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Introduction

These talks have been given, in substance, at various gatherings in Great Britain, Continental Europe, and parts of the Far East, during the past four years. The simple directness of the spoken word has been allowed to stand. Portions of chapters three, four, six, and eight have appeared at various times in "The Sunday School Times."

If any who read may find some practical help through the Master's gracious touch upon these simple words, they are earnestly asked to add their prayers that that same gracious touch may be felt by others wherever these talks may go.

The Lone Man Who Went Before

A Call to Friendship.

One day I watched two young men, a Japanese and an American, pacing the deck of a Japanese liner bound for San Francisco. Their heads were close together and bent down, and they were talking earnestly. The Japanese was saying, "Oh, yes, I believe all that as a theory, but is there *power* to make a man *live* it?"

He was an officer of the ship, one of the finest boats on the Pacific. The American was a young fellow who had gone out to Japan as a government teacher, and when his earnest sort of Christianity led to his dismissal he remained, and still remains, as a volunteer missionary. With his rare gift in personal touch he had won the young officer's confidence, and was explaining what Christianity stood for, when the Japanese politely interrupted him with his question about power. The tense eagerness of his manner and voice let one see the hunger of his heart. He had high ideals of life, but confessed that every time he was in port, the shore temptations proved too much, and he always came back on board with a feeling of bitter defeat. He had read about Christianity and believed it good in theory. But he knew nothing of its power.

Through his new American friend he came into personal touch with Christ, then and there. And up to the day we docked he put in his spare time bringing other Japanese to his friend's stateroom, and there more than one of them knelt, and came into warm touch of heart with the Lord Jesus.

Just so our Lord Jesus draws men, Oriental and Occidental alike. Just so He drew men when He was down here. He had great drawing power. Men came eagerly wherever they could find Him.

He drew all sorts of men. He drew the Jews, to whom He belonged racially. He drew the aggressive, domineering Romans, and the gentler cultured Greeks. He drew the half-breed Samaritans, who were despised by both Jew and foreigner, as not being either one thing or the other. The military men and the civilians, the cultured and the unlettered, the official class and those in private life, all alike felt the strong pull upon their hearts of His presence.

The pure of heart, like gentle Mary of Bethany, and the guileless Nathanael, were drawn to Him. And the very opposite, those openly bad in their life, couldn't resist His presence, and the call away from their low, bad level, but eagerly took His hand and came up. Fisherfolk and farmers, dwellers in the city and country, scholars and tradesmen, crude and refined, richly clad and ragged, — all sorts contentedly rubbed elbows and jostled each other in the crowds that came to listen, and stayed to listen longer, and then went away to come back again for more.

This was why He came — to draw men to Himself. Our Lord Jesus was the face of God looking longingly into men's faces. And they couldn't withstand the appeal of that gentle strong face. He was the voice of God talking into men's ears; and the music of that low, quiet voice thrilled and thrall'd their hearts. He was the hand of God, strong and warm, reaching down to take men by the hand and give them a strong lift up and back to the old Eden life. And, in time, as men put their hand in His, they came to feel the little knotted place in the palm of that outstretched hand, and the feel of it went strangely into their inmost being. He was the heart of God, tender and true, beating rhythmically in time and tune with the human heart. And the music had, and has, strange power of appeal to human hearts, and power to sway human lives like a great wind in the trees.

Our Lord Jesus was the person of God in human shape and human garb, come down close, to draw us men back again to the old trysting place under the Tree of Life. And in every generation, and every corner of the earth, then, and ever since then, men of every colour and sort have come back, and found how His presence eases the tug of life on many a steep roadway, and more, much more.^[1]

And our Lord Jesus drew men into personal friendship with Himself. He didn't like the long range way of doing things. Keeping men at arm's length never suited Him. He gave the inner heart touch, and He longed for the touch of the innermost heart. He was our friend. He asked that we be His friends, real friends of the rare sort, of which one's life has only a few.

And He asked, too, that all else that we brought to Him should be that which grew out of this personal friendship. He gave and did all

that He did and gave, because He was our friend. He asked only for what grew out of a real heart friendship with Himself. He longed to have us give all, yet only what our hearts couldn't hold back. His friendship has one thing peculiar to itself. He has no favourites, in our common thought of that word, among the countless numbers who have come to be included in His inner circle of friends. Yet He gives to each such a distinctive personal touch of His own heart that you feel yourself to be on closest terms. He is nearer and closer than any other, and your longing is to be as near and close to Him in life as He is to you in His heart.^[2]

Now, because we are His friends and He is our friend, He calls us to follow Him. It is a privilege of friendship. He would share with you and with me the things of His own heart and life. He wants to have us come close up to Himself, and live close up. And the only way we can do it is by giving a glad "Yes" to His invitation, and following so close that we shall be up to Himself. Nothing less than this contents His longing.

But there is more than friendship here. He has a plan of action in His heart. It is a wide-reaching plan, clear beyond our idea of what wide-reaching means. It is nothing less than a plan for the whole world, the entire race, for winning it up to the old Eden life of purity and of close walking with God. That plan is the passion of His great heart. He has held nothing back—spared nothing—that it might be done. He is thinking of that plan as He comes eagerly to you and me, now, all afresh, and with His heart in His voice says "Follow Me." This is a bit of His plan for me and for you—that we shall be partners with Him in His plan for the world.

And yet—and yet—this helping Him, this partnership, this working with Him in His plan, is to be because of our friendship, His and mine, His and yours. It is a more than friendship He is thinking of. But that more is *through* the friendship. It grows out of the friendship. Only so does it work out His real plan.

Climbing the Hilltops.

Now this "Follow Me" of His, if taken into one's life, and followed up, will come to mean two things. There are two great things that stand sharply out in our Lord Jesus' life down here, His *characteris-*

tics and His *experiences*. I mean what He was in Himself; and what He went through, suffered, enjoyed, and accomplished; the Man Himself, and the Man's experiences. These are the two things about which these simple talks will be grouped. Our Lord Jesus wants us to follow that we may climb up the hill as high as He did in these things.

Following means climbing. A friend has told recently of a journey taken to a certain village in New England from which, she had been told, a fine view could be got of the White Mountains. On arrival it seemed that a low hill completely shut out the view, to her intense disappointment. But her companion, by and by, called from the top of the low hill and eagerly beckoned her to come up. A bit of climbing quickly brought her to where the magnificent beauty of the mountains broke upon her delighted eyes.

Our Lord Jesus climbed the hilltops, both in His character and in His experiences. He wants us to share those rare hilltops with Him. He has gone away ahead of any other. He is the Lone Man in both character and experiences. And in some of His experiences He will ever remain the lone occupant of the hilltop. But He is eager for our companionship. He longs for the personal touch. He wants us to have all He has got. He has blazed a way through the thicket where there was no path before. He left the plain marks on the trees as He went through, so we could surely find the way. And now He eagerly beckons us to follow.

But following means climbing. It's a hill road, sometimes down hill, sometimes up hill. Which makes stiffer climbing? Usually the one you are doing seems the harder. Sometimes the road is a dead level between hills. And dead level walking—the monotonous dead-a-way, with no bracing air, no inspiring outlook—is often much harder than down hill or up. And so it too is climbing. Following means climbing. He climbed. He made the high climb all alone. No other ever had the courage to climb so high as He. It's easier since He has smoothed down the road with His own feet; yet it isn't easy; still it is easier than not climbing; that is, when you reckon the whole thing up—with *Him* in.

Now He asks you and me to climb. He cannot climb for you. That is, I mean He cannot do the climbing you ought to do. He has

climbed for us, marked out the hill path, and made it possible for us to climb up too. But the after-climbing He cannot do for us. Each must do his own climbing. So lungs grow deeper, and heart-action stronger, and cheeks clearer, and muscles firmer. Step by step we must pull up, maybe through a fog, with no view of beauty, no bracing air yet, only His strong beckoning hand.

But those who reach up and get hold of hands with Him, and get up even to some of the lower reaches of the climb, stand with full hearts and dumb lips. They can't find words to tell the exhilaration of the climb, the bracing air, the far outlook, and, yet more, the wondrous presence of the Chief Climber, even though there's a bit of smarting of face and hands where the thorny tanglewood tore a bit as you went by.

Just now I want you to come with me for a bit of a look at the Lone Man, who has gone before. I mean at the Man Himself. We want to take a look at the characteristics of His life; what the Man was in His character.

And please understand me here. Following does not mean that we are to try to imitate these characteristics. No, it's something both simpler and easier, and deeper and better than that. It means that, as we companion with Him daily, these same traits will appear in us. It is not to be imitation simply, good as that might seem, yet always bringing a sense of failure, and that sense the thing you remember most. It is to be some One living His life in you, coming in through the open door of your will. Your part is opening up, and keeping open, listening and loving and obeying. The touchstone of the "Follow Me" life is not imitation but following; not copying but obeying; not struggle—though there will be struggle—but companionship, a companionship which nothing is allowed to take the fine edge off of.

And please remember, too, the meaning for us sinful men of these characteristics of His. With us character is a result of choice, and then nearly always—or should I cut out that "nearly"? the earnest man in the thick of the fight finds no "nearlys"—it's always with him—character is always the result of a fight to keep to the choice decided upon.

Now with greatest reverence for our Lord Jesus, let me say, *it was so with Him*. He was as truly God as though not man. Yet He lived His life,—He insisted on living His life, on the human level.^[3] He was as truly human as though not peculiarly divine. He had the enormous advantage of a virgin birth, a divine fatherhood with a human motherhood. And, be it said with utmost reverence, He needed that advantage for the terrific conflict and the tremendous task of His life, such as no other has known. But His character as a man—the thing we are to look at now—was a result of choice, and choice insisted upon against terrible odds.

This gives new meaning to His "Follow Me." He went the same sort of road that we must go. He insisted on treading *our* road. It was not one made easier for His specially prepared feet. It was the common earth road every man must go, who will. And so the way He went we can go if we will, every step of it. By His help working through our wills, we *can*, and, please God, surely we will.

The Dependent Life.

There were *three traits in His character upward*, that is in His relation with His Father. First of all He chose to live *the dependent life*. He recognized that everything He was, and had, and could do, was received from the Father, and could be at its true best only as the Father's direct touch was upon it. This was the atmosphere in which all His human powers would do their best. He had nothing of Himself, and could do nothing of Himself. This is the plan the Father has made for human life and effort.^[4] Our Lord Jesus recognized this and lived it. Our common word for this is humility. Humility is a matter of relationship. It means keeping one's relationship with the Father clear and dominant. And this in turn radically affects and controls our relationship with our fellows.

There were three degrees or steps in the dependent life He chose to live. There was the giving up part, then the accepting for Himself the plan of human life, and then accepting it even to the extent of yielding to wrong and shameful treatment, without attempting to assert His rights against such treatment. These were the three steps in His humility. In Paul's striking phrase, He "emptied out" of Himself all He had in glory with the Father before coming to the earth;

He decided to come to the human level and live fully the human life of utter dependence; and He carried this to the extent of being wholly dependent on the Father for righting the wrongs done Him.^[5]

This is God's plan for the human life. It is to be a dependent life. It actually is a dependent life, utterly dependent upon Him. It is to be lived so. Then only is the fragrance of it gotten. It is part of the dependent life—the true human life—that we depend on the Father for vindication when wronged, as for everything else.^[6]

Our Lord Jesus chose to live this life. There was an entire absence of the self-spirit, that is the self-assertive, the self-confident spirit. There was a remarkable confidence in action, but it was confidence in His Father's unfailing response to His requests or needs. This sense of utter dependence was natural to Him; as indeed it is natural to man unhurt by sin. And then He carefully cultivated it. As He came in contact with the very opposite all around Him, He set Himself—indeed He had to set Himself—to keeping this sense of dependence untainted, unhurt by His surroundings.

Now there were three things which naturally grew out of this dependent life, or which naturally are part of it. One was, the sense of His Father, and of His Father's presence. In a perfectly simple natural way, He was always conscious of His Father's presence. Is this the meaning—one meaning—of "blessed are the pure in heart for they shall *see God*"? And then He doubtless set Himself to cultivate this, as an offset to what He found around Him. He would quietly look up and speak to the Father in the midst of a crowd.^[7] This was the natural thing to do. He was more conscious of the Father's presence than of the crowd pressing in to get near. When He was speaking to the crowd He knew the Father too was listening. He felt the Father watching as He helped the people. This was the natural thing with Him, the presence of the Father.

With this there went a second thing, the habit of getting alone to talk things over with the Father. The common word for this is prayer. Without doubt His whole outer life grew out of His inner secret talking things out with the Father. Everything was passed in review here, first of all. This naturally grew out of the consciousness of His Father's presence, and this in turn increased that consciousness. So

He was in the habit of looking at everything through His Father's eyes.

And with these two, there was plainly a third thing, a settled sense of the power, the authority, of God's written Word. It was not simply that He did not question it, but there was a deep-rooted sense grown down into His very being that God was speaking in the Book, and that this revelation of Himself and His will was *the thing* to govern absolutely one's life. This points back to a study of the Book. Doubtless that Nazareth shop was a study shop too. He quoted readily and freely from all portions of the Old Testament Bible. He seemed saturated with both its language and its spirit. The basis of such familiarity would be long, painstaking, prayerful study.

These three things naturally grew out of the dependent life He had deliberately chosen to live and were a part of it. They were necessary to it. These are the lungs and the heart of the dependent life.

Now His "Follow Me" does not mean merely that we try to imitate Him in all this. We will naturally long to do so. And He is the example we will ever be eager to follow. But the meaning goes deeper than this. It means that as we really come close up in the road behind Him this will come to be the natural atmosphere of our lives. We let *Him* in, and His presence within, yielded to and cultivated and obeyed, will work this sort of thing out in our lives. We will come to recognize, and then to feel deep down in our spirit, how dependent we are upon Him in everything. We will gradually come to realize intensely that the dependent life is the true natural life. It is God's plan. It reveals wondrously His love. It draws out wondrously our love, and radically changes the whole spirit of the life.

Poor – Except in Spirit.

Now of course all this is in sharpest contrast to the common spirit of life as men live, then and now. The spirit that dominates human life everywhere is a spirit of independence. And this seems intensified in our day to a terrific degree. There is, of course, a good independence in our dealings with our fellows. But this is carried to the

extreme of independence of every one, even—say it softly—of God Himself. Criticising God, ignoring Him, leaving Him severely out so far as we are concerned,—this has become the commonplace. If for a moment He ignored us, how quickly things would go to pieces! This has come to be the dominant spirit of the whole race to a degree more marked than ever before, if that be possible.

It seems to come into life early. I have seen a little tot, whom I could with no inconvenience have tucked under my arm, walking down the road, head up in the air, breathing out an aggressive self-confidence, and defiance of all around, worthy of one of the old-time kings. And I recognized that he had simply absorbed the atmosphere in which his four brief years had been lived.

This has come to be the inbred spirit of mankind. Everywhere this proud, self-assertive, self-sufficient, self-confident, self-aggressive spirit is found, in varying degree. It is coupled sometimes with laughable ignorance; sometimes with real learning and wisdom and culture. It is emphasized sometimes the more by school training, and other such advantages. But through all these accidental things it remains,—the dominant human characteristic. The chief letter in man's alphabet is the one next after h, spelled and written with a large capital. The yellow fever—the fever for gold—so increasingly epidemic, is at heart a bit of the same thing. The money gives power, and power gives a certain independence of others, and then a certain compelling of others to be dependent on the one who has the money and wields the power. Men everywhere say just exactly what they are specially warned against saying, "*my* power and the might of *my* hand hath gotten me this wealth." They forget the words following this in the old Book of God. "But thou shalt remember the Lord thy God, for it is *He* that giveth thee power to get wealth."^[8]

This seems to be the picture that underlies that phrase, "poor in spirit," which the Master declared to be so blessed.^[9] He is trying to woo men away from the thing that is dominating those all around Him. I have puzzled a good bit over the phrase to find out just what was in the Master's mind. Emphasizing the word "spirit" seems to bring out the meaning. The blessedness is not in being poor, but in a

certain spirit that may control a man. We are all poor in everything except spirit.

The last degree of poverty is to be a pauper. Now, the simple truth is that we are all—every last man of us—paupers in everything. We haven't a thing we haven't got from some one else. We are beneficiaries to the last degree, dependent on the bounty of Another. We are paupers in life itself. Our life came to us in the first instance from the creative Hand, through the action of others, and it is being sustained every moment by the same Hand. We had nothing to do with its coming, and, while we influence our life by living in accord with certain physical laws, still the life itself is all the time being supplied to us directly by the same unseen Hand.

We are paupers in ability, in virtue, in character, in fact in everything. We own nothing; we only hold it in trust. We have nothing except what some One else is supplying. What we call our ability, our genius, and so on, comes by the creative breath breathing afresh upon and through what the patient creative Hand has supplied and is sustaining. We are paupers, without a rag to our bones, or a copper in the pocket we haven't got, not having a rag to our bones; paupers in everything except— —.

There is an exception. It is both pitiable and laughable. We are enormously rich in *spirit*, in our imagination, in our thought of ourselves. Blessed are they who are as poor in spirit as they actually are in everything else. They recognize that they are wholly dependent on some One else, and so they live the dependent life, with its blessed closeness of touch with the gracious Provider. In certain institutions are placed those who imagine themselves to be in high social and official rank, and in possessions what they are not, who imagine it to such a degree that it is best that they be kept apart from others. It would seem like an extreme thing to say that these people are spirit-mirrors in which we may partly see ourselves. Yet it would be saying the truth. How laughable, if it were not so overwhelmingly pitiful, must men look to God,—without a stitch to their backs except what He has given, without a copper in their pockets except what has been borrowed from His bank, yet strutting up and down the street of life, heads held high in air, as though they owned the universe, and—if it did not sound blasphemous I

could add the rest of the fact—and were doing Him a favour by running His world so skilfully! And it grieves one to the heart to note that this seems to be about as true within Church circles as without. The difference between is ever growing smaller to the disappearing point.

It was into such an atmosphere, never intenser than in Palestine and Jerusalem nineteen centuries ago, that the man Christ Jesus came. And He had the moral daring to begin living a dependent life, the true human life, looking up gratefully to the Father's hand for everything. Was it any wonder His presence caused such a disturbance in the moral atmosphere of the world! He insisted, with the strange insistence of gentleness, on living such a life, through all the extremes that the hating world-spirit could contrive against Him. Out of such a life comes His "Follow Me." And in this He is simply calling us back to the original human life as planned by God.

Now, of course, in that first step, that great "emptying out" step, there can be no following. There He is the Lone Man, unapproachable in the moral splendour of His solitude. But from the time when He came in amongst us as Jesus, our Brother, the typical Son of man, He was marking out afresh the original road for our feet. This was the foundation trait in His character. He lived the dependent life.

A Father-pleasing Life.

The second trait in His upward relation was this—He chose to live a *Father-pleasing life*. I use those words because He used them.^[10] I might say "consecrated" or "dedicated" or "surrendered" or other like words. And these are good words, but in common use we have largely lost their meaning. They are used unthinkingly for something less—much less—than they mean. Perhaps if we use the phrase He used we may be able to get back to the thing He meant, and did.

There are three possible lives open to every man's choice: a bad life, in which selfishness or passion or both, either refined or coarse, rule; a good, true, natural life; and a Father-pleasing life. By a good, true, natural life I mean, just now, a really Christian life in all that

that means, but lived as if there were no emergency in the world to change one's habit of life.

You know an emergency coming into a man's life makes radical changes. You go to bed tonight and ordinarily will sleep out your eight hours in comfort and quiet. If a fire break out in the house, you are up in the middle of the night, hurrying around, only partly clad, carrying out valuables, or helping turn on water, or something of this sort. Your natural arrangements for the night are all broken up by the fire. An emergency may make radical changes in one's life for a little time, sometimes for the whole life. Financial reverses may change the whole habit of one's life.

Here's a man who has a well-assured, good-sized income from his business, or his inheritance, or both. He lives in a luxuriously appointed home, with many fine pictures and works of art and curios which it is enjoyable to have. He has a choice library including some fine costly old prints and editions, and enjoys adding rare books on subjects in which he is specially interested. He belongs to some literary and social and athletic clubs. He has an interesting family growing up around him whose education is being carefully looked after. He is an earnest Bible-loving Christian, faithful in church attendance and church duties, pure in life, and saintly in character. He gives liberally to church and benevolent objects, including foreign missions, which have become a part of the church system into which he fits. And he goes an even, contented round of life, home, church, club, recreation and so on, year in and out, holding and using the great bulk of his money for himself. I think of that as one illustration of the good, true, natural life.

Now, the Father-pleasing life is radically different in certain things. Ordinarily the two would be identical. The true natural life as originally planned for us would be the life pleasing to the Father. But something, not a part of God's plan, has broken into life, a terrible something, worse than a fire in the night, or a financial panic that sweeps away your all. Sin has wrought fearful havoc; it has made an awful emergency, and this emergency has affected the life and character of all the race, in a bad way, terribly, awfully, beyond words to tell, or imagination to depict. The whole earth is in the grip of a desperate moral emergency.