
LENTEN READING

Lenten opportunity

Opportunities come to us from God, and are sent to develop the character, and to determine what sort of persons we are. By them, God meets us in our daily walks, to bless us in our lives.

They come to all alike—"God is no respecter of persons." At every turn are opportunities to serve Christ; to worship God; to advance His kingdom; to obey His commands and realize His promises; to do good, to do right and help the unfortunate. And yet, the world is full of slighted mercies, neglected prayers, abused blessings, ignored commands, excused duties, rejected love, despised sacraments, and Christian idlers.

Beloved, whoever you are, Lent is your opportunity to right these wrongs and secure God's blessings upon your soul. 'Tis yours to neglect, to seize or to let slip; to enjoy or ignore.

Self-discipline

The first great principle, that we have to keep in mind when we speak of self-denial, is this—that it means the sacrifice of the lower for the higher self.

Self-denial must always have a purpose. We are not called in Lent, or at any other time, to an objectless starving of the body, to an aimless denial of natural desires, to a whimsical withdrawal from social intercourse.

Abstinence from earthly pleasures, of whatever kind, must always be with a view to something higher—an element of hungering and thirsting after righteousness. Self-discipline is for the rescue of our true self; for its development and culture.

We withdraw from distractions of one kind or another that tend to choke the higher life. The flesh drags down the spirit. Worldly sounds deaden the soul to the voice of God; its passing sights dazzle the eye to the vision of higher spiritual realities; general softness and luxury of living gradually benumb the spiritual faculties. You know it in your own experience. After a round of gaiety and excitement, spiritual things are apt to seem unreal, prayer becomes dry and difficult. We need from time to time to retire

within ourselves, to cultivate the interior life, to renounce the lower for the sake of the higher.

The view of Christ upon the cross tells you that you are not your own—that you "are bought with a price"—that you might change your servitude to Satan for the service of Christ.

Your talents of mind, the aspirations of your soul, the powers of your body—all are Christ's. Your time, your money, your influence, your prayers, your thoughts, your heart—all are Christ's. His commands came to you as to a steward, and he requires that you be faithful. He leaves His work in your hands, and as the redeemed of God, 'tis your work. 'Tis given to you to turn the world from sin to God; and God requires it at your hands.

Lent comes to help you realize this fact; and when you feel its influence upon your heart, you will more fully consecrate your life to the service of Him who died for you to rescue you from sin and eternal death.

The Prophet was in the Desert; the Priest on the Temple; and the King upon the Mountain. He was tempted in all points like as we are; assailed by the lust of the flesh, the lust of the eye, and the pride of life,—the flesh, the world, and the devil,—yet without sin. It teaches us how He can be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, and reminds us of the sword of the Spirit, wherewith He has shown us how to resist the devil and to make him flee from us. He overcame the devil, not in the power of His Godhead, but with the weapon which is given to man. He foiled the tempter with the word of God. His sword and shield alike were simply, "*It is written.*"

Lent presents to your mind the picture of your Lord, tempted, despised, rejected, while He was doing good and preaching the gospel of the kingdom.

Dark Gethsemene, with its bitter agony, comes to your view.

The judgment hall, the mockery, the thorns, the cross, the sight of the Redeemer, sorrowing, sighing, bleeding, dying, transfixes your eye.

Beloved, the moment you let this picture cast its impress on your heart, that moment the tear of sympathy will dim your eye, and you will pledge eternal allegiance to your loving Lord.