

# Choosing a Life Calling

An....  
Address to  
Christian  
Young Men



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## CHOOSING A LIFE-CALLING.

By Reverend E. Y. Mullins, D. D.

### The Basis for Choosing a Calling.

This address is to Christian young men, such as have yielded themselves to Christ and desire the coming of his Kingdom in the world. Every thoughtful boy, even, thinks more or less on the question of his life work, and sooner or later must face the matter squarely and decide. Often of course it happens that the first decision is revised and another and sometimes a totally different one is reached. This is because the boy frequently decides upon the basis of a partial knowledge of himself, his aptitudes and desires, or of the needs and opportunities. Happy is he who holds his final decision back until he is entirely clear in mind as to duty and desire, and happy is he who holds himself in the attitude of earnest inquiry on the subject.

It is fair to assume certain things in advance regarding the young man whose life is directed by the Christian aim and inspired by the Christian motive.

1. It may be safely assumed that he does not regard his life as an accident.

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He does not imagine that it matters little how he spends it. With Christ's teachings about human life and destiny, and about the Providential guidance of the heavenly Father before his mind, he will surely feel that his life is real and that it is earnest. Bushnell is not wrong when he says, "Every human soul has a complete and perfect plan, cherished for it in the heart of God—a divine biography marked out, which it enters into life to live." Of every soul the words of Scripture are true, "Even for this same purpose have I raised thee up that I might show my power in thee, and that my name might be declared throughout all the earth."

2. It may be assumed also that the Christian young man will not desire to settle the question of his life-work on a purely self-regarding basis. It is of the essence of the Christian life to wish to impart blessings to others. Man is inherently a social being. He cannot live as a detached individual and be true to Christ. Three things are essential to real Christian character even after the beginnings of the Christian life have been planted in the heart by faith. These three are self-discipline, self-development and self-giving. All of these processes are carried on under the guidance of the Christian motive and ideal. And self-

discipline and self-development without self-giving make but a fragmentary life.

3. A third assumption is that the Christian young man will be more interested in men than in things. A factory, or a bank, or a gold mine, or a stock farm, is an interesting object of human thought and activity. Geology and chemistry and mathematics are fascinating fields of study, and of absorbing interest to those who are attracted by them. But a Christian man cannot make any of these things primary in his thought. For the eternal passion which Christ kindled in men's bosoms is the passion for humanity, the higher welfare of men. A young man just entering the ministry remarked in a graphic manner regarding his choice of a calling: "Some study insects, and others study rocks, and yet others gaze at the stars, but to me the most fascinating of all sciences are those which relate to men, and of these sciences those with which the Christian ministry is concerned rank first." Of course I do not mean that the ministry in the technical sense is the only proper calling of the Christian, but only that to him in every vocation the primary interest is in persons and not in things. The things and their pursuit must somehow be made to keep a secondary place.

4. It may be assumed also that the

Christian young man will think about his career in a large way. Cecil Rhodes, the founder of the Oxford scholarships and apostle of British rule in Africa, said that some men think in parishes and others in continents, but God thinks in planets, and that any man who truly succeeds must think as God thinks. The small man thinks small thoughts and lives a petty life without the inspiration of any grand ideals. But every great life in any calling is that of one who has learned to "think imperially." Such a life will inevitably seek the sphere of highest service. It will ask, how can I be most useful to my fellowmen? It will have decision of character and courage sufficient to rise above the ordinary and conventional aims and standards of men and make its choice after estimating life on the great scale of eternal values. It will ask, what is Christ's will for me? How can I best reproduce his life on earth?

The above are the general assumptions underlying every earnest Christian life. We next look at some aspects of the Christian ministry as a sphere of service.

### **The Divine Call.**

The call to the ministry is not the specific subject of this tract; hence a few words about it will be sufficient. Essen-

tially a call to the ministry for you is the abiding conviction that God's will is that you should preach the Gospel, combined with some evidence of fitness on your part and some indications that you may be useful in this calling. God makes his will known in so many different ways that they cannot be foreseen or described, but it is not difficult to learn what that will is if there is an earnest heart and a teachable spirit.

### **The Need of Ministers.**

There can be no question of the fact that there is great need of more ministers. I do not here discuss causes. The fact has been demonstrated in many ways. Hundreds of churches to-day are having serious difficulty in finding pastors. A prominent Baptist official in one of the states of the middle west recently said to the writer that in his state alone every man who might be graduated in one or two of the leading seminaries for the next ten years could easily find good fields of labor.

Here are some figures which set forth the general situation. They are for the year 1903, but doubtless they hold for today relatively. There has of course been increase, but the proportion of ministers to churches is about the same. I give the figures for a few only of the

leading denominations. In 1903 among the Baptists of the North there were 7,613 ministers and 9,014 churches; with the Southern Baptists (white), 12,759 ministers and 20,161 churches. Among the colored Baptists there were 10,729 ministers and 15,614 churches. There are numerous other Baptist bodies which I cannot name here. The totals for all Baptists in the United States are 35,829 ministers and 51,492 churches. Estimating one minister to each church, which would be the ideal arrangement, there is a shortage of over 15,000 ministers.

For the other leading denominations the figures for 1903 are as follows:

	Ministers.	Churches.
Disciples of Christ...	6,567	11,157
Congregationalists ...	6,213	5,891
Lutherans .....	1,467	2,136
Methodists .....	39,634	57,572
Presbyterians .....	12,393	15,452
Episcopal .....	5,150	6,867
Reformed .....	1,919	2,491
United Brethren.....	2,368	4,861

The grand total, including many smaller bodies not named in the above list for lack of space, is—ministers, 149,963; churches, 196,719, or 46,756 fewer ministers than churches. Of course in many cases in the country districts one minister serves more than one church, but with the increasing prosperity of



the country this arrangement is rapidly giving place to the better one which leads each church to employ a minister for all his time.

There are other facts which emphasize the need of more ministers. Like all other callings, some men do not succeed in the ministry and drop out of the pastorate into other callings. These often continue to be counted as ministers in tables of statistics. Again, hundreds of the ablest of them occupy positions as mission secretaries, editors, professors and presidents of schools. Besides these the ranks of the ministry at home are constantly being drawn upon to supply the demands of the foreign mission field.

### **The Ministry and Other Spheres of Effort.**

Compare the ministry, then, with some other spheres of activity, and what is its appeal to the young man? Beyond question the openings for business careers were never so numerous or inviting as today. If a man cares supremely for money, if sordid or other kind of temporal gain is the acme of his ambition, the crown in his eyes of earthly success; if the hero of his dreams and ideals is the man on whose brow is the aureole of financial triumph, if the sign manual of all that is worth living for is the dollar mark, then the ministry will make but

a feeble appeal to the modern young man. But I do not believe the youth of the twentieth century are unresponsive to other ideals, and while recognizing the value of wealth as an instrument of good, and rejoicing in the useful careers of many laymen who are faithful stewards of the manifold grace of God in the use of wealth, nevertheless many of our best young men will say there is a higher, better life, a more glorious career.

We may refer also to law, and medicine, as fields of usefulness. Many noble men devote their lives to noble service in these callings. But in neither is the motive or the ideal quite so exalted, or the conception of life and its opportunities so sublime, as in the ministry. Medicine affords a splendid opportunity to minister to the body, and this is a service beautiful and Christlike, but more beautiful, more Christlike, and nearer to the throbbing heart of the Master are the service and motive, the passion and enthusiasm, which held a Paul, a Peter, a John, a Chrysostom, a Spurgeon, a Phillips Brooks, a Broadus, in their mighty grip. These men were the servants of humanity for Jesus' sake, and they devoted their lives utterly to the regeneration, first spiritually and afterwards temporally, of the entire human race.

Teaching is another large sphere of

usefulness, but it is below the ministry in dignity and power. Teaching in general molds the intellect, preaching regenerates the heart. Teaching inspires to attainment, preaching communicates the gift of God. Teaching relates the human spirit to ideas and books, preaching relates it to the divine. Teaching dispels the mists of ignorance, preaching breaks the fetters of sin. Teaching can make one a child of culture, preaching makes him a child of God. Noble callings these, teaching and preaching, but the greater is preaching.

#### **As a Field for Development.**

No field equals the ministry for the development of an all-round manhood. Business trains the self-regarding faculty. The money-making gift has had phenomenal development in our day, but it tends to one-sidedness of character. The ministry, on the other hand, should develop all that is best in men. It develops the intellect. The intellectual universe lies open to the preacher. No form of knowledge is without use to him. With the vast stretches of a boundless realm of natural and revealed truth, its every part throwing out to him the inspiring challenge, "Come and see!" no man is more stimulated to intellectual effort than the preacher. And then where did knowl-

edge ever find so noble a use as in the preacher's work?

The ministry also develops the heart as no other calling. The preacher is baptized into "a sense of all human conditions." He weeps with those who weep and rejoices with those who rejoice. He knows human sorrow. As one has said: "He goes into business with the venturesome boy, and seeks truth with the enthusiastic student, and goes to Congress with the politician, and grows rich with the prosperous merchant, and fails with the bankrupt, and enters into peace with the old man who has weathered the storms and anchored in the harbor of his fireside." Like his Master, he bears the griefs and carries the sorrows of many, but the joy of his calling is that he knows that there is a balm in Gilead, and that earth hath no sorrow that heaven cannot heal, and the task of his life is to apply the leaves of healing to wounded hearts.

And then, spiritually, what an opportunity for growth the ministry affords! Dwelling in God and with God, laboring with the Holy Spirit, feeling in the onward trend and impulse of his life the heartbeat of the eternal purpose, knowing the secret of the ages, even God's redemptive purpose, how can he fail to

grow, to rise up on wings as eagles, to run and not weary, to walk and not faint.

### **The Appeal to Ambition.**

The ministry appeals to the unselfish in us as does no other calling, but at the same time it appeals to the heroic in us. Christ does not want the effeminate young man—the society exquisite, who is afraid to soil his hands, the indolent in mind or body, the self-indulgent and ease-loving, in his ministry. He wants stalwart men, with a purpose, who are willing to do and dare for truth and for humanity. An unambitious man has no place in the ministry. But here ambition must be holy as well as high. The higher, the better, if it is holy, and in the ministry the greater the fall, in the end, if the ambition is unhallowed, earthly, sensual, devilish.

### **The Opportunity of the Ministry.**

The opportunity of the ministry is so vast and inspiring that it is difficult to state it. Perhaps we may set it forth by an analogy or comparison. Just as the task of man in our day, on the material side, is to reconstruct the world in his own image; so on the spiritual side it is to reconstruct the world in God's image. The man in business erects a dwelling to promote human comfort, or he constructs a bridge or a tunnel to facili-

tate transportation, or he develops a mine to increase the mineral wealth of the world. The young man in business goes sometimes as a missionary of commerce to open up new lines of trade in China or South America or Africa. He dreams of the great things that are to be in the commercial development of the world. It is not difficult to understand why these enterprises appeal with such power to the ambitious young man of today. The life of enterprise and of danger and that which holds out promise of financial reward will attract many. It appeals to the imagination.

Now contrast this with the moral and spiritual enterprise of Christianity. A moral kingdom is arising among us, slowly it may be, almost imperceptibly indeed, and yet certainly. There is a vast army of men, ministers who identify themselves with this moral kingdom. Each one says: "I will try to save men; my task shall be to relieve human misery; my joy shall be to give the helping hand and preach a gospel of hope. The world needs truth and it needs justice. I will devote myself to bringing in the reign of righteousness. There are moral plague spots in our cities; I will spend myself in trying to remove them. There are dark places on the face of this planet as large as continents, coextensive with great na-

tions and races; I will plant the banner of Christ's truth there, and I will strive to make the wilderness and the solitary place to rejoice and the desert to blossom as the rose."

Here, too, is a vast and inspiring opportunity to which Christ invites young men. Here, too, are enterprise and danger, an enterprise which appeals to the imagination, and a practical task of wonderful meaning. It is not surprising that many of the best are responding to Christ's call. At the recent Student Volunteer Convention thousands of the very pick of the young manhood of the country assembled from the various institutions of learning to deliberate not over any commercial or military enterprise, not even over the best methods of playing foot ball, although there were doubtless experts in the game present; but rather to consider the question how they could extend a helping hand to their brothers in China and Africa and India, who are less fortunate than they.

Phillips Brooks is right when he says: "The time must come again, as it has come in other days, when our young men shall feel the vitality of the Christian ministry, and seek it with the heroic consecration of their lives. If they could only know that it is of all lives richest in experience, that in it the passion to live

finds fullest satisfaction! What is it to live? To crawl on the dust leaving a trail which the next shower hastens to wash away? Is it to breathe the breath of heaven as the tortoise does, and to bask in the sunshine like a lizard? Or is it to leap and run and quiver with vitality, to do things, to learn things, to become things every day? Is it to touch the eternal forces that are behind everything with one hand, and to lay the other on the quivering needles and the beating hammers of this common life? Is it to deal with God and to deal with man? Is it to use powers to their utmost and to find ever new power coming out in them constantly with their use? If this is life, then there is no man who lives more than the minister, and the generous youth whose cry is 'let me live while I live,' must some day feel the vitality of great service of God and man, and press in through the sacred doors saying 'Let me, too, be a minister'."