in constant prayer, and never be without God in the world. We must have an eye single to his approbation, and whether we eat or drink, or whatsoever we do, endeavor so to arrange all things as shall be for his glory. This is truly the only safe way, for God's providence acts in little things as well as great; and if we are cooperating with him, he will cause *all* things to turn out well, and besides guiding our *successions* of little things into a great and blessed *whole*, he will often invest *single* little things with influences, and attend them with consequences of great glory.

It is by little and little that in such a world as this we must do the greater part of the good that we ever accomplish. He that is faithful in great things, is faithful also in the least; and if he be not faithful in small things, God will not give him the opportunity to be so in large ones. Indeed, it is only by the discipline of faithfulness in small things that a man can be prepared to do good on a great scale. If a man waits for great opportunities, or a great occasion, or a great position, before beginning to do good with all his might, before beginning to exert his influence in all things for God and truth and liberty and righteousness, then, when the occasion comes, or the position is offered, the man himself will certainly be found wanting. The spirit of the man can be trained for great occasions only gradually, and by a discipline and habit of integrity, firmness, and faithfulness in minor emergencies, and in regard to constant calls of duty. It is as if a man, contemplating a height to be gained, should say, I will not take a step up the ladder till I can go from top to bottom at a bound. Well, you never will be there in that way. You must go up step by step, or not at all. It is not given to man to spring at once to grand attainments, or great usefulness, or great influence. He cannot wing his way over intervening obstacles, but must grapple with them, and overcome them, one by one. The greatest promises from God himself take this into consideration. No man can do good in any other way, in any sphere whatever, nor gain any lasting good by any other arrangement.

What is surer than God's great promise in regard to children, that if you train them up faithfully for him, he will take care of them, and bless them, and make them his? But the result of good character and heavenly habits with *them* depends upon the daily, familiar, minute, but ever-recurring examples set before them, and influences brought to bear upon them. The impres-

sions that form their characters from the outset are as little drops falling on the rock, and wearing it, never at once, but by perseverance, repetition, continuance. What can one drop do? It falls, and is gone, and leaves no traces. The most perfect microscope or measuring instrument that ever could be made would not be able to detect the impression made by one drop. And yet the permanence, the incessant repetition, of this feeble, trifling agency, so small as to be entirely imperceptible, may at length furrow and disintegrate the very granite. That is but a symbol of what may be done with souls.

But I say *God's providence* takes care of single little things also, and oftentimes makes much out of them, or hangs much upon them. I think it was Hannah More who once recorded an instance of a gay lady returning from a midnight party at cards, and finding her maid-servant reading a religious book. "Poor melancholy thing," said she, "what pleasure can you find in poring over such a book?" But even in her own careless glance upon it, there was one word that met her eye, and followed her to her retirement, and at length filled her with so much distress, that her maid came to her in anxiety to know what it was that troubled her. She burst into a flood of tears, exclaiming, "Oh! it was one word in your book that has taken hold upon me, and that word is **ETERNITY!**" And by God's grace it led to an earnest preparation *for Eternity*.

But this is by no means a solitary instance. "I can never forget," said a pious man once to a friend, "that one word which was whispered to me once in a meeting for religious inquiry." "What word was it?" "It was the word **ETERNITY**. A young Christian friend, who was yearning for my salvation, came up to me as I sat in my pew, and simply whispered *Eternity* in my ear, with great solemnity and tenderness, and then left me. That word made me *think*, and I found no peace till I came to the cross."

It is said that Harlan Page once went through his Sabbath-school to get some spiritual census in regard to its condition. Coming to one of the teachers, he said, "Shall I put you down as having a hope in Christ?" The teacher replied *no*. "Then," said Mr. Page very tenderly, "I will put you down as having no hope." He closed his little book and left him; but that single remark was blessed of God, and therefore was enough to distress the young man so deeply, that he could find no peace till he gained a hope in Christ's saving mercy. Take another instance. A female member of a Christian church not long since overtook a lady on her way to the prayer-meeting. She asked the young person if she never thought of her own salvation? The lady thus addressed replied that during all her life she had never had one word spoken to her before concerning the salvation of her

soul. But this one affectionate question had God's blessing. Within a few weeks from that time she became a devoted member of the fold of Christ.

Thus God works. It is said to have been a single remark of Rev. Charles Simeon, in regard to the blessings which had resulted from the labors of Dr. Carey in India, that first arrested the attention of Henry Martyn to the cause of missions. His mind began to stir under the new thought, and a perusal of the Life of Brainerd fixed him in his resolution to give himself to his Redeemer in the service of preaching the gospel to the dying heathen.

A great many such cases might be cited ; and the recurrence of such instances should teach us never to be discouraged in trying to do good. In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thy hand, for thou knowest not which shall prosper, nor whether they may not both alike have God's blessing. Blessed are they that sow beside all waters, that are ready for all opportunities. None can tell what God may do with a single word, a single remark, a single question. Even when the case seems most hopeless, the seed may be taking root. The arrow, though feebly shot, may be lodged in the conscience. The heavenly minister in Scotland, Mr. McCheyne, was once riding past a coal quarry, and stopped to look in at the fire-room of the engine-house. The fireman had just opened the door to feed the furnace with fresh fuel. Mr. McCheyne observed it for a moment in solemn meditation, and then, pointing to the bright glowing flame, said in a gentle tone to the man, but full of meaning, “ Does that fire remind you of any thing ? ” If I remember right, he afterwards stated the impression made upon his own soul by the recall, in lively power, of the Scripture imagery of perdition, the worm that never dieth, the fire that never shall be quenched. But he just simply asked, “ Does that fire remind *you* of any thing ? ” The question, from such a devout and praying heart, was not left with the man merely ; it was left with God, and God's blessing accompanied it. It proved an effectual arrow of conviction, roused his conscience as with the power of guilt and hell, led him to the house of God, and may have been to him the gate of heaven. Thus it is that God can make little means divinely powerful. Therefore despise not the day of small things, for none can tell what God may do. Be not weary in well doing, for in due season thou shalt reap, if thou faint not. It is one characteristic of the righteous, that *whatsoever* he doeth shall prosper. *Nothing can be lost that is done for God.* If you do not see the glory of it now, nor the success of it, you shall see the reward of it hereafter. He that goeth forth and weepeth, bearing precious seed, shall doubtless come again with rejoicing, bringing his sheaves with him.

But if we are thus taught the duty of perseverance in well doing, and if we thus gain great encouragement for faithfulness in little things, and small spheres of usefulness, we likewise see how much may depend, and of how great moment, upon actions apparently the most trifling; and therefore how watchful we should be to walk with God; in all our ways to acknowledge him, and in all things be sure of his approbation. Indeed, we can never be too vigilant on our way to the eternal world; the atmosphere of prayer and of God's Word is the only safe one to walk in. How can any man leave his house in the morning without committing his way to the Lord God in prayer! How can any man lie down to sleep at night without invoking the pardoning mercy and parental care of the great Being into whose eternal presence he may perhaps pass without ever waking again, in a world of probation, to the possibility of prayer! Who can tell, when he goeth forth in the morning to this world's activities and cares, what may befall him unless God hold him as in the hollow of his hand? Who can tell what evil, if not guarded and guided of God, he may be the means of bringing even upon others? Who can tell in what lurking-places the adversary of God and man may meet him; what temptations may be thrust upon him from a thought, a book, a bargain, a word, a window! What a work it will sometimes be to read in eternity the history of one day! Watch, therefore, and pray lest ye enter into temptation. Try to gain a little for God, a little for heaven, a little more of grace, *every* day. If you do this in *little* things, you will accomplish *great* things. Here a little and there a little will carry you on from step to step, from grace to glory, till you stand in light and peace and freedom ineffable, where there will be no more need of conflict, anxiety, or watchfulness; but where, holy as God is holy, you may fly upon angelic wings throughout the universe, secure and happy in the great deep of God's infinite perfections.

From that post of observation, that region of heavenly peace and glory, what a scene to look back upon the years of this our mortal pilgrimage! Oh that we might come to them now, and pass through them now, with something of that watchfulness, prayerfulness, diligence, and deep sense of responsibility, that we shall then feel ought to have accompanied us in every step!