

KEPT FOR THE MASTER'S USE

by

Frances Ridley Havergal

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CHAPTER ONE

OUR LIVES KEPT FOR JESUS

“Keep my life that it may be,
Consecrated, Lord, to Thee*”

MANY a heart has echoed the little song:

“Take my life, and let it be
Consecrated, Lord, to Thee!”

And yet those echoes have not been, in every case and at all times, so clear and full and firm, so continuously glad as we would wish, and perhaps expected. Some of us have said

“I launch me forth upon a sea
Of boundless love and tenderness”;

and after a little we have found or fancied that there is a hidden leak in our bark, and though we are doubtless still afloat, yet we are not sailing with the same free, exultant confidence as at first. What is it that has dulled and weakened the echo of our consecration song? What is the little leak that hinders the swift and buoyant course of our consecrated life? Holy Father, let Thy loving Spirit guide the hand that writes, and strengthen the heart of everyone who reads what shall be written, for Jesus' sake.

While many a sorrowfully-varied answer to these questions may, and probably will, arise from touched and sensitive consciences, each being shown by God's faithful Spirit the special sin, the special yielding to temptation which has hindered and spoiled the blessed life which they sought to enter and enjoy, it seems to me that one or other of two things has lain at the outset of the failure and disappointment.

First, it may have arisen from want of the simplest belief in the simplest fact, as well as want of trust in one of the simplest and plainest words our gracious Master ever uttered!

- The unbelieved fact being simply that He hears us;

- The untrusted word being one of those plain, broad foundation-stones on which we rested our whole weight.

It may be many years ago, and which we had no idea we ever doubted, or were in any danger of doubting now— **“Him that Cometh to Me I will in no wise cast out.”**

“Take my life!” We have said it or sung before the Lord, it may be many times; but if it were only once whispered in His ear with full purpose of heart, should we not believe that He heard it? And if we know that He heard it, should we not believe that He has answered it, and fulfilled this, our heart’s desire? For with Him hearing means heeding.

Then why should we doubt that He did verily take our lives when we offered them, our bodies when we presented them? Have we not been wronging His faithfulness all this time by practically, even if unconsciously, doubting whether the prayer ever really reached Him? And if so, is it any wonder that we have not realized all the power and joy of full consecration? By some means or other He has to teach us to trust implicitly at every step of the way. And so, if we did not really trust in this matter, He has had to let us find out our want of trust by withholding the sensible part of the blessing, and thus stirring us up to find out why it is withheld.

An offered gift must be either accepted or refused. Can He have refused it when He has said, **“Him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out”**? If not, then it must have been accepted. It is just the same process as when we came to Him first of all, with the intolerable burden of our sins. There was no help for it but to come with them to Him, and take His word for it that He would not and did not cast us out. And so coming, so believing, we found rest to our souls; we found that His word was true, and that His taking away our sins was a reality.

Some give their lives to Him then and there, and go forth to live henceforth not at all unto themselves, but unto Him who died for them.

This is as it should be, for conversion and consecration ought to be simultaneous. But practically it is not very often so, except with those in whom the bringing out of darkness into marvelous light has been sudden and dazzling, and full of deepest contrasts. More frequently the work resembles the case of the Hebrew servant described in Exodus 21, who, after six years’ experience of a good master’s service, dedicates himself voluntarily, unreservedly, and irrevocably to it, saying, **“I love my master; I will not go free”**; the master then accepting and sealing him to life-long service, free in law yet bound in love. This seems to be a figure of later consecration founded on experience and love.

And yet, as at our first coming, it is less than nothing, worse than nothing that we have to bring; for our lives, even our redeemed and pardoned lives, are not only weak and worthless, but defiled and sinful. But thanks be to God for the Altar that sanctifieth the gift, even our Lord Jesus Christ Himself!

- By Him we draw nigh unto God;
- To Him, as one with the Father, we offer our living sacrifice;
- In Him, as the Beloved of the Father, we know it is accepted.

So, dear friends, when once He has wrought in us the desire to be altogether His own, and put into our hearts the prayer, "Take my life," let us go on our way rejoicing, believing that He has taken our lives, our hands, our feet, our voices, our intellects, our wills, our whole selves, to be ever, only, all for Him. Let us consider that a blessedly settled thing; not because of anything we have felt, or said, or done, but because we know that He heareth us, and because we know that He is true to His word.

But suppose our hearts do not condemn us in this matter, our disappointment may arise from another cause. It may be that we have not received, because we have not asked a fuller and further blessing. Suppose that we did believe, thankfully and surely, that the Lord heard our prayer, and that He did indeed answer and accept us, and set us apart for Himself, and yet we find that our consecration was not merely miserably incomplete, but that we have drifted back again almost to where we were before.

Or suppose things are not quite so bad as that, still we have not quite all we expected; and even if we think we can truly say, "O God, my heart is fixed," we find, to our daily sorrow, that somehow or other the details of our conduct do not seem to be fixed, something or other is perpetually slipping through, till we get perplexed and distressed. Then we are tempted to wonder whether, after all, there was not some mistake about it, and the Lord did not really take us at our word, although we took Him at His word. And then the struggle with one doubt and entanglement and temptation only seems to land us in another. What is to be done then?

First, very humbly and utterly honestly to search and try our ways before our God; or rather, as we shall soon realize our helplessness to make such a search, ask Him to do it for us, praying for His promised Spirit to show us unmistakably if there is any secret thing within us that is hindering both the inflow and outflow of His grace to us and through us.

Do not let us shrink from some unexpected flash into a dark corner; do not let us wince at the sudden touching of a hidden plague-spot. The Lord always does His own work thoroughly, if we will only let Him do it. If we put our case into His hands, He will search and probe fully and firmly, though very tenderly. Very painfully, it may be, but only that He may do the very thing we want—cleanse us and heal us thoroughly, so that we may set off to walk in real newness of life. But if we do not put it unreservedly into His hands, it will be no use thinking or talking about our lives being consecrated to Him.

The heart that is not entrusted to Him for searching will not be undertaken by Him for cleansing; the life that fears to come to the light lest any deed should be reproved, can never know the blessedness and the privileges of walking in the light.

But what then? When He has graciously again put a new song into our mouth, and we are singing

"Ransomed, healed, restored, forgiven,
Who like me His praise should sing?"

and again with fresh earnestness we are saying,

“Take my life, and let it be
Consecrated, Lord, to Thee!”

are we only to look forward to the same disappointing experience over again? are we always to stand at the threshold? Consecration is not so much a step as a course; not so much an act as a position to which a course of action inseparably belongs.

In so far as it is a course and a position, there must naturally be a definite entrance upon it, and a time, it may be a moment, when that entrance is made. That is when we say, “Take”; but we do not want to go on taking a first step over and over again. What we want now is to be maintained in that position, and to fulfil that course. So let us go on to another prayer.

Having already said, “Take my life, for I cannot give it to Thee,” let us now say, with deepened conviction that without Christ we really can do nothing— “Keep my life, for I cannot keep it for Thee.”

Let us ask this with the same simple trust to which, in so many other things, He has so liberally and graciously responded. For this is the confidence that we have in Him, that if we ask anything according to His will, He heareth us; and if we know that He hears us, whatsoever we ask, we know that we have the petitions that we desired of Him. There can be no doubt that this petition is according to His will, because it is based upon many a promise. May I give it you just as it floats through my own mind again and again, knowing whom I have believed, and being persuaded that He is able to keep that which I have committed unto Him?

Keep my life, that it may be
Consecrated, Lord, to Thee.

Keep my moments and my days,
Let them flow in ceaseless praise.

Keep my hands, that they may move
At the impulse of Thy love.

Keep my feet, that they may be
Swift and ‘beautiful’ for Thee.

Keep my voice, that I may sing
Always, only, for my King.

Keep my lips, that they may be
Filled with messages from Thee.

Keep my silver and my gold;
Not a mite would I withhold.

Keep my intellect, and use
Every power as Thou shalt choose.

Keep my will, O keep it Thine;
For it is no longer mine.

Keep my heart; it is Thine own,
It is now Thy royal throne.

Keep my love; my Lord, I pour
At Thy feet its treasure-store.

Keep myself, that I may be
Ever, only, all for Thee.

Yes! He who is able and willing to *take* unto Himself is no less able and willing to *keep* far Himself. Our willing offering has been made by His enabling grace, and this our King has seen with joy. And now we pray, “**Keep this forever in the imagination of the thoughts of the heart of Thy people**” (I Chronicles 29:17, 18).

This blessed taking once for all, which we may quietly believe as an accomplished fact, followed by the continual keepings for which He will be continually inquired of by us, seems analogous to the great washing by which we have part in Christ, and the repeated washing of the feet for which we need to be continually coming to Him.

For with the deepest and sweetest consciousness that He has indeed taken our lives to be His very own, the need of His active and actual keeping of them in every detail and at every moment is most fully realized. But then we have the promise of our faithful God, “**I, the Lord, do keep it, I will keep it night and day.**”

The only question is, will we trust this promise, or will we not? If we do, we shall find it come true. If not, of course it will not be realized. For unclaimed promises are like uncashed checks; they will keep us from bankruptcy, but not from want. But if not, why not? What right have we to pick out one of His faithful sayings, and say we don't expect Him to fulfil that? What defence can we bring, what excuse can we invent, for so doing?

If you appeal to experience against His faithfulness to His word, I will appeal to experience too, and ask you, did you ever really trust Jesus to fulfil any word of His to you, and find your trust deceived?

As to the past experience of the details of your life not being kept for Jesus, look a little more closely at it, and you will find that though you may have asked, you did not trust. Whatever you did really trust Him to keep, He has kept, and the unkept things were never really entrusted. Scrutinize this past experience as you will, and it will only bear witness against your unfaithfulness, never against His absolute faithfulness.

Yet this witness must not be unheeded. We must not forget the things that are behind till they are confessed and forgiven. Let us not bring all this unsatisfactory past experience, and, most of all, the want of trust which has been the poison-spring of its course, to the precious blood of Christ, which cleanseth us, even us, from all sin, even this sin. Perhaps we never saw that we were not trusting Jesus as He deserves to be trusted; if so, let us wonderingly hate ourselves the more that we could be so trustless to such a Saviour, and so sinfully dark and stupid that we did not even see it. And oh, let us wonderingly love Him the more that He has been so patient and gentle with us, upbraiding not, though in our slow-hearted foolishness we have been grieving Him by this subtle unbelief; and then by His grace, may we enter upon a new era of experience, our lives kept for Him more fully than ever before, because we trust Him more simply and unreservedly to keep them!

Here we must face a question, and perhaps a difficulty. Does it not almost seem as if we were at this point led to trusting to our trust, making everything hinge upon it, and thereby only removing a subtle dependence upon ourselves one step farther back, disguising instead of renouncing it?

If Christ's keeping depends upon our trusting, and our continuing to trust depends upon ourselves, we are in no better or safer position than before, and shall only be landed in a fresh series of disappointments.

The old story, something for the sinner to do, crops up again here, only with the ground shifted from works to trust. Said a friend to me, "I see now! I did trust Jesus to do everything else for me, but I thought that this trusting was something that I had to do."

And so, of course, what she had to do had been a perpetual effort and frequent failure. We can no more trust and keep on trusting than we can do anything else of ourselves. Even in this it must be "Jesus only." We are not to look to Him only to be the Author and Finisher of our faith, but we are to look to Him for all the intermediate fulfillment of the work of faith (II Thessalonians 1:11): we must ask Him to go on fulfilling it in us, committing even this to His power.

For we both may and must
Commit our very faith to Him,
Entrust to Him our trust.

What a long time it takes us to come down to the conviction, and still more to the realization, of the fact that without Him we can do *nothing*, but that He must work *all* our works in us! This is the work of God that ye believe in Him whom He has sent. And no less must it be the work of God that we go on believing, and that we go on trusting. Then, dear friends, who are longing to trust Him with unbroken and unwavering trust, cease the effort and drop the burden, and now entrust your trust to Him! He is just as well able to keep that as any other part of the complex lives which we want Him to take and keep for Himself. And oh, do not pass on content with the thought, "Yes, that is a good idea; perhaps I should find that a great help!" But, now, then, do it. It is no help to the sailor to see a flash of light across a dark sea, if he does not instantly steer accordingly.

Consecration is not a religiously selfish thing. If it sinks into that, it ceases to be consecration. We want our lives kept, not that we may feel happy, and be saved the distress consequent on wandering, and get the power with God and man, and all the other privileges linked with it. We shall have all this, because the power is included in the higher: but our true aim, if the love of Christ constraineth us, will be far beyond this.

- Not for “me” at all, but “for Jesus”;
- Not for my safety, but for His glory;
- Not for my comfort, but for His joy;
- Not that I may find rest, but that He may see the travail of His soul, and be satisfied!

Yes, for Him I want to be kept.

- Kept for His sake;
- Kept for His use;
- Kept to be His witness;
- Kept for His joy!
- Kept for Him, that in me He may show forth some tiny sparkle of His light and beauty;
- Kept to do His will and His work in His own way;
- Kept (it may be) to suffer for His sake;
- Kept for Him, that He may do just what seemeth Him good with me;
- kept, so that no other lord shall have any more dominion over me, but that Jesus shall have all there is to have—little enough, indeed, but not divided or diminished by any other claim.

Is not this, O you who love the Lord—is not this worth living for, worth asking for, worth trusting for?

This is consecration, and I cannot tell you the blessedness of it. It is not the least use arguing with one who has had but a taste of its blessedness, and saying to him, “**How can these things be?**” It is not the least use starting all sorts of difficulties and theoretical suppositions about it with such a one, any more than it was when the Jews argued with the man who said, “**One thing I know, that whereas I was blind now I see.**”

The Lord Jesus does take the life that is offered to Him, and He does keep the life for Himself that is entrusted to Him; but until the life is offered we cannot know the taking, and until the life is entrusted we cannot know or understand the keeping. All we can do is to say, “**O taste and see!**” and bear witness to the reality of Jesus Christ, and set to our seal that we have found Him true to His every word, and that we have proved Him able even to do exceeding abundantly above all we asked or thought.

Why should we hesitate to bear this testimony? We have done nothing at all; we have, in all our efforts, only proved to ourselves, and perhaps to others, that we had no power either to give or keep our lives. Why should we not, then, glorify His grace by acknowledging that we have found Him so wonderfully and tenderly gracious and faithful in both taking and keeping as we never supposed or imagined?

I shall never forget the smile and emphasis with which a poor workingman bore this witness to his Lord. I said to him: "Well, H., we have a good Master, have we not?"

"Ah," said he, "a deal better than ever I thought!"

That summed up his experience, and so it will sum up the experience of everyone who will but yield their lives wholly to the same good Master.

I cannot close this chapter without a word with those, especially my younger friends, who, although they have named the name of Christ, are saying:

"Yes, this is all very well for some people, or for older people, but I am not ready for it; I can't say I see my way to this sort of thing."

I am going to take the lowest ground for a minute, and appeal to your past experience. Are you satisfied with your experience of the other "sort of thing"? Your pleasant pursuits, your harmless recreations, your nice occupations, even your improving ones, what fruit are you having from them? Your social intercourse, your daily talks and walks, your investments of all the time that remains to you over and above the absolute duties God may have given you, what fruit that shall remain have you from all this?

Day after day passes on, and year after year, and what shall the harvest be? What is even the present return? Are you getting any real and lasting satisfaction out of it all? Are you not finding that things lose their flavor, and that you are spending your strength day after day for nought? that you are no more satisfied than you were a year ago—rather less so, if anything?

Does not a sense of hollowness and weariness come over you as you go on in the same round, perpetually getting through things only to begin again? It cannot be otherwise. Over even the freshest and purest earthly fountains the Hand that never makes a mistake has written, "**He that drinketh of this water shall thirst again.**"

Look into your own heart and you will find a copy of that inscription already traced, "**Shall thirst again.**" And the characters are being deepened with every attempt to quench the inevitable thirst and weariness in life, which can only be satisfied and rested in full consecration to God; for

"Thou hast made us for Thyself
And the heart never resteth
Till it findeth rest in Thee."

I tell you of a brighter and happier life, whose inscription is, "**Shall never thirst**" a life that is no dull round-and-round in a circle of unsatisfactoriness, but a life that has found its true and entirely satisfactory center, and set itself towards a shining and entirely satisfactory goal, whose brightness is cast over every step of the way.

Will you not seek it?

Do not shrink, and suspect, and hang back from what it may involve, with selfish and unconfident and ungenerous half-heartedness. Take the word of any who have willingly offered themselves unto the Lord, that the life of consecration is a deal better than they thought!

Choose this day whom you will serve with real, thoroughgoing, wholehearted service, and He will receive you; and you will find, as we have found, that He is such a good Master that you are satisfied with His goodness, and that you will never want to go out free. Nay, rather take His own word for it; see what He says: **“If they obey and serve Him, they shall spend their days in prosperity, and their years in pleasures.”**

You cannot possibly understand that till you are really in His service! For He does not give, nor even show, His wages before you enter it. And He says, **“My servants shall sing for joy of heart.”** But you cannot try over that song to see what it is like, you cannot even read one bar of it, till your nominal or even promised service is exchanged for real and undivided consecration. But when He can call you His servant, then you will find yourself singing for joy of heart, because He says you shall.

And who, then, is willing to consecrate his service this day unto the Lord?

Do not startle at the term, or think, because you do not understand all it may include, you are therefore not qualified for it I dare say it comprehends a great deal more than either you or I understand, but we can both enter into the spirit of it, and the detail will unfold itself as long as our probation shall last Christ demands a hearty consecration in will, and He will teach us what that involves in act. This explains the paradox that full consecration may be in one sense the act of a moment, and in another the work of a lifetime.

It must be complete to be real, and yet, if real, it is always incomplete; a point of rest, and yet a perpetual progression.

Suppose you make over a piece of ground to another person. You give it up, then and there, entirely to that other; it is no longer in your own possession; you no longer dig and sow, plant and reap, at your discretion or for your own profit. His occupation of it is total; no other has any right to an inch of it; it is his affair thenceforth what crops to arrange for and how to make the most of it. But his practical occupation of it may not appear all at once. There may be wasteland which he will take into full cultivation only by degrees, space wasted for want of draining or by over-fencing, and odd corners lost for want of enclosing; fields yielding smaller returns than they might, because of hedgerows too wide and shady, and trees too many and spreading, and strips of food soil trampled into uselessness for want of defined pathways.

Just so is it with our lives. The transaction of (so to speak) making them over to God is definite and complete. But then begins the practical development of consecration. And here He leads on softly, according as the children be able to endure.

I do not suppose any one sees anything like all that it involves at the outset.

We have not a notion what an amount of waste of power there has been in our lives; we never measured out the odd corners and the undrained bits, and it never occurred to us what good fruit might be grown in our straggling hedgerows, now how the shade of our trees has been keeping the sun from the scanty crops. And so, season by season, we shall be sometimes not a little startled, yet always very glad, as we find that bit by bit the Master shows how much more may be made of our ground, how much more He is able to make of it than we did; and we shall be willing to work under Him and do exactly what He points out, even if it comes to cutting down a shady tree or clearing out a ditch full of pretty weeds and wild-flowers.

As the seasons pass on, it will seem as if there was always more and more to be done, the very fact that He is constantly showing us something more to be done in it, proving that it is really His ground.

Only let Him have the ground, no matter how poor or overgrown the soil may be, and then He will make her wilderness like Eden, and her desert like the garden of the Lord. Yes, even our desert! And then we shall sing, **“My beloved is gone down into his garden, to the beds of spices, to feed in the gardens and to gather lilies.”**

Made for Thyself. O God!
Made for Thy love, Thy service, Thy delight;
Made to show forth Thy wisdom, grace, and might;
Made for Thy praise, whom veiled archangels laud;
O, strange and glorious thought, that we may be
A joy to Thee!

Yet the heart turns away
From this grand destiny of bliss, and deems
‘Twas made for its poor self, for passing dreams.
Chasing illusions melting day by day,
Till for ourselves we read on this world’s best
This is not rest!”

~ end of chapter 1 ~

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