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A Life *Fully Surrendered* to God

“FOR THE EYES OF THE LORD
RUN TO AND FRO THROUGH-
OUT THE WHOLE EARTH, TO
SHOW HIMSELF STRONG ON
BEHALF OF THOSE WHOSE
HEART IS LOYAL TO HIM.”

—2 CHRONICLES 16:9

When Dwight Lyman Moody set out to see the world at the tender age of seventeen, God and Christianity were far from his mind. He was determined to make himself rich—and to leave behind the backbreaking farm labor and poverty that had defined his youth.

Because Moody's father had died unexpectedly when Dwight and his siblings were young, his mother struggled hard to feed and care for the family, with the children working and

contributing whatever sustenance they could as they grew older. Though Moody was respectful of his mother and loved her, he was also restless and wanted to break away from the monotony of life in rural New England. Eager for material success, he left home and headed for Boston—with several strikes against him. He had no money, no place to stay, and no assurance of a job, and he was barely literate, with only about four or five patchwork years of schooling.

Through the years, Dwight's mother, Betsy, had read to the children from a Bible at night. Evidently the seeds had not taken root in Dwight's heart, for he showed no interest in spiritual matters at the time he left home. For several days he walked the streets of Boston in search of a job, but without success. His earthy country-boy attire and rough mannerisms evoked stares of contempt and ridicule from the city-cultured Bostonians and raised doubts in the minds of prospective employers. Dwight's uncle, Samuel Holton, had a shoe store in town, but initially Dwight was too prideful to ask his relative for a job; he also knew his uncle to be a stern taskmaster. Besides, this same uncle had earlier told him to stay away from Boston because he wouldn't fit in well.

After several days of fruitless searching, Moody humbled himself and asked his uncle Samuel for work. Samuel was willing to hire the young man—but with two stipulations: First, the hardheaded youth had to be willing to adhere to his uncle's

exacting methods of work, and second, he was to attend church with his uncle each Sunday.

Moody's attendance at church was regular, but his chief pre-occupation continued to be financial gain. Then one day Moody's Sunday school teacher, Edward Kimball, came to the shoe store to talk with Moody. Kimball's visit led the young man to a spiritual awakening:

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When I was in Boston I used to attend a Sunday school class, and one day I recollect my teacher came around behind the counter of the shop I was at work in, and put his hand upon my shoulder, and talked to me about Christ and my soul. I had not felt that I had a soul till then. I said to myself: "This is a very strange thing. Here is a man who never saw me till lately, and he is weeping over my sins, and I never shed a tear about them." . . . It was not long after that I was brought into the Kingdom of God.¹

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—MOODY'S FIRST GOAL: \$100,000—

After Moody became a Christian, he continued to attend church and work for his uncle. But eventually youthful restlessness beckoned again for him to move onward, and in the fall of 1856 he took a train westward to Chicago, a wild and

fast-growing city that abounded with opportunities for aggressive young men like Moody. Chicago was also a much better fit with his personality, as he had always felt out of place in the high-society populace in Boston and at his uncle's church. By this time, Moody had set his sights on building a personal fortune of \$100,000.

It didn't take long for Moody to find work in the Windy City. Taking advantage of the experience gleaned from his uncle's business, he was hired at a footwear store. His drive for personal gain must have been obvious, as one of the proprietors said of him, "His ambition made him anxious to lay up money."² And one of Moody's fellow clerks observed,

Moody was a first-rate salesman. It was his particular pride to make his column foot up the largest of any on the book, not only in the way of sales, but also of profits. He took particular delight in trading with notional or unreasonable people; especially when they made great show of smartness and cunning, and thought themselves extraordinarily wise. Nothing was ever misrepresented in the smallest particular; but when it came to be a question of sharpness and wit between buyer and seller, Moody generally had the best of it.³

It was evident by now that when Moody devoted his energies to a task, he didn't do so halfheartedly. He went all out, holding nothing back. And no one else could keep up with him.

Within four years, Moody had saved up around \$10,000—no small feat in a day when most men seldom earned more than a few hundred dollars per year. He was making solid progress toward his financial goal. But during this time, another passion began to burn within him. Upon arriving in Chicago, he had dutifully become a regular churchgoer, but a notable turn took place in his heart during his first year in the Windy City. A spiritual awakening of sorts swept the city, and in a letter written to his mother on January 6, 1857, Moody wrote, “There is a great revival of religion in this city.”⁴ Up to this time Moody had been actively inviting people off the streets to attend church with him, yet he hadn’t taken steps to show personal concern for their spiritual condition. But during this period of revival, Moody met and came under the care of Christian mentors who inspired him to take a more serious interest in prayer, spiritual growth, and evangelism.

–PUTTING GOD’S WILL FIRST–

Moody’s zeal in spiritual endeavors grew quickly and soon matched the diligence he applied to his business dealings. In time, Moody’s passion for ministering to people—particularly the poorest children in Chicago—grew to the point where it was a challenge for him to divide his energies between church and business. While Moody still lacked in personal spiritual development and ministry skills, he experienced tremendous success in his church work. As a result, the varied demands

upon his time grew greater. What's more, he sensed God's calling upon his life—a calling for him not just to serve the Lord but to make it his full-time occupation. Some twenty-five years later at a Christian workers' conference, Moody related the struggle in this way:

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When I came to Jesus Christ, I had a terrible battle to surrender my will, and to take God's will. When I gave up business, I had another battle for three months, and I fought against it. It was a terrible battle. But oh! how many times I have thanked God that I gave up my will and took God's will.⁵

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In 1861 Moody made the decision to step out in faith and leave the business world. All through the first half of the 1860s, he was actively involved in numerous avenues of ministry, including the YMCA and speaking to Union soldiers in Civil War camps. In 1867, again Moody struggled when he felt God calling him—this time, the call was to take his ministry beyond the city of Chicago.

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Then there was another time when God was calling me into higher service, to go out and preach the gospel all over the land, instead of staying in Chicago. I

fought against it for months; but the best thing I ever did was when I surrendered my will, and let the will of God be done in me.

If you take my advice, you will have no will other than God's will. Make a full and complete surrender.⁶

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It was from this time onward that Moody's ministry would never be the same, experiencing continuous explosive growth in the decades to come.

Pursuing Heavenly Treasures . . .

The key to Moody's tremendous business success was his all-consuming drive to be the very best at what he did. And though in his early years of ministry he had much to learn, there's one truth he recognized immediately: Any work done for the Lord ought to be carried out to the very best of our ability. As Moody said, "When [God] gave Christ to this world, He gave the best He had, and He wants us to do the same."⁷

Thus Moody went from pouring every ounce of his energy into building up treasures here on earth to building up treasures in heaven. Just as he had held nothing back in his ambitious pursuits in the business world, he now held nothing back in his spiritual endeavors. To him, doing anything less was unthinkable.

. . . And Total Surrender to God

Moody's conviction that Christians ought to live in total surrender to God was reinforced in the early years of his ministry while in England. There he heard British evangelist Henry Varley say, "The world has yet to see what God will do with and for and through and in and by the man who is fully and wholly consecrated to Him."⁸ Moody thought to himself,

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*He said "a man." He did not say a great man, nor a learned man, nor a rich man, nor a wise man, nor an eloquent man, nor a smart man, but simply "a man." I am a man, and it lies with the man himself whether he will or will not make that entire and full consecration. I will try my uttermost to be that man.*⁹

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Henry Varley's encouragement had a tremendous impact on Moody, who, because of his lack of education and ministry training, faced frequent reminders that, from a human perspective, in many ways he was inadequate. Yet as he came to realize that it is God who does the actual work of ministry and that the most effective channel for ministry is a wholly surrendered life, he resolved more than ever to avail himself completely for the Lord's use.

All through his years of ministry, Moody shared these discoveries with his fellow believers and constantly urged them to fully yield their lives to God.

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One of the sweetest lessons we can learn in the school of Christ is the surrender of our wills to God, letting Him plan for us and rule our lives. . . . I cannot look a day into the future. I do not know what is going to happen tomorrow; in fact, I do not know what may happen before night; so that I cannot choose for myself as well as God can choose for me; and it is much better to surrender my will to God's will.¹⁰

The first thing a man must do if he desires to be used in the Lord's work, is to make an unconditional surrender of himself to God. He must consecrate and then concentrate. A man who does not put his whole life into one channel does not count for much, and the man who only goes into work with half a heart does not amount to much [emphasis added].¹¹

It seems about the hardest thing, to get to the end of self, but when we have got to the end of self, and self is lost sight of, self-seeking and self-glory thrown aside, and Christ and His cause are uppermost in our hearts, how easy it is for God to use us.¹²

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Not only did Moody urge that Christians make themselves fully available, but he warned of the potential danger of half-

hearted service. To illustrate his point, he would speak of when God called Abraham to leave Ur of the Chaldees and go to Canaan:

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Then [Abram] came to Haran, which is about half-way . . . and stayed there—we do not know just how long, but probably about five years.

Now, I believe that there are a great many Christians who are what might be called Haran Christians. They go to Haran, and there they stay. They only half obey. They are not out-and-out. How was it that God got him out of Haran? His father died. The first call was to leave Ur of the Chaldees and go into Canaan, but instead of going all the way they stopped half-way, and it was affliction that drove Abram out of Haran. A great many of us bring afflictions on ourselves, because we are not out-and-out for the Lord. We do not obey Him fully. God had plans He wanted to work out through Abram, and He could not work them out as long as he was there in Haran. Affliction came, and then we find that he left Haran, and started for the Promised Land.¹³

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—GIVING GOD THE CREDIT—

It's when we're totally surrendered that God has the freedom to accomplish the work He desires to do through us. And it's vital we always remember that it's God Himself who is doing that work. It is He who brings forth the results, not us:

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It wasn't David or the sling, but it was the God of David. It wasn't Samson, but the God of Samson. It wasn't Joshua, but the God of Joshua. It wasn't the rod of Moses that did the work, but it was the God of Moses. And, my dear friends, what we want is to learn that lesson.¹⁴

If we are lifted up and say we have got such great meetings and such crowds are coming, and get to thinking about crowds and about the people, and get our minds off from God, and are not constantly in communion with Him, lifting our hearts in prayer, this work will be a stupendous failure.¹⁵

You have got nothing to be proud of. If you are ever used at all, bear in mind that it is God speaking in you, and not you yourself.

We do not say that gas pipe gives the light; it only conveys it. If we have any light in us, it is Christ's

light. Let us be careful that we do not fall into that sin of being proud and lifted up.¹⁶

We want the great, the mighty, but God takes the foolish things, the despised things, the things which are not. What for? That no flesh may glory in His sight.¹⁷

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—WHAT DOES GOD EXPECT OF US?—

Now, in all this talk about total surrender, inevitably a question arises: Does such a commitment mean going into full-time Christian ministry, as D. L. Moody did?

Absolutely not, Moody would say. In fact, Moody constantly lamented the fact that so few Christians realized how much God could use them right where they were. Yielding ourselves totally to God doesn't mean becoming a full-time minister or missionary, but rather, giving our whole heart and the best of our abilities to whatever opportunities we have for serving Him. Ministry need not be an office; it's a lifestyle devoted to attracting the lost to Christ and encouraging other believers in the faith.

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Every Christian ought to be a worker. He need not be a preacher, he need not be an evangelist, to be useful. He may be useful in business. See what

*power [a Christian] employer has, if he likes! How he could labor with his employees in his business relations! Often a man can be far more useful in a business sphere than he could in another.*¹⁸

*A false impression has got hold of many of God's people. They have got the idea that only a few can talk about God's affairs. Nine-tenths of people say, if anything is to be done for the souls of men, "Oh, the ministers must do it." It doesn't enter into the hearts of the people that they have any part in the matter. . . . Any one can do this work.*¹⁹

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According to Moody, every single believer has a place in the Lord's service. Every person has his or her unique niche, his or her special role. It was this conviction that led Moody to encourage all Christians—even children—toward serving in whatever capacity they could.

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If this world is going to be reached, I am convinced it must be done by men and women of average talent. After all there are comparatively few people in the world who have great talents. Here is a man with one talent; there is another with three; perhaps I may have only half a talent. But if we all go to work and

*trade with the gifts we have the Lord will prosper us; and we may double or treble our talents.*²⁰

*I have little sympathy with the idea that a Christian man or woman has to live for years before they can have the privilege of leading anyone out of the darkness of this world into the kingdom of God. I do not believe, either, that all God's work is going to be done by ministers, and other officers in the Churches. This lost world will never be reached and brought back to loyalty to God, until the children of God wake up to the fact that they have a mission in the world. If we are true Christians we should all be missionaries.*²¹

*God has a niche for every one of his children. Happy the man or woman who has found his or her place.*²²

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Biographer John McDowell noted,

More than any other man of our times, Dwight L. Moody vindicated the rights, duties and privileges of the layman in carrying the Gospel to the world, as opposed to the exclusive prerogatives of an ordained clergy. . . . Mr. Moody believed that every Christian was foreordained to service; by his own example and his untiring effort he did all he could to help Christians realize their divine call.²³

—NOTHING DONE FOR GOD IS TOO SMALL—

One unfortunate misperception common among lay Christians is that because they're not ministers or leaders, their service is not as significant in advancing God's kingdom. In fact, they may even find themselves reluctant to fulfill the more routine opportunities for service simply because they seem so . . . well, *unimportant*. Yet according to Moody, no work of ministry is a small thing in the eyes of God:

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Now, if every one of us did something every day, if it is what we call a little thing, but if it is done for the Master, mark you, it is not a little thing.²⁴

Let us go to work and keep at it. Find something to do. Remember that anything you do for God should not be looked upon as an insignificant work.²⁵

If each one of us is doing some little thing, it isn't little in the Master's sight. If we keep at it 365 days in the year, there will be a good deal of work done at the end of the year.²⁶

There are a great many different ways of doing good. A lady once visited a hospital, and noticed with what pleasure the patients would smell and look at the flowers sent to them. Said she: "If I had

known that a bunch of flowers would do so much good, I would have sent some from home.”

As soon as she got home, she sent some flowers out of her garden. It was a little thing—a bouquet of flowers. It might be a very insignificant work—very small; but if it was done in the right spirit, God accepted it. A cup of water given in His name is accepted as given to Himself. Nothing that is done for God is small.²⁷

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Moody also said it's when we're willing to do the little things that God entrusts us with bigger opportunities:

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The men who have been permitted to do higher things are the men that began with small things. If you are not willing to deal with one man about his soul, and labor with that one man, you are not fit to go into the pulpit and preach to others. Some of Christ's greatest discourses were given to one person or two persons.²⁸

The more we use the means and opportunities we have, the more will our ability and our opportunities be increased.²⁹

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—GOD WILL MULTIPLY THE FRUIT—

All the way to the end of his life, Moody repeatedly exhorted Christians to *consecrate* themselves and to *concentrate* in their service to the Lord. Consecrate and concentrate—that is, total surrender and total focus. He called for total devotion to the task at hand, no matter how small it was. He knew that if we are faithful to consecrate and concentrate, then the Lord will take care of bringing forth the fruit of ministry. He will take that which is small and multiply its impact—a truth confirmed by this letter from Finland, which was sent to one of Moody's sons shortly after the evangelist's death:

Are you aware that your father was the means of starting evangelical Christianity in Finland? From an autobiography of Rev. Eric Jansson, "the apostle to Finland," I see that he (Jansson) and his wife were converted under your father's preaching in Chicago and were for a while active members of your father's church, and that the Spirit used a remark made by your father to impress upon Mr. Jansson the duty of going home to his own kindred and his own country and tell what great things the Lord had done for him. Accordingly he returned and has by God's grace made such a record as few have made since the days of the apostles; has endured all kinds of persecution for "the offense of the cross," and has accomplished great things for God. . . . There are now 31 Baptist churches with 2,030 members, in Finland.

244 were baptized last year. Two Baptist papers are published, and the beginning of a theological seminary was made some years ago. I consider Jansson one of your father's greatest trophies, and I regret that I did not write to you about him before. I doubt whether your father himself ever knew how the Lord had used him in Finland, where he has never been.³⁰

—THE POSSIBILITIES ARE INFINITE—

Moody never set out to be great in ministry. Rather, he chose simply to be faithful. He yielded himself completely to God, allowing the Lord to use him however He chose. We, too, can make that choice—and allow God to work mightily through us. As Wilbur Chapman noted, “The thing that made Mr. Moody great as a Christian is within the reach of every follower of Christ.”³¹

Indeed, the possibilities for service are infinite, according to William Earl Dodge: “The great lesson in Mr. Moody's life is the infinite and magnificent possibility for service which can come to one that puts himself absolutely in God's hand to be used.”³²

MOODY

from the Pulpit

A LITTLE GIRL, only eleven years old, once came to me in a Sunday school and said: "Won't you please pray that God will make me a winner of souls?" . . . Oh, suppose she lives three-score years and goes on winning four or five souls every year; at the end of her journey there will be three hundred souls on the way to glory. And how long will it be before that little company swells to a great army? Don't you see how that little mountain rill keeps swelling till it carries everything before it? Little trickling streams have run into it, till now, a mighty river, it has great cities on its banks, and the commerce of all nations floating on its waters. So when a single soul is won to Christ you cannot see the result. A single one multiplies to a thousand, and that into ten thousand. Perhaps a million shall be the fruit; we cannot tell.³³