

DEFINITE AIM IN CHRISTIAN WORK.

No doubt very great good is wrought in this world by Christian people without any direct aim or intention. A good man or woman cannot live in any community and not by mere sly, unconscious influence be a blessing. There is an unpurposed ministry which is wrought by every one who faithfully follows Christ, a ministry not of doing but of being.

Then every earnest Christian finds many opportunities of doing good wherever he goes, chance opportunities, we may call them, not directly planned for, but things that his ready hand finds to do as he moves on in duty's path. This is right. Life's wayside ministries are of in calculable importance. The kind word or the gentle act or the delicate thoughtfulness, even the bright smile as we hurry through our busy day, may change defeat into victory or discouragement into hope, may touch dark clouds with silver, or may save a trembling soul from despair. Certainly we are to sow beside all waters, we are to do good to all as we have opportunity, we are to do whatsoever our hand finds to do.

Yet this general ministry of unconscious influence and of chance or wayside work ought not to satisfy any Christian. In addition to this, we ought to make definite plans of usefulness. Mere accidental helpfulness is apt to be very diffusive and widely scattered. It may touch a great many people in the course of a year and may do a little or a greater good to all of them; but it is not apt to impress any of them very deeply. It may give a large measure of passing happiness, but usually it leaves no permanent mark on the life or character of many people. Depth and permanence of impression are generally the result of direct and long-continued touching of a life.

Without any diminution, therefore, in the unpurposed and accidental ministry of our lives, would we not all accomplish more in the end if we made our aims of usefulness and helpfulness more direct and definite? While we try to do a thousand people a little good, would it not be better if we then selected a few people from the thousand and sought by intense and long continued effort to do the highest good that we are capable of doing for them and in their lives? This was the Christ's way.

He went about doing good. He had some blessing for every one he met who would take it. Wherever he found sickness or sorrow he was ready with his healing or comfort. But meanwhile the great work of his three public years was wrought on the lives of but twelve men. He chose those men from the thousands and took them into his personal family. He lived with them, talked to them on all subjects, took them into his confidence, opened his heart to them, taught them the deep lessons of heavenly wisdom, poured the richest life of his soul upon their poor, bare lives. The result was that while he had but a few disciples when he died the few were transformed men, thoroughly permeated with his own spirit, ready to go out and witness for him everywhere and exhibit to others the power of divine grace. Though he had but so small a number of disciples every one of them was ready to go for him to the ends of the earth, to endure any sacrifice for his sake, and to pour out his blood for his cause.

Is not the method of the Christ the true method for all of us? Suppose each earnest Christian, without being any less useful to the thousand he may have opportunity to help, should carefully select a definite number—five, ten, twenty—and set himself with earnest, deliberate purpose to make the deepest possible impression upon them. Let him write down their names and consider them in a peculiar sense his own—their lives the little bit of garden he will make it his special task to cultivate. Let him pray for these persons by name and every day. Praying for them will increase his interest in them and lead him to love them deeply and earnestly. Let him, then, draw them near to him by his considerateness and thoughtfulness, by manifestations of love and sympathy and by personal kindnesses. Let him seek every opportunity to make their lives better and more beautiful. Let him strive to impress himself upon their characters, to inspire in them all pure, holy and noble thoughts, and lead them first to Christ and into his service, and then to ever higher attainments in religious life and fuller consecration to the Master's service. Then let this purpose to be a blessing to these persons continue without weariness, without break or slackening of interest, in patience and perseverance, year after year.

There is no earnest, devoted Christian