

J.R. Miller:

What is it to number our days? One way is to keep careful record of them. That is a mathematical numbering. We say we are so many years old. We note our birthdays. But that is not the numbering which is meant in the old Bible prayer, "Teach us to number our days." Mere adding of days--is not living. There are those whose years leave no blessing in the world, and who gather no growth of good or wisdom into their own hearts--as they pass through life. There are people who live to be seventy years, eighty years old--who might as well never have been born.

Another way of numbering our days is illustrated by the story of a prisoner. When he first entered his cell, he made marks on the wall, of all the days of the sentence he was to serve. Then at the close of each day--he would rub off one mark. He had one day more of prison life put in, and there was one day less for him to remain. This process he continued until he had completed the time of his incarceration. Each one of us every evening--has one day more expunged from his appointed time on earth. One day more is gone, with its opportunities, its privileges, its duties, its responsibilities gone beyond recall. We can never get it back to change anything, to undo any wrong done in it, to do any omitted duties that belonged to it, to take any gift or blessing that was offered and rejected during the bright hours, to seize any opportunity that came and passed.

There is something startling in this thought of the irrevocableness of time past. At the close of a day one line more is blotted from the column, and gone forever from us. If we have lived the day well, it is all right. Days that go from us filled with true, sweet, noble living, the little page written all over with pure, white thoughts and records of gentle deeds, need never be mourned over. But it is a sad thing to have to rub out the lines of days of idleness, of impurity, of selfishness, of lost opportunities, of unaccepted privileges and blessings. Such numbering of days is not the numbering Moses had in mind. Such days are lost days.

The true way of numbering our days, is suggested in the prayer in the old Psalm when we read it in full, "So teach us to number our days--that we may get a heart of wisdom." We are so to live our days as they pass--that we shall get new wisdom from them. Life's lessons cannot all be learned from books. The teachings may be set down in books--but it is only in actual living that we can learn them. For example, patience. A book or a teacher may tell us very clearly what patience is, what it does, how it bears itself amid life's frictions; but learning all this will not make us patient. We must get our patience in the school of life.

We talk of learning from the experience of other people. There are things we can get in this way. Probably we ought to learn more than most of us do--from those who have gone over the way before us. But the truth is, we have to go over the path ourselves, to get its lessons. We have to learn by doing, by failing, by stumbling, by suffering, by making our own mistakes, by enduring the results and consequences of our own self-conceit and folly.

Out of the experience of our days--we ought to get a heart of wisdom. Some people never do. Said the wise man, "Though you grind a fool in a mortar, grinding him like grain with a pestle, you will not remove his folly from him." Proverbs 27:22. There are plenty of such fools, all the time. They make the same mistake over and over, suffering always from it in the same way--but never learning wisdom from the experience! This is most unprofitable living. We ought to get a heart of wisdom, from the passing days.

We come to a birthday or a new year. We cannot change anything that has been done in our past year. It is idle even to waste a moment in weeping over the mistakes we have made, the follies we have committed. Tears will blot out nothing--that life has written on its turned pages. Grieving will not correct mistakes. But we ought to learn wisdom from the year's experiences. "To err is human;" but we ought not to repeat our errings. We ought not to need to burn our fingers twice, in the same fire. We ought not to be deceived twice, by the same temptation.

We ought to begin our new year with a wiser heart. Life should be cumulative. Each year should be lived on a higher plane than the last one--with a truer view of life's object, with increased energy. The hurts made this year by the things that have happened to us--should become new adornments and enrichments in our character. If we are living right, obediently, and near the heart of Christ--all things will work together for good to us. It is the part of wisdom, to take out of all things the good which the love of God would give to us.

No matter, then, what the experience of any closing year has been to us--it is our privilege and the part of wisdom in us to carry from it some good. It is sad indeed if we have lived through three hundred and sixty-five days, with their burdens, duties, cares, sorrows, gains, losses, joys, pains, mistakes, successes, failures,

loves--and are no wiser, no better, stronger, more Christlike, than we were when we crossed the threshold of the year! He who has lived well, carries the marks of the year's experiences in his character in larger, truer, nobler, stronger manhood.

Some people talk sadly of the closing of a year. They think of it as a friend with whom they have walked in close companionship, from whom they must now separate themselves. We talk of the dying of the year, when we approach its close; but better is the thought that it is a living year from which we are parting. No year in which we have lived and wrought, ever can be a dead year.

If we have lived truly, earnestly, wisely--any year we have passed through, is to us indeed a living year. It lives in us in its lessons, its advances, its impressions, its influences, its new strength gained in struggle, its victories, its testings, its cleansings, its new revealings of God, its friendships and fellowships. It lives in us, too, in its losses which have been turned to gains, its sorrows which have been illumined by divine comfort.

Then the year lives, too, if we have been faithful in love's duty, in the things we have done, in the words we have spoken, the influences of good we have given out. We have dropped seeds and planted trees, which shall be growing and bearing fruit long years hence. If we have numbered our days aright, an old year is indeed a living year, crowded with life--a year which shall make the world's life better, sweeter, richer, nobler.

The lesson may be broken up a little. We so number our days aright, when we give to each one as it passes, its own measure of faithfulness. Our days come to us 'one by one'. God breaks up His great years, into 'little sections' for us--that we may be able to get along with our work, our burdens, and our struggles. He who has learned this secret--has gained a heart of wisdom.

Take the 'single days' as they come to you. Do not look beyond the horizon which night stretches so short a way before you. Take the 'one little day'. Do all its duties faithfully; accept its blessings; seize its opportunities; endure its trials; meet its temptations victoriously; bear its burdens; receive its blessings; miss not its privileges; do all the kindness you can; make it a beautiful day.

Anyone can live one single day sweetly, victoriously. Make today beautiful. Then do the same with tomorrow, and with the next day--and so on to the end of your life. Thus you will 'number your days' in a way that will make each one profitable. Thus you will write on each day's page--a record of which you will not be ashamed when it is spread before you on the judgment day.

We can never number our days rightly, if we do not have God in them. We ask God to teach us to number our days. One of the first lessons of true wisdom we have to learn--is that we cannot leave God out of our life. Human guidance has its place. It is one of Christ's ways of guiding us. We all feel stronger for tried human companionship, for wise human counsel; but the human is not enough. Human wisdom is fallible; human strength is often weakness. We must have Christ as guide and companion. Our morning prayer each day should be, "Lord, teach me to number my days."

We need God's forgiveness, on the best of our days. Can we hold up our hands before God at the close of any day, and say, "I am free from sin. I have lived this day perfectly. I have not blotted any of its white moments. I have spoken only good words. I have done only right things. I have no sins to confess"? We have failed in our endeavors. We have fallen below even our own ideals. We have done things we ought not to have done; we have left undone things we ought to have done! We have failed in our duties to each other--love's duties, We have not been always charitable toward the faults and infirmities of others. We have not been always kind, gentle, and forgiving. We have not been always the good Samaritan to the wounded ones whom we have found in life's tragic way.

Then toward God we have been remiss. We have done at best--only fragments of our duty. There is not one day when our evening prayer could be closed without the confession of sin and the pleading for mercy.

We need God, too, in getting a heart of wisdom from our experiences. As soon as we find a fault in our disposition or character, we should set to work to have it cured. As soon as we see a duty which we ought to do--but which thus far we have failed to do, we should immediately begin doing it. We should be ever reaching after the finest things in life and character, whatever things are true, whatever things are lovely. When we make a mistake, it is idle to spend time weeping over it--tears wash out no blot, and make no amends. Rather we should put all the energy of our regret--into better living, guarding well lest we fall into the same error again tomorrow, and tomorrow, and tomorrow, until our feet have worn a path for themselves in the wrong way!

Numbering Our Days

The wisdom we expect to get from experience--is wisdom for life, that we may daily grow in beauty of soul, in strength of character, and in helpfulness to our fellow-men. In all this we need God. We never can reach true spiritual loveliness, without continual divine help. As the sweetest flower needs the sunshine and the rain and dew from heaven, so do our lives need heaven's blessing to give them true loveliness!