THE GOLDEN STAIRS
By John E. Riley
President, Northwest Nazarene College

Seventh Printing 1957
Printed In The United States Of America

Beacon Hill Press
2923 Troost Avenue
Kansas City, Missouri

* * * * * * *

Digital Edition 06/24/07
By Holiness Data Ministry

* * * * * * *

CONTENTS

Dedication
Acknowledgments
Introduction

01 -- The Crisis
DEDICATION

To my mother and father high on the golden stairs

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

To The Macmillan Company, Publishers, New York; Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, New York, Nashville; Henry Altemus, Publisher, Philadelphia; The Reader's Digest, Pleasantville, N.Y.; The Fleming H. Revell Co., New York; acknowledgment is gratefully given for the permissions they have granted.

INTRODUCTION

This is a book that does not need an introduction. A glance at the title, The Golden Stairs, and one is immediately interested. A scanning of the chapter headings, The Crisis, The Chart, The Closet, The Church, The Call, and The Climb, and he is intrigued. It is written as a study book in the Christian Service Training series and it is well adapted for class work, but it is so well written, so vitally spiritual, so full of valuable material and so helpful to Christian living, that it should be widely read for personal profit.

The style of the author, Dr. John E. Riley, is scholarly. This reveals the fact that he has worked long and diligently to prepare the manuscript for this book. And more than that, it is very evident that he is a man of thorough formal training and diligent application to his task as a spiritual leader and pastor of youth. His work also speaks unmistakably of his deep spiritual insight. He writes as one who knows by personal experience. In every one of the six gripping chapters the reader feels that the author has climbed the "Golden Stairs" before him. By natural endowments, by supernatural experience, by careful training by the godly parents to whom the book is dedicated, by full preparation in an environment of Christian faith and devotion, and by the faithful practice of what he teaches, he has prepared himself to present this book to all who will read and study it.
It is my hope and confidence that The Golden Stairs will have a wide circulation and will prove to be a blessing to all who peruse its pages.

G. B. Williamson

*     *     *     *     *     *     *

01 -- THE CRISIS

And you hath he quickened, who were dead in trespasses and sins (Ephesians 2:1).

One of the chief fallacies of evolutionary thinking is the assumption that man is all right as he is, except that he must move forward.

No sound practical advice on the good life can be given until first of all man's natural sinfulness is acknowledged and provided for. To ignore the universality of sin is to begin on a shaky foundation, or rather, on no foundation at all. The first thing to do with a broken arm is to set it. Once it is set then all the other factors that contribute to healing may be brought into play. After the injured arm is bound or put into splints or a cast, rest, good food, fresh air and whatever medical care may be necessary will speed the recovery. But all of these must follow, not precede, the readjustment of the broken bones -- or one goes through life with a crooked arm.

Ere we turn our feet toward the heights of holy living let us be sure that we are equipped to climb and that we are headed in the right direction. Let us get our bearings to see in which direction we should travel. Let us evaluate ourselves and see what we need to begin the Christian life.

The Dilemma

The first fact we must recognize is that, in our natural state, we are not Christian. We are sinners, sinners in action and sinful in state. Vice is a social term. Crime is a legal term, referring to a violation of the laws of the government. Sin is a religious term, signifying either a violation of God's law or a state of maladjustment to God's law. It is fundamental that we shall understand the vividness and insistence with which the Scripture teaches and illustrates the universality of sin. To miss here is to build a theological system without any foundation. To miss here is to stagger through life, thwarted and defeated on every spiritual battlefield. Worst of all, to miss here is to miss heaven, and, losing our own souls, to carry others down with us.

Our first parents were created holy and endowed with that which the theologians called original righteousness. At the close of the six creative days, "God saw everything that he had made, and, behold, it was very good" (Genesis 1:31). Man was made flawless and holy, but he was free as well. His holiness was a
created holiness and not a holiness from choice. His every faculty was active in the direction of holiness. He was good, positively good, positively loving, positively obedient, positively pure, positively trusting. But his holiness had to be developed, expanded and strengthened by the exercise of his own free will in choosing the right.

There, in that beautiful garden at the dawn of human history, the glory and awfulness of freedom are seen. Standing at the fork in the road Adam and Eve made the wrong choice and sin and death fell upon them and upon all their descendants. It was as if the whole universe were shaken by a terrible earthquake. Even heaven itself was moved by the awful catastrophe and every divine attribute sprang into action to counteract sin. Man's whole being, as well as his world, was affected. The seeds of death took root in his body, and his whole personality was stricken. His intelligence was darkened, his emotions were perverted, his will was crippled. He was separated from God, deprived of the Divine Presence, and depraved because of that deprivation. These dark and awful realities are enough to strike terror to the heart of man. But we had better face them, for, until we go back to the dark hour of the Fall and see it all, we can never see the glories of Redemption. And, until we go down into the sub-cellar of our own souls and see the sin there, we can never find personal deliverance through Jesus Christ our Lord.

The old story of the reality of sin is told over and over again in life and literature. The young doctor in A. J. Cronin's The Citadel came to his day of reckoning when, after politics defeated his health measures in a Welsh mining town, he sold his standards for money. After his wife's tragic death, he found in her handbag snapshots of himself in those Galahad days, and letters of gratitude from impoverished miners, and other mementos that she had kept to remind herself of the man he might have been. He knew that his pain was only just. He shouted at himself in a drunken stupor that yet could not drug his conscience, "You thought you could get away with it. You thought you were getting away with it. But, you weren't."

The bane of sin both in its inner tyranny and in its outer ruin is beyond our power to cure. As Dr. Buttrick puts it in his Christ and Man's Dilemma, "Such is our human dilemma. We are ignorant, but aware of our ignorance, yet unable to lighten our darkness: we need a revelation. We are wicked, but we know our wickedness, yet we cannot overcome it: we need a redemption. We are mortal, and chained to mortality, though with a long enough chain to see it for what it is, yet we cannot break the chain: we need deliverance." (1) George Buttrick, Christ and Man's Dilemma (Abingdon-Cokesbury Press), p. 26. Copyright, used by permission of the publishers.

Historically, in Adam, the sinful act produced the sinful state. Racially, in ourselves as descendants of Adam, the sinful state produces the sinful act. The Psalmist said, "I was shapen in iniquity; and in sin did my mother conceive me" (Psalms 51:5). Remember that sin is primarily a religious term. Dr. Harry Jessop
puts it something like this. A man is not a consumptive because he coughs. A tree
is not an apple tree because it bears apples. A dog is not a dog because he barks.
Rather, the consumptive coughs because he is tubercular. The tree bears apples
because it is an apple tree. The dog barks because he is a dog. The sinner sins
because he is a sinner.

Then something drastic must be done for me before I can start the Christian
life. The Word of God makes that very plain. A crisis, or rather two crises, must take
place. I must be born of the Holy Spirit and I must be baptized with or filled with the
Spirit. "Ye must be born again" (John 3:7). "Be filled with the Spirit" (Ephesians
5:18). He "shall baptize you with the Holy Ghost, and with fire" (Matthew 3:11).

But before we turn the light of our investigation upon the grace of God as it
comes to us personally we must gaze upon the tragic, but wonderful, scenes of
Calvary. When sin came, every attribute of God sprang into action and the plan of
Redemption was born of God's Infinite Love, Infinite Holiness, Infinite Wisdom, and
Infinite Power. The Atonement is not God's Love fighting against God's Justice. The
Atonement is the outpouring of the whole being of God. In the Cross of Christ we
see the mingling of Love and Holiness and Justice and Wisdom. Jesus Christ, the
God-Man, suffered there for my sins. He died there, the Just for the unjust, that I
might be delivered from the guilt and the pollution of sin. Here then is the basis for
whatever deliverance from sin I may expect in my heart.

Life is both crisis and continuity. We can see in our own experience as in
history that crisis is necessary. Creation, the Fall, and Calvary were all crises. In
Christian experience there are two great crises, regeneration and entire
sanctification.

Crises in Christian Experience

1. The New Birth. The doctrine of the New Birth has suffered much at the
hands of top-heavy theologians. That it is taught plainly and persistently in the
Scriptures few people will deny. But periodically throughout history it has had to be
revived because a lazy and worldly church has given up preaching to weak and
wicked humanity, "Ye must be born again" (John 3:7). The darkest cloud to hide the
doctrine of the New Birth has been the superficial evolutionary modernism of the
last century or so. The pseudo-scientific teaching of naturalistic evolution denied
the Genesis account of Creation, the Fall of Man, Original Sin, the Atonement, and
quite naturally the New Birth. But none of these bold and supercilious denials have
been made to stick, and this turbulent Twentieth Century has been acknowledging
again the truths of the old Bible doctrines.

Self-conscious theologians and weak-kneed preachers have trembled at the
red-blooded vigor of Bible terms like sin, damnation, and repentance, and cast them
out of the window. But strangely enough the psychologists have been bringing
them back in again. The so-called liberal theologians tried to talk to us about a
goody-goody world which was necessarily and intrinsically better and better all the time. But the psychologist insists that the four great evils are fear, hate, selfishness, and guilt and that unless we find a way to be rid of them we will be damned. True enough, the psychologist does not mean exactly the same damnation the old-time hell-fire preachers meant; but, if not exactly, he means pretty nearly the same thing. And, furthermore, when the psychologist talks about getting rid of guilt and fear he approximates some of the old biblical principles. There must be an acknowledgment of need, a complete confession, a denial of self as the center of life and a reorganization around some other principle or person. This change, says the psychologist, must usually be a crisis change, a clean, dramatic, perhaps an instantaneous break.

Whether in the life of the mild, intelligent John Wesley, the brilliant legalist Paul or the profane John Bunyan, there was a miracle that took place which banished all the guilt of past sin, imparted new life, and brought these men into the family of God. "If any man be in Christ, he is a new creature" (II Corinthians 5:17). In conversion there are three things which occur instantaneously and simultaneously: justification, a changed record, the act of God whereby all one's sins are forgiven; regeneration, a changed heart, the act of God whereby one receives spiritual life; adoption, a changed relationship, the act of God whereby one is adopted into the family of God. A fourth element in the miracle of conversion is the witness of the Spirit whereby we receive the assurance of sins forgiven; this may not always occur simultaneously with the others.

2. Cleansing. It is not necessary to dwell longer on the thought of the New Birth for it is very likely that most of those who read this little book are already believers seeking preparation for service. But the second crisis is no less important than the first and we must search our hearts to be sure the Holy Spirit dwells there in His cleansing power, else all our later study and spiritual discipline will be in vain. For no great service can be rendered and no great progress can be made as long as the sinful dispositions of carnality remain in the soul.

There may be those impatient to start the heavenward climb, but we had better be sure we are prepared before we set out. Paul's exhortation is, "Let us lay aside every weight, and the sin which doth so easily beset us" (Hebrews 12:1).

The prevailing sins of the church are the sins of disposition. Profanity, thievery, and immorality are found in the church far too often, but still not so often that they attract no attention. But envy and selfishness and gossip and pride and jealousy are so often present that one does not see them in the headlines. And yet carnality is the root of all sin. The deacon's getting "mad" is essentially the same as the murder that makes the headlines. The envy of one of the leading ladies is essentially the same as that thing which led the bank official to abscond with bank funds. The root of sin is the self principle. Dr. Fosdick tells about having visited an amusement park wonderland as a boy. Walking along one of the corridors he
suddenly ran into another country boy -- into himself in a mirror. And he Says that, ever since, he has been running into himself as the chief problem in life. E. Stanley Jones says that the "holy men" of India try by word and deed to deny themselves, but that it doesn't quite work. Here on a bed of spikes sits a Hindu "holy man" clad in a dirty loin cloth and looking as if nothing in the world interests him. His general appearance says, "I am indifferent to the world. I care not for wealth or clothing. I am dead to the world." But a wealthy man goes by and, instead of tossing a valuable coin, he drops a mere pittance. Immediately the "holy man" shows anger; he is not as dead as he would have one think. Self is still the center -- the selflessness is just camouflage.

Or, here is a Christian missionary who has died to loved ones, to home, to some chosen calling and has traveled to a foreign field to spread the gospel. He seems to be dead to everything, but a slighting remark is made and, instantly, anger flares. The self principle has not died -- it is just camouflaged. Or perhaps we should be a little kinder and say that it is not quite dead.

The New Testament certainly focuses attention upon the dispositional need of man, upon the inwardness of sin. Jesus, in proclaiming the constitution of the Kingdom, set up a righteousness of motive and spirit rather than word and deed. "Ye have heard that it was said by them of old time, Thou shalt not kill; .... But I say unto you, That whosoever is angry with his brother without a cause shall be in danger of the judgment" (Matthew 5:21-22a).

The very men who were chosen by the Master to be His ambassadors revealed their heart needs under the pressure of life. Converted men they most certainly were, with their names written in heaven, and yet Jesus, rebuking them, said, "Ye know not of what manner of spirit ye are of" (Luke 9:55). They quarreled about positions of prominence. They burned with terrible anger and wanted to call fire from heaven to destroy those who would not hear them. They were carnally blind and full of doubt when the Master would have revealed blessed truths to them. They were full of cowardice and failed the Master in the hour of crisis. They all denied Him by their actions, and Peter cursed and swore as well.

Every church in the New Testament revealed one or more of the dispositions of the old Adam nature. The church at Corinth is best known to us because more is written of that group, but it is typical. There were quarrels among the believers there, and Paul said, "Are ye not carnal?" (I Corinthians 3:3). There were abuses of the Christian sacrament of the Lord's Supper, and some isolated cases of gluttony, drunkenness, and immorality. All of this was an expression of unsanctified dispositions.

The church has exemplified that need of the cleansing baptism with the Holy Spirit ten thousand times. Pride, backbiting, envy, jealousy, sarcasm, hate, fear, quarreling, surmising, and all the other children and grandchildren of "the Old Man" have hampered the progress of the Church of Jesus Christ.
But, thank God! there is provision made for the sinful nature as well as for the guilt of sinful deeds. "Christ loved the church and gave himself for it; that he might sanctify and cleanse it with the washing of water by the word, that he might present it to himself a glorious church, not having spot or wrinkle, or any such thing; but that it should be holy and without blemish" (Ephesians 5:25, 27).

This glorious provision is confirmed by the New Testament just as positively as the need for it is presented. After Pentecost the fearful, cringing disciples were transformed to courageous fruitful witnesses. The carnal bickerings were lost in the consuming passion to see the lost brought to Christ, and even in the differences of opinion there was a spirit shown like that described so unforgettably in I Corinthians 13. The storm and turmoil and inner insufficiency of the disciples were replaced by "My peace" and by "the power of the Holy Ghost."

After all, holiness is health. Holiness is true normalcy. The bird is made to fly and the fish to swim. The locomotive is made to race along two steel rails. Freedom is to live in accordance with one's nature. Man was made in the image of the holy God and he will find his greatest happiness and his only fulfillment in having a holy heart. Sin, in deed or in disposition, is a violation of our nature and takes its toll of body, soul, and spirit.

Sin beclouds the mind. Evil passions, like the mist from a miasmic swamp, make clear thinking and sound judgment impossible. Sin harms the body. Someone has said that if you get mad at your boss and tell him off you will lose your job. If you get mad and do not tell him off you will develop ulcers of the stomach. Man is a psychophysical being, body and mind affect each other. The doctors know that jealousy, guilt, fear, and anger poison the system. Sin affects the home, the city, the nation, and the world. The atomic bomb has certainly reined us up short. We can see that sin will ruin us if we do not find deliverance. Ralph W. Sockman has put it thus in his recent book, Now to Live: "Jonathan Edwards stirred a revival of religion .... by picturing sinners in the hands of an angry God. With our atomic bomb we have put the power of God in the hands of angry sinners." (2) Ralph W. Sockman, Now to Live (Abingdon-Cokesbury Press), p. 61. Copyright, used by permission of the publishers.

My car was in the garage and I stood watching the mechanic; he was a greenhorn that did not deserve the name mechanic. He did his best to put a nut on a bolt cross thread, until I suggested that he put it on with the thread. Sin is trying to live cross thread. Holiness is getting in harmony with God and our own nature.

Before I can be prepared for the climb up the golden stairs I must, down in the secret wheels and springs of my heart and life, become geared to God. I am so happy that Paul gives me such an encouraging word as I Thessalonians 5:23, "And
the very God of peace sanctify you wholly; and I pray God your whole spirit and soul and body be preserved blameless unto the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ."

Oh, my friend, have you crossed the Red Sea? Have you journeyed through the wilderness and crossed over the Jordan into Canaan? Do you know the glorious vitality of two works of grace?

Is your all on the altar of sacrifice laid?
Your heart, does the Spirit control?
You can only be blest and have peace and sweet rest,
As you yield Him your body and soul.

Rev. A. B. Earle, the great Baptist evangelist of the last century, in his book Bringing in the Sheaves, tells how he received the Holy Spirit in His fullness. "I was in my room pleading for the fullness of Christ's love, when all at once a sweet, heavenly peace filled all the vacuum of my soul, leaving no longing, no unrest, no dissatisfied feeling in my bosom. I felt I knew I was accepted fully of Jesus. A calm, simple, childlike trust took possession of my whole being. Then for the first time in my life I had that rest which is more than peace. I had felt peace before, but feared I should not retain it; now I had peace without fear, which really became rest ... This change occurred about five o'clock on the evening of the second day of November, 1863. There has not been one hour of conscious doubt or darkness since that time."

The Continuity

We have been discussing in this chapter the crisis experiences of the Christian life. It is absolutely necessary that one know these two crises of grace. But life is continuity as well as crisis, and we must turn our attention to that which follows regeneration and entire sanctification.

There are too many people like the little boy who fell out of bed and wakened up frightened and crying. His mother said, "Why, Jimmy, how did it happen?" He replied, "Well, I guess I went to sleep too near where I got in."

No one receives enough grace at the altar to take him clear through to heaven, unless he dies soon after meeting the Lord at the altar. We receive enough grace to start to live the Christian life, and then day by day, hour by hour, moment by moment we receive more grace. The Portland Rose which travels the Union Pacific tracks between Chicago, Illinois, and Portland, Oregon, never has steam enough at the start to make that trip. Those mighty locomotives get up enough steam to start and then as they go they generate the steam to pull the long line of cars across the plains and over the Rockies. And so it is with Christian experience. There are practices and principles which keep us in touch with the power of God and carry us up the heights toward heaven. The Christian leader must not only "come" and "tarry" before he "goes" out in the service of the Master. He must maintain the principles of that "come" and "tarry" in a constant relationship to the
Master. One of the favorite texts of Rev. John Short, one of our early New England Nazarenes, was Philippians 3:16, "Nevertheless, whereto we have already attained, let us walk by the same rule, let us mind the same thing."

*     *     *     *     *     *     *

02 -- THE CHART

Thy word is a lamp unto my feet, and a light unto my path (Psalms 119:105).

One thousand Bulu Bibles, the first ever printed, arrived in Cameroun, West Africa, in March, 1941. The translation had been accomplished by Presbyterian missionaries and, subsidized by the American Bible Society, had been printed in England during the Battle of Britain. They were shipped via New York City. What their arrival meant is told by Dr. A. J. Good, the principal translator. Three hundred of the thousand went to Elat Station, one of the main stations of the mission. Hundreds of people begged for them, but the Bibles had to be allotted very carefully, for there were not enough to go around. For example, one large town where there were 1,300 communicants received only two copies of the Word of God. There was so much joy when a fortunate person received a copy and such disappointment at being refused. For months the expression had been heard from old people, "I hope I will not die until the Book comes." Sick folk would say, "I hope I will still be here when the Book comes." "Kalate," meaning "The Book," had been heard from almost every lip.

And now "The Book" had come. Groups of native Christians gathered with heads together meant that a Bible was the center of attraction. One of the leading evangelists was allotted a Bible by the missionaries. As he received it from the missionary he fingered it lovingly, and said, "I'll not open it until I pray." Away he sped with the "Kalate" unopened until he reached his house and prayed.

Ways of Using the Bible

All, if we would know the Bible most fully and profitably we must hold it with reverent fingers and open it prayerfully. There is too much irreverence in the handling of the Bible. Sometimes earnest, well-meaning preachers will twist and bend and roll their Bibles or slam them on the pulpit. I have seen a preacher kneel on his Bible to keep from getting his trousers soiled. Of course, no Christian would think of tearing the Bible to pieces or spitting upon it as an infidel might. But there are many little careless ways of misusing the Bible, such as throwing it around or piling books, magazines, and papers carelessly upon it. The worst misuse is not to use it at all. Oh, the dusty Bibles lying unused and neglected! I think it was Dr. Chapman who advised preachers not to carry their Bibles in pastoral calling, so that they might ask in each house for a Bible to read before prayer.
Now it is true that there are different ways in which to use the Bible. The Bible is sometimes used as a charm; one home had a block of wood carved and painted like the Bible with black covers and gilt edges, because the people there felt that it was good luck. We have all read and heard stories of men in World War II whose lives were saved when a bullet was stopped by a New Testament over the heart. I would certainly not discount the real joy a man would feel at having his life saved in such a manner. But, generally speaking, that reason for carrying a Testament is superficial sentimentality or superstition, and it was capitalized on by more than one crooked company manufacturing Testaments with thin metal covers. The Bible should be in the heart rather than over it.

The Bible may be approached in an attitude of negative criticism. Scoffing at the idea of revelation, ridiculing the idea of ancient superstitions, myths, and fairy tales, looking for mistakes and contradictions, the skeptic will find little or no good in the Bible. There has to be the will to believe if one is to find the will of God in the Bible. Jesus said, "If any man will do his will, he shall know of the doctrine, whether it be of God, or whether I speak of myself" (John 7:17).

The Bible may be approached as an object of study. It may be studied for its historical value. It may be studied for its literary value, and what varied and incomparably beautiful literature it is. It may be studied for presentation to a Sunday-school class, or for sermons (would that more preachers would use it for this purposely. But the supreme purpose of the Bible is accomplished when it is used personally and devotionally, when I pick up the Book, open my mind to it, bare my heart to it, and read it with a "What-is-here-for-my-soul?" attitude.

The Nature of the Bible

This devotional attitude is not possible until, in some way or other, we have decided what the Bible is, until we have come to some concept of its nature and meaning. Most of us have been taught the Bible at Mother's knee. We have seen Father take it from shelf or table, open to the place of the daily reading, clear his throat and read before we knelt at family prayers. From our youth we have regarded this book as "The Book," the Holy Scriptures, the Word of God.

But maturity and the call to prepare for leadership seem to demand a clarification, a development of our understanding of the Bible. A complete yielding of ourselves to it is difficult or impossible until we have quite completely settled upon these questions. What is the Bible? How did we get it? Is revelation necessary? Is the Bible really the Word of God? How shall I receive it and use it?

A "word" is "a vocal sound, or combination of such sounds, used as a symbol of an idea or conception," or "the letters that stand for a significant vocal expression." Words serve a twofold purpose: to reveal the person who uses them, and to communicate his ideas to others. One of the most complete revelations of a person is his words. To be sure there are other forms of expression, facial
expressions, gestures, or deeds. And, to be sure, sometimes one's words are
downright deceptive; such as, "Good morning, Mrs. Brown, I am so glad to see
you!" when exactly the opposite is true. But if you take all the words one speaks
and writes, the false greeting to Mrs. Brown, the gossip about her before the
greeting, and the sarcastic remarks after she has gone, you receive quite a
thorough picture of the person speaking. "Out of the abundance of the heart the
mouth speaketh" (Matthew 12:34).

Words are also to communicate ideas, or they should be. Paul Hill has said
that sentences are like freight trains which we load up with ideas to send to one
another. I suppose there is such a thing as sending empties to one another.

The Word of God, then, is to reveal God to us and to communicate His
thoughts to us. With this in mind we can see that there is a sense in which nature is
the Word of God. "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament
sheweth his handiwork. Day unto day uttereth speech, and night unto night
sheweth knowledge. There is no speech nor language, where their voice is not
heard. Their line is gone out through all the earth, and their words to the end of the
world" (Psalms 19:1-4a). The physical world about us and the laws and instincts of
life within us all testify to and reveal God to us. When we watch the migrating birds
in flight we rise in our spirits as did William Cullen Bryant in his song "To a
Waterfowl":

He who, from zone to zone,
Guides through the boundless sky thy certain flight,
In the tong way that I must tread alone,
Will lead my steps aright.

But the Word of God in nature and in the categories of my own mind is not
enough. There is something in me that reaches out to God. But there is something
in me, also, that runs from God. And then, too, there are blindness and confusion
and terror in me. And there are the terrors of a nature "red in tooth and claw." The
stars sparkle and the crescent moon looks down on a world touched with silver. But
the beauty is suddenly shattered by an earthquake, and a volcano belches fiery lava
upon a sleeping town; and again the silvery beauty of a sleeping world is painted
red with the blood of countless wars. Unless God speaks in some other way, unless
He gives some more assuring word, we will be left not only in wonder, but also in
fear and darkness. William Lyon Phelps has quoted one of the great writers as
saying that nature reveals the wisdom and the power of God, but only the Bible
reveals the love of God.

1. The Bible Is, More Completely Than Nature, The Word Of God. The mind of
man is dark and confused, the heart of man is wicked and helpless -- God must
speak, supernaturally, simply, unavoidably, convincingly, in order to help us. That
word He speaks in the Bible, is the Sword of the Spirit, "quick, and powerful, and
sharper than any twoedged sword, piercing even to the dividing asunder of soul
and spirit, and of the joints and marrow, and is a discerner of the thoughts and intents of the heart" (Hebrews 4:12). "All scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for doctrine, for reproof, for correction, for instruction in righteousness: that the man of God may be perfect, throughly furnished unto all good works" (II Timothy 3:16, 17).

"We believe in the plenary inspiration of the Holy Scriptures by which we understand the sixty-six books of the Old and New Testaments, given by divine inspiration, inerrantly revealing the will of God concerning us in all things necessary to our salvation; so that whatever is not contained therein is not to be enjoined as an article of faith" (Mabel 1956, page 28).

2. The Bible Is Primarily A Book Of Religion. It is not a book of science, though its science is true. It is not a book of history, though its history is correct. It is a revelation of the will of God concerning us, a revelation which is divinely inspired and poured through the personalities of holy men who "spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost" (II Peter 1:21). The Bible in that sense is both a divine and a human book. It is divine in the sense that it, as Peter says, "came not in old time by the will of man: but .... of God" (II Peter 1:21). God-inspired, it inerrantly reveals the will of God. It is not the product of human reason. It is not the conclusions of philosophers or scientists. It is "out of the blue," from above, from God. It is authoritative and ultimate "Thus saith the Lord!" As the Word of God it mercilessly exposes the weakness and wickedness of man and the ineffable glory of God. It is human in the sense that it is poured through the mold of human personalities across many centuries. It was not dropped in a tightly-wrapped package from heaven. This is shown most distinctly in the different styles of writing, the poetry of the Psalms or Job, the epigrammatic style of Proverbs, and the long involved sentences of Saint Paul.

3. In The Profoundest Sense, The Bible Is Not The Word Of God In And By Itself. There are three further truths we must remember in connection with the Bible.

a) The first is that, in the ultimate, Christ is the Living Word of God. The Bible fails of its full speech unless it speaks of Him, the Person, and it finds its fullest speech when it speaks of Him most eloquently. Jesus rebuked the religionists of His day because they searched the Scriptures so diligently and yet refused to come to Him of whom the Scriptures spoke. Ye "search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me. And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life" (John 5:39, 40).

A very popular pastime at social gatherings is charades, a game in which one group acts out a word while the rest of the party tries to guess what the word is. Sometimes a word is dramatized, first, syllable by syllable, and then it is shown all at once as a whole word. The Bible is the syllable by syllable revelation, and then comes Christ, the Whole and Living Word. That seems to be the meaning of Hebrews 1:1-3, "God, who at sundry times and in divers manners spake in time past
unto the fathers by the prophets, hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person .... sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high." If you really have Christ, you have the Bible; if you do not have Christ, you do not have the Bible.

b) A second truth to remember is that the Bible cannot efficiently be the Word of God without the agency of the Holy Spirit. The Spirit inspired the written Word and the Spirit must interpret the written Word. "But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned .... for the Spirit searcheth all things, yea, the deep things of God" (I Corinthians 2:14, 10). Dr. Wiley teaches that the Word of God can be known efficiently only as follows: Christ-filled men inspired by the Holy Spirit. "In Him is life; in Him also are hid all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge. The Bible as the objective body of Christian truth must be held in solution in theological thought, and through the Spirit must be made vital in Christian experience." (3) H. O. Wiley, Christian Theology, Vol. I, p. 146. The Holy Spirit is the conservator of orthodoxy.

c) A third truth, already implied, is that there must be the will to believe else the Bible becomes a sealed book. This is not to say that the Bible is passive and impotent. The Bible is veritable dynamite. The Bible (to use a homely figure of speech) is like a Molotov cocktail (a homemade Russian bomb which when thrown would stick to the enemy tank until it exploded or burst into flames and wrecked the tank). The Bible seizes hold of its reader; it grips and troubles and torments even the skeptic. Nevertheless, to get the most from the Bible there must be a receptive mind and heart on the part of the reader.

My Bible and I

1. I Must Come To The Bible Receptively. I must come to the Bible objectively or passively; perhaps it might be better to say receptively. I must not come to the Bible to thrust myself into it, determined to get hold of it and bring its meaning to my own preconceived ideas. When I step here on this holy ground I dare not barge in to call God down for an interview. I must take my shoes off, for this is holy ground, and here I watch and wait to see whether God will deign to reveal himself to me. If there is to be a real revelation, God is the one who must do the revealing. Heaven is a curtained window to me; He can see down through, but I cannot see up unless He draws the curtains. Heaven is too far above for me to reach, unless He lets down the Jacob's ladder. I dare not come into the presence of the King of Kings, even if I could, unless He extends to me the golden scepter of welcome.

Jesus said that unless we be converted and "become as little children" we cannot enter the Kingdom. Even in this bold, brash, irreverent day we should have learned that the only way to unlock the secrets of the universe is to come receptively. We must want to know, but we must be ready to receive. The student
learns mathematics not by going at the book with a sledge hammer but by sitting quietly before the book and hoping that mathematics will reveal its secrets to a ready, attentive mind. One learns chemistry not by invading the laboratory with a pickax and shovel or with a shotgun, but by quietly studying a book and patiently experimenting with chemical formulae. One learns poetry by opening his soul to the gentle secrets of poetry. The ancients spoke of wooing the Muses; they seemed to recognize that the universe had a way of revealing itself to the humbly receptive seeker.

If that is true of the kingdom of mathematics or chemistry or poetry, how much more true it is of the kingdom of Heaven, which cometh not with observation. The world is too much with us; we must go into the closet and shut the door, shutting out the world and shutting out also the clamor of our own turbulent thoughts and feelings. That is a prayer secret, but it also is a Bible reading secret. To hear most clearly the message from heaven, I must reduce the static of earth and even of my own beating heart as much as possible.

Sometime ago I had a little trouble with my car radio. When I told the mechanic, he reached in under the hood and from the distributor cap he pulled out a little black enamel cylinder that he called a "silencer." The purpose of this little gadget is to reduce engine noises to the minimum so that the radio might get the best possible receptivity. Something had happened to the little "silencer," but when he replaced it with a new one, the shrill static was gone, and once again I could enjoy the beautiful tones of the ether waves. There is not enough "objectivity," not enough of God, in our hymn singing, our public worship, and in our private Bible reading. There is too much of "I," "me," and "mine," and not enough of "He," "Thou," and "Thine." As I come to the Holy Word, then, there must first of all be a subordination, a hiding of myself, that He may reveal himself to me. The revelation is primarily "of Him."

2. I Must Come To The Bible Responsively. But if the Bible is to be a benefit to me it must be personal; it must be "to me" as well as "of Him." And, it must also be "of me" in the sense that it mirrors myself "to me." The Word of God is a wonderful window through which I see the glories of the changeless and unchangeable God. I see God in such wonderful passages as Hebrews 1:10-12, "And, Thou, Lord, in the beginning hast laid the foundation of the earth; and the heavens are the works of thine hands: they shall perish; but thou remainest; and they shall all wax old as doth a garment; and as a vesture shalt thou fold them up, and they shall be changed: but thou art the same, and thy years shall not fail." What a view of God! The starry heavens above are majestic enough to charm our souls, if we would but gaze at them. A periodic visit to the Hayden Planetarium in New York City or to some other planetarium should be required of every one who has an important position in the destinies of men; it would certainly do preachers good, and it might help politicians. But back of the stars is the infinite changeless God who uses the "eternal" stars as a change of garment. The Bible is full of lofty windows with measureless vistas of divine vision lying beyond them.
But the Bible is also full of windows that have quicksilver on them, and suddenly we see ourselves mirrored in them. We see our wickedness and lostness, and we are stirred by a terrible conviction for sin. Then we see God on the cross, loving us and dying for us. We throw ourselves into His arms. Then we come on another quicksilver passage and the awfulness of our carnality startles us. There comes the temptation to deny the reflection, to angle it off to our neighbors or friends. But no, the Bible is "of Him," "to me," and "of me," "to me." It must be personal if it is to be of value to me. If I throw the seed of truth away or let the birds carry it away, it will not take root and bear fruit in my life. Then we see the provision for the cleansing of the soul, and we appropriate it for our own soul's need.

Thus it goes as we gaze into the perfect law of liberty. We see God and we see ourselves. We see His holiness, His all-sufficiency, and we see our weakness; when we admit our weakness we may claim His strength, and thus we go from strength to strength. It is all very personal and very much applied to us. There must be constant assent, constant admission, constant application to oneself, a constant "It's me! It's me! It's me, O Lord!" We see this intermingling of windows and mirrors, of God and me, of objective vision and personal application in such scriptures as II Corinthians 3:18, "But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord."

3. I Must Come To The Bible Completely. I must accept the Bible into all of me, into my whole being. Its truth must enlighten my mind. Its calm strength must come to my emotional nature. Its cleansing vigor must activate my will. It is more than a book of ideas, more than a compilation of truths. It is more even than Truth, to be grasped intellectually--but it is to be grasped. The whole being, including the mind, must receive it. Jesus said, "Ye shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free" (John 8:32). For one to try to do an intellectual sleight of hand by saying to oneself, "I know this is not true, and I cannot accept it or believe it, but I will try to find emotional uplift and moral strength in it nevertheless," is more foolish than to try to lift oneself by one's own bootstraps. "He that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him" (Hebrews 11:6). A fundamental element of faith is intellectual assent. With my mind I must accept the Word of God. I must let it fill my memory and determine my processes of thought.

It must also soak into my emotional being, and what glorious help it brings me here. At the end of a busy day, I open my troubled spirit to the restful quiet of the 23rd psalm. Or I read the story of the Galilean storm. My imagination is caught by the picture of the Master sleeping in the stern of the ship while the storm rages in all its fury and the veteran fishermen tremble for their lives. Then He awakens and rises to His feet with perfect balance in the tossing boat and rebukes the waves with a "Peace, be still." The wind ceases and there is a great calm. Something steals into my beating heart, and the first thing I know there is poise and calm. "Great peace have they which love thy law; and nothing shall offend them" (Psalm
There is something radioactive about the Word of God. But instead of being destructive of blood cells and tissue and bone as the chain reaction of radioactivity is in nature, it is constructive and healing. "Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee" (Psalms 119:11). God's Word sets a chain reaction going that keeps the emotions vigorous but perfectly balanced and stimulates the will to holy activity.

Practical Suggestions for Bible Reading

We will finish this chapter with a few practical suggestions as to the devotional use of the Bible.

1. Continuity. More or less regularly one should read the Bible through, beginning with the first verse of Genesis and reading through the last verse in Revelation. Reading in the Old Testament in the morning and the New Testament in the evening is an excellent practice. Through the Bible each year is like Vitamins A, B, C, D, and E to the soul. If I had kept it up unfailingly, it might seem like boasting. It humiliates me to confess I have missed the habit some years, but the several years I have done it have been an invaluable blessing.

2. Concentration. A concentrated study of a book or group of books will yield rich food to the soul.

3. Selectivity. Going to the Bible for special help at special times is like a shelter in the time of storm, or a letter from home, or a special treat from the ice box, and more, much more. Our reading should be more than just letting our Bible fall open to see where we will read each day. One doesn't toss a coin to see where to read in a love letter (the Bible is God's letter to us); one reads a love letter all through. But occasionally the Lord does give us the special word we need for a particular time.

4. Meditation. Our Bible reading should be at different speeds. Sometimes we should stop long and ruminate. I once heard Rev. Harold Gardner say that the strange word "Selah" in the Bible meant "chew on that awhile." There are times when we should "chew on" some passage for a long time and let it bring strength to our souls.

5. Memorization. At one time, possibly often, I am told the now sainted C. E. Cornell stood on a public platform and for thirty minutes gave people the location (chapter and verse) of scriptures they quoted. Only once did he slip up and then I. G. Martin came to his aid.

The Word of God will be to us light, warmth, strength, food, guidance, and protection. Oh, that we might love it as did the little blind seamstress in London, England. She discovered one day that her fingers were so callused from using the needle that she could no longer read the Braille in her Bible. With a sharp knife she
pared some of the skin from the ends of her fingers so that she could read her Bible. But then her fingers were so sensitive she could not use the needle. It seemed she must make her choice between the bread for her body and the Bread of Life. She felt she could not stop her work, for it was her only means of support. With streaming eyes she leaned over to kiss her beloved Bible good-bye, when to her indescribable joy she discovered she could read the Braille with her lips.

* * * * * * * * *

03 -- THE CLOSET

Enter into thy closet .... and .... pray (Matthew 6:6).

It may seem strange to introduce the idea of a closet in a book on spiritual development and progress; it seems on the surface like introducing something negative and reactionary in a discussion of something positive and progressive. But the contradiction is more apparent than real. Actually, nothing is more intrinsic to the idea of spiritual advancement than prayer.

The closet is not a place of hiding; it is a place of adventure. It is not a place of blindness; it is a place of the greatest vision. It is not a place of retreat; it is a place of the greatest advance. It is not a detour or an eddy; it is on the main line. The connotation of the word "closet" to us is a place to hang clothes, a dark place with shoes on the floor, hats on the shelves, and an odor of dust and mothballs. As Jesus used the term it was only to suggest inwardness, privacy, quietude, and sincerity as against the hypocritical street-corner praying of the Pharisees. That, in fact, was the fundamental emphasis of the Sermon on the Mount -- inward motives rather than outward actions.

In the spiritual life the prayer closet suggests to me the express elevator in the Empire State Building in New York. One is shut in, to be sure; but not shut in, in darkness, for it is light; not shut in, in stuffiness, for it is air-conditioned (shall we say heaven-conditioned); not shut in, in inactivity, for this is an elevator. One enters the prayer-closet-elevator and shuts the door. Then the electric power with which it is connected (the Holy Spirit helpeth our infirmities) shoots it skyward, away from the busy street with its roar of traffic, beyond the business offices, above the social chatter, and up into the sky where the air is clean and clear and the soul is alone with God. To the man who does not know the meaning of prayer it seems a waste of time, a dead-end street, a stuffy closet. But to the man who has been lifted into the heavenlies, prayer is the most vital thing in the world, the purest progress.

The Meaning of Prayer

The primary dimension of prayer is altitude. Its direction is up. Fundamentally, it is man to God and God to man.
Prayer does have its horizontal influence, but that is not its primary direction. Prayer does something to me on the horizontal plane. It broadens my influence. It widens my aura of effectiveness. We shall say more of this later. Prayer does something horizontally in the lives of others as well. That is, there is an objective result of prayer; something positive and real happens "over there" on the other edge of town or across the seas when I pray.

A number of years ago, when the Drys were fighting to keep the 18th Amendment, I attended a large Temperance rally in a church in Maine. The main address of the evening was given by the secretary of the Civic League. At the conclusion of his earnest message he urged everyone to work and pray. And then he said, "The most important thing is to pray. How many of you will pray? How many of you believe that God will work in answer to your prayers?" Nearly every hand in the church was raised, with the notable and noticeable exception of the hand of the pastor of the church. It is not for me to say just why he refused to raise his hand, but, knowing him personally, I think I may hazard a guess. I think that he believed that prayer is answered only subjectively, that God does not do things out there objectively when one prays. In this particular instance, the prayer for the preservation of the 18th Amendment, it might seem that he was right. But we know he was wrong -- prayer changes things, it has its horizontal meaning.

1. Prayer Is Primarily Vertical. It is directed to God, not to man. That is almost a truism, and yet it needs to be restated and reconsidered, perhaps often. Prayer is directed to God, not to man. A Boston reporter who had covered a religious gathering for his newspaper wrote concerning the prayer, "It was perhaps the most eloquent prayer ever delivered to a Boston audience." There may be some Bostonians who feel quite ready to have prayers offered to them, but most of them believe that prayers should be said to them to God.

It may well be that the temptation to forget the direction of prayer is greatest in public prayer. Everyone who has prayed in public knows that this is a very real problem. It is not easy to talk with God when there are others listening in. Even that is not all there is to public prayer, for these others are not just listening in; they are praying, too (or should be, rather than looking around, or whispering, or chewing gum, or leafing through the hymnbook), and this vocal prayer one is praying is to be an expression of the whole group. What is one to do? How shall one pray? Shall one forget the other worshipers or forget God or remember both? It would be easy to give a glib answer to these questions, but giving an answer is not finding an answer. Every mature pastor and every mature layman knows that the moments of public prayer are a lifeline of spiritual vitality. When my church corporately prays in the Holy Ghost on Sunday morning something happens. Something happens to deepen and vitalize that church; something happens, without which that church is twice dead and plucked up by the roots. Everything else may be beautiful -- the ushers may be their smiling best, the caretaker may have the pews shining, the choir may sing like angels, the sermon may be scintillating, but, if the congregation does not touch God in the spirit of prayer, we have not really been to church.
It may not be too difficult, however, to agree on the answer to this problem, once we have faced it. Perhaps we may agree on some summary such as this:

a) There may be times when the consciousness of God becomes so overpowering as to obliterate all other consciousness; everything and everyone about us are forgotten, even one's own self. Paul describes such an experience in II Corinthians, the twelfth chapter, "I knew a man in Christ .... (whether in the body, I cannot tell; or whether out of the body, I cannot tell: God knoweth;) such an one caught up to the third heaven .... how that he was caught up into paradise, and heard unspeakable words, which it is not lawful (marginal translation 'possible') to utter." What a wonderful experience! It must be nearly the "beatific vision." That is the Mt. Everest peak of prayer. We may have gotten near enough to glimpse it afar. But it was not the normal experience, even for Paul.

b) There may be times when other things so crowd in for a time that the heavens seem brass and the Lord seems a million miles away. This could be caused by sin, but not necessarily so. A splitting headache, a jumping toothache, the telephone, a crying baby, a blaring radio, a hundred troublesome things, singly or in unison, may fill the whole horizon of consciousness. It is not necessarily sin thus to be victimized. It is sin to stay perpetually "in a stew."

c) The normal spirit of prayer is the predominance of the God-consciousness with the consciousness of other things in subordination. God is the focal point of attention, others and things are out on the fringe of consciousness where we see them only out of the corner of the mind's eye. To put it another way, God is the melody and refrain; the rest of life is just the accompaniment. Perhaps that is what Paul meant when he exhorted, "Pray without ceasing" (I Thessalonians 5:17). Sometimes in the "variations" of life's music the melody may seem to be submerged. But ever and anon it emerges in new beauty, and once in a while it breaks forth in a great crescendo. Prayer is the breath of the soul directed toward God, not a soliloquy in the closet, nor an address to the people in church.

2. Prayer Must Be Spirit-Aided. Jude speaks of "praying in the Holy Ghost" (Jude 20). Paul very plainly describes the ministry of the Holy Spirit in Romans 8:26 and 27, "Likewise the Spirit also helpeth our infirmities: for we know not what to pray for as we ought: but the Spirit itself maketh intercession for us with groanings which cannot be uttered. And he that searcheth the hearts knoweth what is the mind of the Spirit, because he maketh intercession for the saints according to the will of God." In Ephesians 6:18 we find this expression, "Praying always with all prayer and supplication in the Spirit."

We cannot pray effectively without the help of the Spirit. We must be born of the Spirit -- "if ye abide in me." We must be strengthened by the Spirit, for we have our "infirmities" even in a pure heart. We cannot climb the heights of heaven and gain an audience with the "King" unless we rely in humility and faith upon the Holy
Spirit. He is the executive of the Godhead, the Immanuel of this dispensation, and we approach the Trinity through His efficient aid and only thus. Born of the Spirit, filled with or baptized with the Spirit, led by the Spirit, sealed by the Spirit, so, too, we pray in the Spirit.

3. Prayer Must Be Christ-Authenticated. There is only one Name by which we may come to God. "Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you" (John 16:23). The atoning merit of Christ is the pivot on which all our salvation swings. We would have nothing but destruction were it not for the atonement. T. M. Anderson has put it bluntly but unforgettably, "Everything above hell comes to us through the atonement." Revelation comes through Christ -- II Corinthians 4:6, "to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." Forgiveness is through Christ -- Ephesians 4:32, "God for Christ's sake hath forgiven you." The riches of sonship are through Christ -- Galatians 4:7, "if a son then an heir of God through Christ." The gift of the Holy Spirit is through Christ -- John 16:7, "I will send him unto you." Even our future resurrection is through Christ -- II Corinthians 4:14, "Knowing that he .... shall raise up us also by Jesus." And when we pray we must pray in His name and for His glory. Thank God for that mighty name of Jesus-we confess that Jesus Christ is Lord to the glory of God the Father.

Charles Wesley wrote:

Arise, my soul, arise, shake off thy guilty fears;  
The bleeding sacrifice in my behalf appears;  
Before the throne my Surety stands,  
My name is written on His hands.

He ever lives above, for me to intercede;  
His all-redeeming love, His precious blood to plead;  
His blood atoned for all our race,  
And sprinkles now the throne of grace.

The Father hears Him pray, His dear anointed One;  
He cannot turn away the presence of His Son:  
His Spirit answers to the blood,  
And tells me I am born of God.

4. Prayer Must Be Bible-Focused. "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you" (John 15:7). All prayer to be effective must be within the will of God. How better can we know the will of God than through the Scriptures which are given that we might know His will. "Whatsoever things were written aforetime were written for our learning, that we through patience and comfort of the scriptures might have hope" (Romans 15:4).
Someone has said that a man cannot pray effectively unless as he prays his mouth is filled with the promises that God has given in His Word. God speaks in His Word, and when we know the Word, we know quite accurately His will, and then we know how to pray. Praying without Bible reading is a little like firing the gun without aiming it; perhaps we might say that reading the Bible without praying is like aiming the gun without firing it.

5. Prayer Is Two-Directional. It may seem by our emphasis thus far that the important part of prayer is our part. Not so. The harder part of prayer is our part -- getting ourselves in the attitude of prayer, but the more important part is God's part -- what God says and what God does when we finally get in the place where we are receptive.

All of us talk to ourselves, or should. But we do not talk aloud to ourselves, possibly for two reasons. In the first place, we do not care to have everyone reading our minds and, in the second place, we do not wish to be thought queer. The basic assumption of all the people who pray is that they are praying to someone. We do not pray to be seen, but on the other hand we do not feel silly and embarrassed when we are seen praying, because when we are praying, we are talking to Someone. None of us are going to talk unless we think someone is listening, and the fellow who says that prayer is a soliloquy is not going to pray very long.

If there is Someone there, and thank God there is, then we should listen as well as talk. In fact there should be far more listening than talking on our part. There are too many people who get into trouble religiously as well as socially because they are talking when they should have been listening. We need to come to our heavenly Father just as a child comes to his parents, crying out our hurts, whispering our love, presenting our petitions, and thinking aloud about our problems. But we need even more to sit at His feet and learn of Him. We need to heed His warnings, listen to His directions, receive of His outpoured love, and bask in the sunlight of His presence. Not to listen bespeaks pride, superficiality, self-centeredness, spiritual insensitivity, and lack of respect. One of the rudest things a little child can do is to interrupt his parents when they are talking. How much we miss by our childish talkativeness.

One of the greatest secrets of the Christian life is the secret of the quiet hour when in the secret inner chamber "Thou dost whisper what Thou art." One of the casualties of this speedy noisy age is silence. Who has not felt this very keenly when some quiet sacred moment has been rudely spoiled by loud laughter and thoughtless chatter. The singing of the birds, the rustle of the leaves, the mysterious heavenly noise accompanying the appearance of the "northern lights" are heard only when one listens. Even in the "big woods" where game is plentiful the city greenhorn does not see or hear much because he is so noisy. But when he sits still for a few minutes he learns that the woods are not empty. The chipmunk and red squirrel will start to play around, the woodpecker will start to pound on a near-by tree, and a deer will slip quietly through the trees not far away.
A little boy came in late for dinner and found that his favorite piece of chicken was gone. He grumbled a bit, but his father stopped him with a gentle rebuke and said, "Son, if you want to hear the call to dinner, you will have to stay within calling distance." It is quite as important for me to be within calling distance of the Lord as it is for me to call on Him. The miracle of the radio has called to our attention the fact that the air is full of sound at all times. All that is necessary is a receiver to capture it. We may say, "There is not a sound," but had we a receiving set we could reach out and pull in the music of symphony orchestras, the beating of drums, the drone of news commentators, or the sound of distant battle. There are many spiritual lessons to be learned by a consideration of prayer's likeness to radio. There must be some tuning out and some tuning in.

Praying That Counts

1. The Kind Of Man Who Prays. James 5:16 tells us that "the effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much." James seems to imply that, while other types of men pray, the man who prays habitually is a righteous man. Perhaps we might say that there are two classes of people that pray -- penitent sinners who cry, "Lord, be merciful to me a sinner," and believers. Frankly, I am puzzled to know just what to do with the many people who prayed emergency prayers during the war. Many of the men at the front called upon the Lord for deliverance in the hour of danger and when the danger had passed frankly confessed that God had delivered them-but continued in their wickedness nevertheless. It is not for any of us to deny the reality of that praying which was done by millions of hearts during the war. All we can do is to trust that it went deeper than it appears to have gone. It was emergency praying and the Lord seemed to answer those prayers and that faith as far as they went.

But we must still adhere to our thesis that a sinner cannot pray, except as he prays the prayer of penitence. How could he pray consistently asking the Lord for this and that without the Lord's saying, "Now, I want to talk with you about your sin. If ye love me, keep my commandments"? No sinner is going to keep on praying in earnest. As he talks to the Lord and the Lord talks to him, one of two things is going to happen. The blazing light of God's holiness will so mercilessly expose his sin that he will either quit praying (men love darkness rather than light, because their deeds are evil) or he will confess his sins and be saved.

Prayer has a way of bringing our unrighteousness and even our infirmities to the surface and skimming them off. God is Light, and when a man prays he must be prepared to face the Light. A church member rushed up to a fellow church member and started, as we say, to "tell him off." The second man said, "Just a moment, brother. If you are going to tell me what is wrong with me, we had better pray first. I will need grace to receive criticism and you will need grace to tell me in the right spirit." He pulled the critic to his knees and said, "You pray." The first man, who had been so ready to "tell his brother off" and who was all steamed up to expose
his faults, suddenly was almost speechless. He tried to pray but he could hardly say anything intelligible. He stuttered and stammered, and then quit. The second man humbly opened his heart to God and was soon blessed as he prayed; the first thing he knew the critic had his arms around him saying, "Oh, brother, forgive me. I have had the wrong spirit. Please forgive me."

2. The Kind Of Prayer God Answers. James speaks of the "effectual fervent prayer." Prayers need not be long or eloquent to be heard; they may be neither and still be answered or they may be both, yet go unanswered. Many prayers like most sermons are deep -- if you stand them on end.

There are certain qualities which must be present if prayer is to be answered.

a) Prayer must be sincere -- the kind of praying that draws nigh to God with the lips but in heart is far from Him is an abomination. That kind of thing God hates. One of the worst things a man can do is to say, "I love you," insincerely. Lying about the weather is bad enough. Cheating on one's income tax report is a dishonest thing. But approaching sacred things like love, reverence, and God deceitfully is far worse.

b) Prayer must be earnest, must be fervent Cold prayer is a contradiction in terms. Could one speak of icy fire, of cold love? "The act of beseeching earnestly" is one definition of prayer. If you do not care, it is not prayer. Prayer is caring, and then letting the Lord know.

c) Prayer must be submissive. "Not my will but thine be done" (Luke 22:42). "Ye ask, and receive not, because ye ask amiss, that ye may consume it upon your lusts" (James 4:3).

d) Prayer must be with faith. "If thou canst believe, all things are possible to him that believeth" (Mark 9:23). "Whatsoever things ye desire when ye pray, believe that ye receive them and ye shall have them" (Mark 11:24). "Without faith it is impossible to please him: for he that cometh to God must believe that he is, and that he is a rewarder of them that diligently seek him" (Hebrews 11:6).

e) Prayer may need to be importunate. One never sees that word importunate without thinking of the widow who troubled the unjust judge, who feared not God nor regarded man, until he answered her request. And the Word goes on (Luke 18:7, 8), "And shall not God avenge his own elect, which cry day and night unto him, though he bear long with them? I tell you he will avenge them speedily."

3. The Kind Of Answer God Gives. Before we discuss this further we might offer the thought that sometimes God answers "Yes" and sometimes "No." He does answer prayer. But how? He answers according to His own loving wisdom. He answers as thoroughly as our faith and obedience will permit Him.
a) God answers prayer outside of me. He answers prayer objectively in accomplishing that which otherwise would not have been done. There are those who refuse to accept this fact because they are afraid it will disturb their airtight little self-contained philosophy. How can God perform miracles without upsetting His laws? If God is good and great why should He be influenced by any of our petitions. Should He not go ahead and do what is best regardless of us? These questions quite naturally come to everyone who thinks about prayer, and they are not to be passed off with any cute remarks. But after we have done our best to reason things through we still are gripped by the teachings of the Word of God and by the cry of our own hearts. In a series of lectures several years ago Dr. George Buttrick said, in substance, "If a mother out of her loving heart prays earnestly for her son halfway around the world and the universe gives no heed whatsoever, then it looks like the universe does not care for life and love at their best." But God, and the universe, do not frustrate life at its best; real prayer, noble and unselfish, is life at its best; therefore, God must answer prayer. We believe that, in answer to prayer, God may perform what we call a physical miracle. A miracle is something unusual, something supernatural. But we are not to suppose it is a violation of law, or even a suspension of law. A miracle may be the working of a higher law, and after all, the highest law is the will of God. In my limited way as a free moral agent I move among the natural laws with a limited freedom and control. For example, I let go of a pencil and the law of gravitation speeds it toward the floor; I reach out and catch it and put it in my pocket. No law has been broken. My free will is geared to natural law in my limited sphere. The supreme law of the universe is the will of the Infinite God. Heaven is a swinging door to God He can come at will to aid me.

We believe that in answer to prayer the Lord accomplishes spiritual miracles as well. This is expressed far better in this little poem, sent me years ago by a missionary friend in China, than I could possibly say it.

The weary ones had rest, the sad had joy
That day, and wondered "how?"
A ploughman singing at his work had prayed,
"Lord, help them now."

Away in foreign lands they wondered how
Their simple word had power.
At home, the Christians, two or three, had met
To pray an hour.

Yes, we are always wond'ring, wond'ring how,
Because we do not see
Someone, unknown perhaps, and far away,
On bended knee.

-- Author Unknown
b) God answers prayers in me. The motto of the Parent-Teacher organization goes something like this -- "Building is not successful unless the builder grows." Praying is not too successful, however real the answers may be, unless the prayer grows. God answers prayer just as truly in me as He does for me or outside of me. Prayer is more than ascetic spiritual gymnastics. Prayer is about the highest plane of human life, and living on that plane does something to me. We must insist upon this lest we look upon praying merely as a means of getting things. Like the little boy who, when he was asked if he had said his prayers the night before, replied, "No, I didn't want anything last night." Some people think of prayer as some kind of a charm or hocus pocus that will protect them from danger. It may be sincere and it may be devout, but when I see a Catholic cross himself before doing something risky, I am sure it is superstition. Mary said she was not going to say her prayers any more. When she was asked why, she said, "I didn't say my prayers last night and nothing happened to me, so I am not going to say my prayers any more."

Prayer is the oxygen of the soul. When we breathe deeply, the pulse is quickened, the lungs expand, the mind is clarified, the whole being is refreshed.

Lord, what a change within us one short hour
Spent in Thy presence will avail to make!
What heavy burdens from our bosoms take!
What parched grounds refresh as with a shower!
We kneel, and all around us seems to lower;
We rise, and all, the distant and the near,
Stands forth in sunny outline, brave and clear;
We kneel, how weak! We rise, how full of power!
Why, therefore, should we do ourselves this wrong,
Or others -- that we are not always strong--
That we are sometimes overborne with care--
That we should ever weak or heartless be,
Anxious or troubled -- when with us is prayer,
And joy and strength and courage are with Thee?

-- Bishop Richard C. French

Prayer does not always change the circumstances about us. Sometimes it gives us the resiliency that will enable us to take the circumstances and hard blows and still rebound. We have heard in the old song that He tempers the wind to the shorn lamb; and I believe He does, until the lamb has a chance to grow some more wool. It was another bishop, Ralph Spaulding Cushman, who wrote these verses:

I met God in the morning
When my day was at its best,
And His presence came like sunrise,
Like the glory in my breast.

All day long the presence fingered,
All day long He stayed with me,
And we sailed in perfect calmness,
O'er a very troubled sea.

Other ships were blown and battered
Other ships were sore distressed;
But the winds that seemed to drive them
Brought to us a peace and rest.

Then I thought of other mornings
With a keen remorse of mind,
When I, too, had loosed the moorings
With the presence left behind.

So I think I know the secret,
Learned from many a troubled way;
You must meet Him in the morning
If you want Him through the day.

(5) Ralph Spaulding Cushman, Hilltop Verses and Prayers (Abingdon-Cokesbury Press). Copyright 1945, used by permission of the publishers.

One of the little devotional choruses we sing has a real message in it.

God answers prayer in the morning
God answers prayer at noon
God answers prayer in the evening
And keeps our hearts in tune.

Sometimes the Lord gives us what we need, not what we want. Sometimes He gives us our secret desire and not what we ask for. That is said in another way in this little paragraph given over the air by the Pennsylvania State School Association:

"He asked for strength that he might achieve; he was made weak that he might obey. He asked for health that he might do greater things; he was given infirmities that he might do better things. He asked for riches that he might be happy; he was given poverty that he might be wise. He asked for power that he might have praise of men; he was given weakness that he might feel the need of God. He asked for all things that he might enjoy life; he was given life that he might enjoy all things. He received nothing he asked for, all that he hoped for. His prayer is answered. He is most blessed."
A father, so the story goes, bought a small carved altar to display in the home. The question arose as to where it should be put. The family could come to no agreement, and argued so long about it that the father decided to put it nowhere. Instead he placed it in the flames of the open fireplace. The altar had been made of a pungent wood and soon a faint aroma began to permeate the house. The mother in the kitchen smelled it. The son in his room noticed it. Its odor could be detected in the living room and the den. So with prayer. As we submit our prayers to the holy flame of God's will, self is consumed, and a new spirit of God's nearness permeates our lives. We discover that our praying has brought down heaven's finest gift, the sense of God's continuous presence.

*     *     *     *     *     *     *

04 -- THE CHURCH

Come together in the church (I Corinthians 11:18).

Thou, whose unmeasured temple stands,  
Built over earth and sea,  
Accept the walls that human hands  
Have raised, O God, to Thee!

Lord, from Thine inmost glory send,  
Within these courts to bide,  
The peace that dwelleth without end  
Serenely by Thy side!

May erring minds that worship here  
Be taught the better way;  
And they who mourn, and they who fear,  
Be strengthened as they pray.

May faith grow firm, and love grow warm,  
And pure devotion vise,  
While round these hallowed walls the storm  
Of earthborn passion dies.

-- William Cullen Bryant  

Some decades ago down in the Tennessee countryside, Joshua Browning, a Methodist preacher and blacksmith, built a little church. His children grew up under the eaves of that little church. One of them, Raymond, became a preacher whose ministry has won thousands to Jesus Christ, among them the famous Clovis Chappell. More than once I have heard Raymond Browning say, "Suppose my father
had built a saloon instead of a church. I might be in the penitentiary or in hell today.

The Church has been the object of ridicule far more than the Bible has been. The Church has been ridiculed for the same reasons the Bible has been, because the Church believes the Bible. And so charges of "old fogey," "superstition," and "myth" have been hurled at the Church. But the Church has been subject to ridicule, further, because of its own human foibles and failings. There are many who will accept the Bible, who yet refuse to have anything to do with the Church because they feel it is such a poor representation of the kingdom of God. We need not fear for the Church, for the Word tells us that the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. In fact, the more carefully one scrutinizes the Church the more profound will be one's appreciation of the Church. Not only are churches better than saloons (that is reducing the statement to an absurdity) -- churches are better than any other institutions in the world. And from the Church there will spring up every institution of any value.

What Is the Church?

The Church is the organized body of believers in Jesus Christ. In the broad sense it includes all denominations and all other groups large and small, however loose their organization may be. The term "church" is applied to buildings only in a secondary sense. The Church is both an organism and an organization.

In order to clarify our thinking about the Church we should define some of the terms which are commonly used in a discussion of this subject. The "visible" church is the external organization including all those who are church members. The "invisible" church is the body of born-again believers who through a vital experience of grace are actually "in Christ." It is very apparent that there is no exact identity between the "visible" and "invisible" church. Many have their names on church rolls who are not "Christians" in the strict evangelical sense of the term. And some are born-again believers who have not united with any church organization. We believe that as nearly as we can approximate it we should have an identification of the two. In other words, everyone who is a believer and in the living "organism" (the invisible church) should belong to the visible church, the "organization." And no one who is not a believer should be a church member. That is a working principle which should be applied conscientiously and yet reasonably.

The birthday of the Church was Pentecost, and the nature of the group that clung together that day may be best understood by the term that was used to describe them in the New Testament, "ecclesia," the called-out ones. At the first there was very little organization, for the Master had said, "The kingdom of God is within you" (Luke 17:21). Jesus set up little or no machinery. He established a personal relationship with His followers. Then, when He left, He commanded them not to depart from Jerusalem, but to "wait for the promise of the Father, which, saith he, ye have heard of me" (Acts 1:4). The power of the Church, the genius of
the Church, was then, is now, and ever shall be the personal presence of the Holy Ghost. Jesus said, "Ye shall receive power, after that the Holy Ghost is come upon you: and ye shall be witnesses unto me" (Acts 1:8). The three New Testament imperatives, "Come," "Tarry," and "Go," make it forever certain that church organization and church membership are not of first importance. The first, the fundamental thing, is personal inward transformation-coming to Christ, tarrying for the Holy Spirit, going to bring others to the same experience. Whatever facilitates this first thing is important even though it may not be primary. That, I think, enables us to place organization where it rightfully belongs.

The early church was quite unspoiled by any ecclesiastical machinery. Its meetings were spontaneous and informal. There was something admirable in that group which shames much that is called Christianity today. There was little pride, political wire-pulling, or selfishness. There was a universal priesthood; "every layman was a missionary" and they compassed land and sea to spread the gospel of Jesus Christ. There was no asceticism in the distasteful sense of the word; there was glorious self-sacrifice for the sake of the cause. Paul gave up many of his rights, not to fill the Church's storehouse of merit, but because he was devoted to the service of the Saviour and of sinful men. The early church was courageous enough to face a heathen, idolatrous, immoral world with a spiritual gospel and a high morality. It had the boldness to flaunt in the face of speculative, intellectual Hellenism the foolishness of the Cross; and later when even the Church compromised with Greek thought it still regarded Christian teaching as supreme. It was individualistic, almost anarchistic at times. It was a charismatic church; men not only possessed the grace (charis) of God, they might also possess some of the gifts (charismata) of God. The talents or abilities were all considered gifts of God; some were apostles, some evangelists, pastors, or teachers.

There are a few facts that are apparent in the organization that developed in this spontaneous, Spirit-filled body of believers. (a) Jesus established no elaborate organization -- Roman Catholics to the contrary. (b) Individual spiritual life was the fundamental thing. (c) Organization developed under the leadership of the Holy Spirit and the pressure of necessity. (d) Efficient organization may be a great aid in fostering spiritual life.

Christianity is an historic religion. No man can possibly be a Christian who says, "I am not going to pay any attention to what has happened. I am going to find God in my own soul." For Jesus Christ, the only Saviour, came in history. He was born, lived, and died. The only satisfactory record we have of His life and work is found in the New Testament. His message was amplified in the writings of His followers. I must turn to John, Paul, Peter, and the rest to find out in detail what Jesus was, what He did, and what He taught. I cannot be a Christian if I refuse to go back into history for my New Testament and for Christ. And when I have done that, it is very natural that I shall come to love and appreciate the story of God's dealings with the Church all down through the ages. There is little likelihood of my having any profound appreciation of the power of God now and in the future if I do not
appreciate the power of God yesterday. One of the greatest contributions I could possibly make to my own spiritual development and to my usefulness is a thorough study of the Church and Church history. My effectiveness as a leader in Christian service will be in direct proportion to two things: the vitality of my personal relationship to God and my grasp of sacred history. There are other things, of course, but these are crucial.

What Will the Church Do for Me?

Aside from my own personal reliance upon God and the Bible, the Church will be my greatest spiritual aid. John Newton wrote:

See, the streams of living waters,
Springing from eternal love,
Welt supply thy sons and daughters,
And all fear of want remove:

Who can taint, while such a river
Ever flows their thirst t' assuage?
Grace which, like the Lord, the Giver,
Never fails from age to age.

Glorious things of thee are spoken,
Zion, city of our God,
He, whose word cannot be broken,
Formed thee for His own abode.

1. The Church Is A Great Spiritual Mother, not in an official ecclesiastical sense. She is a spiritual mother in a real living sense, fostering the preaching of the Word, giving birth to spiritual babes, nurturing the spiritual life of young and old alike, sheltering from the cold blasts of fear and hate, shedding the healing warmth of her influence everywhere. She is a spiritual mother, not because of mitered priests and gold rings, high thrones, pompous ceremonies, high sounding titles, and ex-cathedra utterances; but because of her warm fellowship of believers born of the same Spirit worshiping the same Christ.

2. The Church Helps Us Solve Life's Serious Problems. The Psalmist gives us quite an insight into the ministry of the Church in Psalms 73. He begins by describing his confusion and bewilderment at the problems of life. He had been observing the wicked and their apparent prosperity, their easy living, their dying without "bands" and it had begun to "get" him. He looks now at his own endeavor to live a conscientious life. The wicked have scoffed at God, they have been bold and blasphemous, and yet their strength has been firm. But the psalmist has been scourged for his goodness and piety. He thinks about this whole problem of evil until he is about ready to give up all faith in God and good. "When I thought to know
Life is full of enigmas. There will be some who will say, "Why bother with anything you cannot understand? If I cannot understand a problem I just forget it." But man cannot leave these great problems alone, for he has an insatiable curiosity, a desire to know, a thirst for knowledge. The boy tinkering with his father's watch until he breaks it is a case in point. And, furthermore, these great problems of the universe do not wait to be solved, they thrust themselves upon us. Hunger does not wait to be sought out. Sickness and trouble are not in some distant clime hidden away where only the adventurous explorer finds them. They stalk every road, holding up oxcarts and limousines, mules and motorcycles, parades and lonely travelers. They take wings and bring down to earth with a blazing crash the speedy planes above. They sail the seas with every ship. They visit every nation, they knock on every door, they come in unbidden through every window. And, in the third place, these cosmic problems are bound up inextricably with man's deepest happiness. To be happy he must grapple with them and find their solution, for it is from his own soul these great questions arise. To the brute beast they never occur. There they are, great and tall. Perhaps we may sum them all up under the two simple questions "Why" and "How." Why do the wicked prosper? Why do the innocent suffer? Why does evil seem more prevalent than good? How can I know the right? How can I do the right? How can I be happy? How can I overcome sin?

Life's enigmas are not going to yield to the hammer of insistence and the prying chisel of logic alone. One's assumptions must be right to be sure; starting out with the wrong premise, one is sure to end up with the wrong conclusion. Assuming that wrong is wrong only if one is caught is bound to lead to moral chaos. Also one's attitude must be right. The door of knowledge opens only to those who bend low. The best things in life are missed by the noisy, swaggering, self-confident braggart. He loves to hear himself talk and so he misses the singing of the birds, the beauty of a harp, the thrill of deep thinking, the sure grip that comes when one sinks beneath the surface and strikes reality, the richness of other personalities, the awakening of the earth at dawn, the infinite depth of the skies, the ever-presence of God -- and he sometimes spoils them for others.

The best things in life are not always won by a frontal attack. They also serve who only stand and wait -- and they find the answers, too. An attitude of honest courage and an attitude of faith are necessary, too, if one is to find the answers. Atmosphere is another necessity to the finding of life's answers. Driving a car sixty miles an hour, listening to the blare of a radio punctuated by static, and talking to someone in the back seat, one is not very likely to find any answers, except to the question, "Where is the nearest hospital." The ancient Greeks realized the necessity of atmosphere, and so they said there were nine Muses, goddesses of the arts and sciences, who were responsible for the inspiration of all creative ideas. In this noisy hectic age the mind and nerves and morals of men are going to pieces because of a
lack of this thing we call "atmosphere" -- not a physical atmosphere, but a mental, emotional, and spiritual atmosphere.

Like the Psalmist we will find the answers only in the sanctuary. I was "licked," ready to quit, intellectually confused, morally beaten, emotionally wrought up, nervously exhausted -- until I went into the sanctuary. There in the house of God my assumptions were corrected. I was reminded that the things which are seen are temporal. It came to me like a refreshing ocean breeze on a hot sultry day that it was not things I needed; it was a Person, and here He is! In the sanctuary my attitude was corrected; the self-centered feverish struggle of my soul ceased and I found peace in being God-centered. In the sanctuary I found an atmosphere in which my soul thrives. I realized I was not made for the mists and vapors and poison gas of worldliness. I was made for high altitudes, for the rarified atmosphere of the spiritual world. In the sanctuary my mind cleared, my soul quieted, my heart found satisfaction. Like stepping from the hot dusty street into the cool shade of a quiet room, was and is the sanctuary to my soul. At first it seems too dark and too quiet. But as I sit in a chair and relax, my eyes become adjusted and I see a friendly smiling face. A cold glass of lemonade is thrust into my hand. Quieted, rested, thirst slaked, nerves calmed, fevered brow cooled -- it comes to me, "This is just what I needed." Like that, but infinitely deeper than that, is the sanctuary to my soul.

Two young fliers were talking. One of them said, "When the instructor tells me I need altitude it makes me sore." Said his companion, "When he tells me I need altitude, it makes me soar." When the preacher tells us we need altitude, do we get sore, or do we soar?

3. The Church Offers To Me The Preaching of the Word of God. In the midst of lies and half-truths the corrective authority of the Bible to me is of indescribable value. We have given a chapter to the devotional use of the Bible. We might well give some thought to the benefits of the public preaching of the Bible.

4. The Church Offers To Me The Fellowship of the best people in my community. I go to church, not because there I can see what the best-dressed people are wearing, not because I can meet the secretary of the Chamber of Commerce or can make some good business contacts, but because I can mingle on a high plane with others who believe in good and God and the Bible. They say that a man is known by the company he keeps and that is true, but it is not the whole story. Our reputation is established by the crowd with whom we associate, because everyone knows that one usually becomes like the people with whom he spends his time. We quite naturally adopt the type of dress, conversation, habits, amusements, virtues, vices, and ideals that are predominant about us. We are made that way, we are fundamentally and unavoidably influenced by the environment in which we live. We may not wish to admit it but it is true. Our freedom lies chiefly in selecting our environment.
Here is a man who works in a wicked and profane crowd of men. You may say, "He does not need to become like those men." Yes, he does. He will surely and certainly become like those men unless in some way or other he sets up in his life another pressure greater than that of his fellow workmen. He may in personal religious living spend time with God and his Bible -- and thus, through yielding to the wholesome influence of the divine Spirit, he may resist the damning influence of his profane fellow workmen. He may find additional aid in church fellowship, where, instead of keeping up his arms of resistance, he may yield to the natural inclination to be like his surroundings. Thus he becomes like God and like God's people.

5. The Church Also Offers This Fellowship To My Family and to all whom I may invite to church with me. My husband or wife can enjoy the wholesomeness of clean conversation and purposeful living. My children can grow up without being poisoned and stunted by evil. Their study, their play, their fun, their friends are morally and religiously trustworthy because they are church centered. Too many people have been "Gadarenes," free lance, independent, irresponsible, drifting Christians. In their drifting they have carried their children, here and there, and, ever and anon, the children are being wrecked. If not for themselves, they should have a church home for the sake of their children who need the nurture of the church's fellowship.

6. The Church Offers To Me The Discipline Of its ethical emphasis. It may not always be too comfortable; in fact, it may be downright disturbing. It may sometimes be embarrassing. Sometimes I will be stirred with a gripping call to higher living. Sometimes I will be goaded and prodded. But I know it is for my good, for my moral consciousness is kept alert. From the pulpit I hear the wrong denounced and the right extolled. The earnest intelligence of the preacher exposes the shallow and the shoddy, and then lifts up the genuine and true. There is no joking about sin, no winking at crookedness or selfishness or uncleanness. In church, things are looked at as they really are. The influence of the pulpit and the example of the overwhelming majority in the pew are in the direction of righteousness. Self-examination is the order of the day in church. Giving, not getting, is the emphasis. Eternity, not time, is the measuring stick. Character, not fortune, is the good. God, not gold, is the end in view. All of this means a disciplined mind, trained to think seriously, abstractly, profoundly. And it means a moral nature, healthy of fiber, responsive and responsible. There are so many personal characteristics developed in church life -- poise, friendliness, attentiveness, ability to get along with others, inclinations to volunteer for some worthy service, universality of interest in response to the missionary appeal. But the primary values are moral wholeness and God-centeredness.

If these influences are not cast about our children early in life we may find them becoming like the armies of unchurched youth of today. The non-moral or immoral state of young people and boys and girls is enough to startle us wide awake. God, the Bible, and the Ten Commandments are unreal to millions of youth in our so-called Christian America. They are less real than the movies, the
suggestive jokes on the radio, the libidinous magazines and books which are worse
than open sewers. They are less real than tobacco smoke, cocktails, gambling,
fighting, and dancing. No prayer is heard in the homes, the Bible is an unknown
book, Sunday is a holiday, and there is nothing sacred. The poorest kind of a
church is better than that. The poorest kind of a church is better than millions of our
youngsters have. The poorest kind of a church is better than no church at all. Today
56 out of every 100 crimes in the United States are committed by children between
the ages of 7 and 18. A few months ago the Boston police broadcast this statement:
"Boston police in their battle against the crime wave have made an important arrest,
holding three criminals. The criminals are 11, 12, and 13 years of age." This is not
pleasant thinking but we had better face it.

7. The Church Is The Fountainhead Of every great organization for good in
the community. Schools, hospitals, civic clubs, parks, playgrounds, and betterment
groups of all kinds sprang into being, directly or indirectly, from the Church. The
Church is an unparalleled breeding place for moral and religious idealism.
Consider, for example, the missionary enterprise which, as Dr. Kenneth Latourette
reminds us, has been supported by more voluntary gifts, given by more people of
moderate means in more parts of the world, than any other movement in the history
of the world. Think of the sheer amount of education in unselfishness the Church
has effected in this one enterprise alone.

8. The Church Is The Greatest Agency for the unification of mankind. It
preaches, and practices somewhat consistently, the brotherhood of man. It
proclaims the fatherhood of God. It minimizes racial and cultural barriers. It
advocates universality of vision, unselfishness of purpose. Its influence is a healing
influence wherever it goes. It brings healing to the body. It brings healing to the
mind, the home, the social life of town and state. Were its influence accepted, it
would bring healing to the nations and between the nations.

9. The Church Offers Me A Place Of Service, a place of service which is far
more significant, because a great organization can accomplish what isolated
individuals never could. The story is told of a Negro coach driver who was
particularly adept with the black-snake whip he used to encourage the horses
along. He could snap the whip and flick off a leaf or a small branch as he rode
along. One day his attention was called to a wasps' nest. "Let's see if you can hit
that," someone suggested. "No, sub!" said the colored man, "dey's organized."

That suggests that not only should I expect something from the Church. I
must also be ready to do something for the Church.

What Shall I Do for the Church?

If the Church continually "does" for me and I do nothing for the Church, then
the Church is cultivating the very thing which has well-nigh ruined the world, i.e.,
selfishness. One of the greatest things the Church can do for me is to encourage
me to do something for others. He that sayeth his life shall lose it, but he that loseth his life for Christ's sake shall save it.

1. I Owe My Church My Faithful Attendance. When I stay at home I vote to close the church, to dismiss the preacher, to shut the Bible and hymnbook. When I find it impossible to attend, I will pray for the services. When I find it possible to stay away from church for reasons that are lazy and selfish, then I know in my heart that I have let down, I have let the church down, I have lost my first-rate love. Attendance at church services is a matter of solemn duty and privilege. It is not to be dictated by the weather, by the special attractions, by my particular fancy for the preacher, by the place in the limelight which I may enjoy. Attendance upon all the regular public means of grace and upon as many of the special services as possible is a plain and undeniable duty.

2. I Owe My Church Constructive Participation in all of its activities. I am there, not to criticize and to find fault, not to drag my feet, but to boost.

3. I Owe My Church The Subordination Of my own interests and opinions to the will of the majority and the good of all.

4. I Owe My Church My Tithes And Offerings. I am not to be the custodian of the Lord's money; the church is. If I cannot trust my church with the Lord's money, I ought to find another church, or have special prayer for myself.

"I am your church. Make of me what you will. I shall reflect you as clearly as a mirror. If outwardly, my appearance is pleasing and inviting, it is because you have made me so. If within, my spiritual atmosphere is kindly, yet earnest; reverent, yet friendly; worshipful, yet sincere; sympathetic, yet strong; divine, yet humanly expressed; it is but the manifestation of the spirit of those who constitute my membership. But, if you should, by chance, find me a bit cold or dull, I beg of you not to condemn me, for I show forth only the kind of life I receive from you. I have no life or spirit apart from you. Of this you may always be assured: I will respond instantly to your every wish practically expressed, for I am the reflected image of your own soul. Make of me what you will."

The church is God's house and the gates of hell shall not prevail against it. A missionary recently returned from China has reported that he does not know of a single church which was destroyed during the Sino-Japanese War where the congregation has ceased to worship because of the building's being destroyed. There is something indestructible in the hearts of God's people -- it lives on though the place of worship be destroyed.

Meeting place of God and man, where God stoops low to touch man with divine life and man goes out to touch others for good what a wonderful place, what a wonderful living thing, is church!
Clarence Cranford tells of a young lady who watched a man come into a church. He went to the altar and reverently placed his hands upon it as he knelt in prayer. Then holding his hands as if he did not want them to touch anything else, he went out. The following day, the girl read in the paper of a great doctor’s successfully performing a very delicate operation, and she decided that the man at the altar and the doctor were the same person.

Oh, bring your hands, your feet, your head and your heart, and your family to the altar of God. He will touch you! He will bless you and make you a blessing!

* * * * * *

05 -- The Call

I must be about my Father's business (Luke 2:49).

One of the most fascinating things in the world is a road. A road has a past, a present, and a future. It is not a single isolated thing. It is a series of events, of experiences, of places, scenes, people, and towns. It may be a little woods road, two tracks grown high with grass as a mute testimony that someone once cut lumber here or now lives here, deep in the forest. It may be a dusty-muddy (sometimes one, sometimes the other) country road, wash-boardy and hard, or soft and wavy, narrow or wide. It may be a second- or third-class road, surfaced with oil or macadam, or it may be a great first-class highway. Sometimes it may be narrow and curving, like a great black serpent, through the hills and mountains; sometimes straight and white and wide across the level country; sometimes stretching out across the prairies with nothing that a New Englander would call a curve; sometimes stopping and turning sharply right or left or turning back in the direction from which it came as if it had changed its mind; sometimes in the valley beside a river, sometimes on the dry dusty plain, sometimes clinging to the side of a great mountain climbing slowly upward or dropping in a steep slope. How fascinating is a road! How a bend in the road awakens one’s imagination! The love of the road is that which makes hoboes, travelers, adventurers, explorers, and the average American citizen.

There are many wonderful highways all over the world, but especially here in our great nation of road builders. The great transcontinental highways, the beautifully landscaped parkways, and some of the special toll roads are ours to enjoy; we have paid for them, or will. Many of us have dreamed of someday looking out our windshields on the Pan-American Highway that runs from Alaska down into South America.

Some of us may not have traveled very extensively, but there is one road with which everyone of us should become acquainted. It is a road not always sunny and beautiful, a road that at times is rough and steep. It is the road of service. No emphasis on spiritual living could possibly be complete without an adequate
The Meaning of Service

Our emphasis in this book is on the devotional life and, in harmony with that general theme, we will approach the subject of service with an eye to its devotional benefits. However, it would seem that to look at service purely and simply for the good that might come to us would be not to see it at all. In order to grasp any subject one must give himself to it; in order to grasp the subject of service one must get the outward look, the "others" point of view, else he has missed it altogether. On the other hand, both as one studies the meaning of service and also as one puts it into practice one should find rich rewards in personal religious growth.

What do we mean by Christian service? Are we to think of it in terms of laboring for human betterment? Are we to base it upon humanitarian appeals? Are we to crystallize it into a program of reform? Is our philosophy to be an optimistic "day by day in every way we are getting better and better?" What is to be the instrumentality of our labors? What are we trying to do? How? Why?

The answer to these questions can be found satisfactorily only in the Bible concept of God and history. It may seem to be going a little afield to find out the purpose of God in creation, but it is the most practical common sense to do so. For, if we believe that God controls the destinies of the universe, then we had better find out, if possible, what God is trying to do, lest haply we be found fighting against God and thus wasting our efforts.

Whatever avenue of thought we may pursue will bring us eventually to God. The chemist in the laboratory will not find God in a test tube; but he will find everywhere the handiwork of God, and the more profoundly he delves into the field of his choice the more convincing will be the index fingers pointing to deity. The historian may feel, for a time, that his patient analysis of the tides of human life has accounted for every rise and fall; but the deeper he gets into history the more unavoidable is the conviction that beneath the tides of life is the power of God. The sociologist, the psychologist, the educator and all the rest who seek truth will be led eventually, if they are honest and openhearted, to the great mother lode of truth, to Him who is Truth. This I believe with all my heart. Let this not be misconstrued to mean that there is no difference between truth and error. There is an everlasting difference. It does mean that all limited truths are related to Truth, and if one follows their lead one will come to Truth.

For example, suppose that I were to start in as a humanitarian, dedicating my life to all that is for the good of mankind. I would study man, first of all, as a physical being, and I would conclude, on the basis of scientific investigation, that a certain minimum of food, fresh air, rest, and so on were essential. Then I would
study the mental, social, emotional, aesthetic, and moral needs of man; eventually I
would decide upon the basic principles of the good life. When my study of the
visible man had all been finished, I would still find something lacking; I would find
that the supreme need of man is for a personal God and the more thorough my
study became the more thoroughly would I see that the whole man needs God. The
hunger of the body for food and the mind for learning all fit harmoniously into the
hunger of the whole soul for God. When this man I am studying finds God, then
everything else in his life falls into place. When he does not have God, then nothing
fits as it should.

Starting any place in the search for truth, one should eventually come to God.
But that search may be discouragingly long and fraught with hazards and
confusion. Life is so short, the human mind so frail, and the hunger of the soul so
great, that one had better jump squarely into the middle of truth and then look
around afterward. In other words, one had better find God in Christ and the Bible
first, and then start to build up a system of philosophy. The soul will speed to Christ
with a swift intuitive rush -- there comes at once a glorious soul satisfaction. Once
the main issue has been settled, sin banished and the heart at peace with God, then
can follow the filling in and building up of our concepts.

1. God's Creature Purpose. Turning, then, to the Bible we find the
fundamentals which will give us our concept of service. In the first place, we see
God's creative purpose. "And God said, Let us make man in our image, after our
likeness" (Genesis 1:26). A companion text which reveals the same truth is
Ephesians 1:10, "That in the dispensation of the fulness of times he might gather
together in one all things in Christ." In making bold to say, "God purposed to do
this or that," we are not trying to rush in where angels fear to tread. We are humbly
trying to grasp that which the Bible tells us of God's purpose so that we may know
what man is made for and how best to help him toward that end. Christian service is
not an insipid humanitarianism; it is something rugged and eternal, geared to the
purpose of God. Too many idealists are merely sitting around and blowing soap
bubbles when God is reclaiming humanity from the ruins of sin and needs life
savers, bricklayers, hod carriers, and carpenters.

God's purpose in creation seems to be to make creatures with elements of
personality like himself -- will, emotion, and reason. The creatures were not to be
exactly like himself, for they were to be finite, but they were to grow in Godlikeness
by unbroken eternal fellowship with Him. The creation of man satisfied God's
creativity, His benevolence, and His desire for companionship. People are forever
asking, "Why did God create man?" We certainly do not have all the answers, and
in this stepping along with seven league boots we may make a theological misstep.
But we must try anyway. We cannot say that God would have been unhappy or
incomplete had He never created man, for God is infinite and perfect. But the
opposite extreme would be to say that since God is perfect we can say nothing
about Him, for to describe Him would be to limit Him. Avoiding both this Scylla and
this Charybdis, we may go back to our thesis that creating man satisfied God's creativity.

Personality must have personality to work with. God could never have been satisfied making worlds. The infinite variety of plant life, of scenery, of design in the world could not have satisfied the heart of God. In five days or periods the Lord finished the world and all its inhabitants, and then He made man. Ever since then God has made man His chief interest. Like demands like. Seeing this in ourselves and in the world about us is that which makes us to believe that God loves and cares for us. To be sure our globe is but a dull speck in the unbelievable space of the universe. To be sure man is insignificant in the extreme compared with the sun, moon, stars, and the crushing forces of nature. But as one man has put it, "Speaking of astronomy, man is the astronomer." Man is tiny, but he is the observer, and the stars are only observed. The personal Creator of this universe of persons and things must be more interested in the persons than in the things. Creativity, as one of the fundamental urges of personality, is seen in the child with his blocks, the boy with his jackknife, and the girl with her doll dresses. The inventor is jubilant when he has made something. Perhaps one of the purest joys Henry Ford ever knew was when he drove his first automobile down the streets of that midwestern city. The higher type of creation, the greater the joy of creation. The boy with his blocks grows into the man that builds bridges and hospitals. The man may build with cement and steel in his construction, but he learns greater joy when he builds with human values. The scientist may scoff at a personalistic view of the universe, but we know that God could not be satisfied with mountains and lakes and stars.

The creation of man satisfies God's benevolence. Three of the most beautiful words in all of literature are "God is love." He is not just good-natured. He is not just loving. It is more than that He loves when He is loved. God is love, the essence of love, the perfection of love, the source of love. Love is expressed in doing something for others. The infinite God, who is love, gives and gives and gives.

The creation of man satisfies God's desire for companionship. Again like desires like. To be sure there is a fellowship lofty and indescribable in the Trinity, but, nevertheless, there is an expression of fellowship in the creation of man. It is something almost too wonderful for words, and yet we read in the Scriptures that God walked and talked with Adam in the garden in the cool of the day.

But man sinned and a chasm yawned between the companions of the Garden of Eden. The sin of man thwarted God's creativity, spurned His love, and rejected His companionship. Only against a clear concept of creation can one adequately see the awfulness of sin. That brings us to

2. God's Redemptive Scheme. The divine purpose is just the same as it was originally -- to have men to love and serve Him. But, first, His redemptive scheme must lift men from sin. This plan may be seen best in three different phases: the
initial or first universal phase, the individual phase, and the final or second universal phase. The initial phase has to do with the universal provision of salvation. It began with the first Adam and finishes with the second. It tells of the shedding of blood, the observance of rites, ceremonies, the office work of the priests, and draws toward an end when in the fullness of time God sent forth His Son to be the propitiation for our sins. It reaches a double climax when Jesus says, upon the cross, "It is finished," and when the Holy Ghost comes at Pentecost. Salvation is provided, Redemption is finished, universal Atonement has been made, so that whosoever believeth on Christ might not perish but have everlasting life. A fountain is opened in the House of David for sin and for uncleanness.

The second or individual stage of God's redemptive scheme begins at Pentecost and ends when the angel shall put one foot on the land and the other on the sea and says that time shall be no more. During this stage it is the task of all those who have been redeemed to spread the news that all men may be saved. During this period God deals with individuals. Sin in the heart must be removed by individual treatment.

The third phase of God's redemptive scheme is the final or universal. This begins with the end of time and continues through eternity. He brings His redeemed children together in His eternal kingdom where He shall reign as King of Kings and Lord of Lords. It may be now that Christians are few and far between. It may be now that we do not seem to have much to say, that our power is limited, that we are a peculiar people, pilgrims in this weary land. But there is coming a day and we are approaching a land where there will be no sin and no sorrow. God will finish His redemptive scheme and accomplish His creative purpose by bringing all who love Him into a holy, eternal fellowship. Against this background we can see

3. The Meaning Of Service. Remembering that we are in the second phase of the redemptive scheme, we can see the Church's place in God's program. Our immediate task is to bring men to the atoning Christ, so that delivered from sin they might start along the road toward God's creative purpose.

The motto of Douglas Camp Meeting Association presents quite well the service motive of the Christian "To bring heaven to earth, and eventually the people of earth to heaven."

The Nature of the Call

We have entitled this chapter for the discussion of service, "The Call." What is the nature of the call? From whom does it come? Is it authentic and authoritative?

In the first place, this call is really a command. Whatever else may be said about it, the final and authoritative word is the command of Jesus, "Go!" We may discuss the plight of the heathen and the problem of their salvation, but, whatever
the conclusions that seem most reasonable to us, the voice of Jesus says, "Go! Go! Go!" How forcefully J. Hudson Taylor stirred Great Britain over and over again with his missionary message on the text: "If thou forbear to deliver them that are drawn unto death, and those that are ready to be slain; if thou sayest, Behold, we knew it not; doth not he that pondereth the heart consider it? and he that keepeth thy soul, doth he not know it? and shall he not render to every man according to his works?" (Proverbs 24:11-12).

Here we see not only the command of God; we see also the call coming as the terrible cry of the need of men. These above verses seem to have been a plea for some kind of social and economic justice. It seems they must surely lose some of their effectiveness coming from such a man as Solomon, one who oppressed the poor and himself spent money like water. But Hudson Taylor did no violence to the Scriptures in lifting these verses to the broad plane of missionary need, for this is certainly a vivid description of the state of sinful man.

Humanity's call to us is the call for the whole gospel for the whole man for the whole world. That means that we cannot ignore the physical need. James said, "If a brother or sister be naked and destitute of daily food, and one of you say unto them, Depart in peace, be ye warmed and filled; notwithstanding ye give them not those things which are needful to the body; what doth it profit? .... Faith without works is dead" (James 2:15, 16, 26). True it is that man's entire need is not physical, but his need is partly physical. Too many times the Church has been willing to forget that, if God in His wisdom made men physical beings, the Church ought to minister to those physical beings. Right at this moment millions of well-fed American church members are making very little effort to share their bread with the starving millions of the earth.

And yet, in all fairness to the Church, we must acknowledge that most of the humanitarian efforts in the world have been mothered by the Church. Hospitals, nurseries, asylums, parks, playgrounds, free lunches, famine relief, and such things spring up in the rich soil of Christian consciousness. Among other noble efforts consider the Heifers for Relief program. Thousands and thousands of cows and calves are delivered in the cities and towns of Europe and Asia. Jesus offered His blessing to the one who gave a cup of cold water in His name. What a thrill to have a part in giving starving children a cup of milk in His name. Don't you dare to say that is not a part of our call! In comparative values it may not be the most important part, but to deny it as a part would be to deny the whole gospel.

Paul makes it plain that the material needs of others make a demand upon us, for he states we should even feed our enemies. "Therefore if thine enemy hunger, feed him; if he thirst give him drink: for in so doing thou shalt heap coals of fire on his head" (Romans 12:20). Jesus offered, at least by implication, reasons for loving and caring for our enemies. "Love your enemies .... that ye may be children of your Father which is in heaven ..... Be ye therefore perfect, even as your Father which is in heaven is perfect" (Matthew 5:44, 45, 48). He also said, "For if ye love them which
love you, what reward have ye?" (Matthew 5:46). Putting these reasons in the order of their importance then, we may say that we ought to love and do good for men (1) That we may be rewarded; this must be understood as reward in the sense of the deepest satisfaction of personality needs, not badges, or lollipops, or spotlights; (2) That we may win the souls of men; "heap coals of fire on his head" certainly speaks of conviction for sin and, by inference, of spiritual awakening; (3) That we may be like God, for God's nature is to do good.

I would like to take the time to discuss this phase of service a little further, for there are too many Christians who fail in their efforts to "win souls" because they seem to think that a man's soul can be saved while the rest of the man is untouched. True it is, our supreme task is to get "souls saved"; but the soul is within man and cannot be reached without touching some of the rest of the man. And furthermore, the soul is attached to all of the rest of the man and cannot be snatched away and carried to heaven. In the last analysis, the soul is the man.

Our service must be to the "whole" man and to all men, first of all, that we may receive "reward." (See Matthew 5:46.) This reward for real service is inward, outward, and eternal. It is inward in the deep satisfaction that comes in investing one's love and efforts in people. Investing in stocks and bonds or real estate may bring a sense of material security, but not satisfaction; investing in personality is the only thing that can bring satisfaction. This reward is outward in the uplift of men, in the raising of the standards of life, the closing of saloons, the opening of schools, hospitals, and churches. If my efforts could change a dirty sinful town into a better place what a reward that would be! If the streets became clean and well paved, the houses painted and surrounded by shrubbery and green velvet lawns, the schools adequate, the hospitals efficient, and the churches crowded, what a reward that would be! If God takes pleasure in scattering flowers and sunshine, how inconsistent it would be for me to scoff at doing good to the "whole" man. This reward is eternal in the joy of knowing that men are redeemed from sin and brought home to heaven.

This brings us to our second scriptural reason for service to the "whole" man. It is this -- that in feeding and clothing the outward man we may find an access to the inward man and so lead him to the Christ who saves from sin. We ought to love our enemies, says Paul, for thus we may save their souls and transform them into friends. Said Edwin Markham:

He drew a circle that shut me out--
Heretic, rebel, a thing to flout.
But love and I had the wit to win:
We drew a circle that took him in.

Our third scriptural reason for service to the "whole" man is that it is our nature as children of our "Father which is in heaven." Whether we are rewarded for it or not, whether we win their souls and get them to heaven or not, we must love
men because of God's nature within us. What He is we must be; what He loves, we must love; what He does, we must try to do. He made the world a beautiful place -- should not the Christian work for clean cities and attractive country-sides? He made man a physical as well as spiritual being -- should not the Christian labor for the betterment of human life, physical, social, intellectual, cultural, and economic? He made the world "one world"; He made all men "of one blood" -- should not the Christian be world-wide in his thinking and loving? This is a plea for the widest sympathy and understanding on the part of Christians for every human need everywhere whatever it is. It concerns me as a Christian that a beer parlor or a cheap roadhouse is dragging down the youth of my town. I should keep my church open and I should also try to close the beer parlor. It concerns me that some little black boy anywhere around the world has a toothache or a hunger ache. I insist that our vision and our service must be as wide as the "whole" man and as all mankind. We must love all of people and all people. Let us get this settled first; we will say something of emphasis later, but this first -- there is no need of any man anywhere, whatever it may be, that is beyond the field of Christian service.

If I am a child of God, something within me will drive me to service. I read some months ago of a young Mexican girl in California who was left to care for her seven younger brothers and sisters. Her mother had died, leaving her at seventeen years of age to keep the home. She kept the children clean, and fed, and in school. One day a friend complimented her on the fine sacrificial work she was doing. She replied, "I can't take any credit for doing something I have to do." "But, my dear," said the friend, "you don't have to. You could get out of it." The girl paused a moment in thought, and then said, "But what about the have to that's inside of me?"

The Glory of the Open Road

There is a terrible peril in the cloistered life. It is the peril of suffocation. It is the peril of poor health with too little oxygen, too little exercise, and all the accompanying evils. It is the peril of paralysis from non-use. It is the peril of the ingrown life, which, like the ingrown nail, means irritation and infection and possible death. Henry Ward Beecher said, "Religion means work. Religion means work in a dirty world. Religion means peril; blows given, but blows taken as well. Religion means transformation. The world is to be cleaned by somebody and you are not called of God if you are ashamed to scour and scrub." I knew a young preacher who felt it was beneath the dignity of the ministry to clean the church or build a fire; and so, in that little church which could not afford to pay a caretaker, a busy housewife had to walk a long distance three or four times a week to clean the church and light the fires.

Love is a mighty force, mightier than atomic energy. For one to receive the love of God with its indescribable energy and its holy radioactivity and then to hold it, not giving it out, is the surest spiritual suicide. Love rejected is a terrible thing. Love kept is almost as bad. Love must be given out, must be channeled to others, else it will kill us. That is the trouble with too many professed Christians; they are
dead, killed by uselessness to a spiritual death where they think of God's love as something for them to enjoy, never for them to give out. Psychologically, spiritually, emotionally, intellectually, and morally people become ingrown who do not travel the toad of service.

But, oh, the glory of the open road! Radiant spiritual health comes from the life of service. The shadows and fears of the self-centered life are forgotten. The ghosts of imaginary enemies disappear on the battlefield where a real battle is engaged. A thousand petty concerns about oneself are forgotten in the overpowering concern to do something for and with Jesus. The thrill of having won a soul for the Master brings such a glorious satisfaction as to make little selfish pleasures seem pale by comparison. The old-timers used to say, "He who cuts his own wood is twice warmed." He who labors for the Master is twice blessed he, by the grace of God, accomplishes the salvation of men and he is kept saved himself, radiantly, vigorously, victoriously, gloriously kept saved himself. Praise the Lord!

The water that is dammed up becomes stale and breeds mosquitoes and flies. The stream that runs free is fresh and clear and full of trout. The self-centered life deserves Carlyle's terrific comment, "Soul extinct; stomach well alive!" The mind and heart that are free and open are kept fresh and vigorous.

Let us conclude this chapter with some practical considerations. It may hurt a little but perhaps we ought to admit that sometimes even our religious activities are self-centered. We go to church to get helped, more than to give help. We want to feel happy and loved, we want to be "blessed." We are more concerned with finding approbation and enjoying the service than we are with getting some soul-health even at the cost of being hurt or with giving some help to someone else. Perhaps there are too many in church wanting to enjoy something rather than looking for a place of battle or service. Perhaps we are a little Epicurean in our religion. Perhaps when we have gone to church and paid our tithes we feel that we have finished. We do not have a vigorous program planned for our whole lives for the Master.

Every young Christian ought to think about this matter -- "What can I do for Jesus?" Dr. Sockman has suggested that it is not only a matter of "coming to Jesus"; it is also a matter of "going with Jesus" and "working for Jesus." I am very frank to confess that two very vital lacks among us Christians in general are "Bible reading and study" and "soul winning." The two are very closely related. If this chapter does nothing more than spur some young Christians to tackle the Bible seriously and then go out to win souls to Christ it will have accomplished a great deal -- "In doing this thou shalt both save thyself, and them that hear thee" (I Timothy 4:16).

* * * * * * *

06 -- THE CLimb
They went up by the stairs of the city of David (Nehemiah 12:37).

This book was begun with an emphasis on the balance between crisis and continuity. Life is a balance between the two. Seedtime and harvest are crises, but before the former must come the preparation of the soil, and before the latter must come the weeding and cultivating and sun and rain. Crisis and continuity are essential, too, in the spiritual life; it is not "either" "or," it is "both" "and."

Too often there is a tendency among holiness people to minimize the continuity. Sometimes, it seems, good people will so emphasize the climactic decisiveness of the work of entire sanctification as to leave no room for growth in grace. It is not necessary to minimize either the first work of grace, regeneration, or later growth in grace in order to make room in between them for the second work of grace.

Entire sanctification is not a terminal. It is definite; it is complete and decisive. But it is not the end; it is rather the beginning of life as it should be. It is not the end, the goal of all human striving. It is the glorious act of God's grace whereby, for the first time, we are freed from sin so that growth in grace may be rapid and unhindered. One's infected appendix is not removed as the final goal of life; one's appendix is removed, I understand, in order that one may live free from infection. Entire sanctification is not the end of growth; it is the real beginning of rapid and unhindered growth. As a pastor I have seen some of the members of my flock grow in grace more in weeks after entire sanctification than in years prior to the experience.

A preacher once said to me, "I have studied and taken in so long that I am full. From now on I am going to write and preach and give out." His well went dry before too long -- I hope he has started to take in again, else he must be pretty dry and stale by now. That attitude seems to typify the concept some people have of entire sanctification. It might be summed up about as follows, "I have arrived, I have the blessing. My search is over. The work is done. I have the witness. The climax of life is over. From here on to the pearly gates it is just coasting. There is really nothing more, nothing better for me now." Such an attitude is quite contrary to the facts of spiritual living. Entire sanctification is positive, but in another sense it is the open door to progress.

Progressive Living

In every phase of life we see the ultimatum, "progress or perish." When advance ceases, disintegration and death set in. In our bodies tissue is breaking down and we must provide food and drink and air and rest to build up new tissue. Life is not a static thing. It is dynamic-heart-heating, blood-moving -- and when action ceases, death begins. It is true in business as well; one may stand still for a long time while others are making improvements, but then the crisis comes -- either move ahead or fail. The doctor finishes medical school and internship, and goes out
well prepared to practice medicine. But he must keep abreast of the times, informed as to new scientific discoveries and techniques or he will fail. In some places it shows up more quickly than in others, but everywhere in life the law is "progress or perish."

It is true in spiritual life. I think that is what the scripture means, "If we walk in the light" -- light moves so that to stay in the light one must walk. In fact, as General Booth remarked, "You can keep company with God only by running at full speed." Like working on an assembly line in a great automobile plant where stopping means piling up, so in the Christian life stopping means a piling up of light and obligation. And if one stops too long one risks a crisis, a breakdown, or a blow up.

They say that the Carlsbad Caverns of the Southwest are one of the most thrilling wonders in our nation. I am told that groups are assembled at the foot of the elevators and then taken on conducted tours through the great caves where it is darker than midnight. A light is switched on in a cavern as the group comes into it. The people move on looking around and listening to the lecture. When the last one has passed through and into the next cave the lights are turned off. If anyone dallies he is left suddenly in an unbroken darkness that strikes terror to the soul. In the spiritual life we find the same thing true -- we must move ahead to stay in the light. "If the light that is in thee be darkness, how great is that darkness!" (Matthew 6:23).

1. Progress Must Have A Program. Movement is not necessarily advancement; it may be just movement and it could be retrogression. Fosdick speaks of the aspen leaf that shakes and moves all night long but is in the same place in the morning.

Some years ago, while on vacation at Half Moon Lake near Alton, New Hampshire, we drove to a farmhouse to purchase milk and fresh vegetables. I sat in the car for a few minutes while some of the party went inside the house to make the purchases. I saw a man come out of the woodshed with an armload of wood. I thought that he was going to build a fire. He dropped a stick or two and stopped to pick them up. I thought, "He is persistent." He came on near the car and then I saw that he was feeble-minded. He passed on around the house and came back again, still carrying the wood. He was carrying wood, but with no purpose and to no avail. I have seen Christians like that, too, moving -- but in a circle; they were not feeble-minded either, though they were foolish.

Take civilization for example. There are some who seem to believe, as I have heard it argued in sociology class, that complexity is civilization. But that hardly seems a good enough definition, though so many politicians think it is. There must be some principles, such as the enrichment of life, the good of the people, the satisfaction of human needs, some principles other than complexity which will serve as a yardstick to measure the advance or slipping of civilization.
For the Christian life we have a concrete and detailed program given to us in the Bible. The Word of God states specifically and repeatedly that Christ is both the means and the guide for life. "He that saith he abideth in him ought himself also so to walk, even as he walked" (I John 2:6). "Christ also suffered for us, leaving us an example that ye should follow in his steps" (I Peter 2:21). There are two phases to the Christian program -- the individual and the social or collective; my own personal growth in Christlikeness and the advancement of the kingdom of God on earth. There are several scriptures which give us a description of growth in grace; such passages as Colossians 2:6, 7 -- "As ye have therefore received Christ Jesus the Lord, so walk ye in him." rooted and built up in him, and established in the faith as ye have been taught, abounding therein with thanksgiving"; or II Peter 1:5-8 -- "And beside this, giving all diligence, add to your faith virtue; and to virtue knowledge; and to knowledge temperance; and to temperance patience; and to patience godliness; and to godliness brotherly kindness; and to brotherly kindness charity. For if these things be in you and abound, they make you that ye shall neither be barren nor unfruitful in the knowledge of our Lord Jesus Christ."

2. Progress Demands Practice. One human frailty is "daydreaming," making great plans and never working them out. This is true particularly in the spiritual life, because spiritual advancement is the most difficult while the most glorious advancement. We must not only dream of that wonderful height we are going to gain someday, we must take the next step.

Do we pray, "Lord, make me strong?" Then we must bend our backs to the load to be carried today. Do we pray, "Lord, make me wise?" Then we must think and read and meditate, must use our best judgment under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit today.

Or do we procrastinate like Augustine who prayed in his dissolute youth, "Lord, make me pure -- but not now"? We need to get our plans and ambitions right down to the present. One colored man said to a friend who was trying to get rid of the drink habit, "Sam, my boy, don' keep sayin' 'I'se gwine to quit, I'se gwine to quit.' Say, 'I'se done quit!'"

Phillips Brooks put it like this, "I watch the workman build upon the building which by and by is to soar into the skies, to toss its pinnacles up to the heaven, and I see him looking up and wondering where those pinnacles are to be, thinking how high they are to be, measuring the feet, wondering how they are to be built, and all the time he is cramming a rotten stone in the building just where he has set to work. Let him forget the pinnacles, if he will, or hold only the floating image of them in his imagination for his inspiration; but the thing that he must do is to put a brave strong soul, an honest and substantial life into the building just where he is now at work. (7) Phillips Brooks, Addresses (Philadelphia: Henry Altemus, publisher, 1895).
3. Progress Furnishes Its Own Power. Christian progress is not an endless upstairs climb by grim sustained effort. That type of unsupported, unrefreshed climbing soon haves one exhausted and broken. A certain weariness and futility are found in the self-righteous life that are dangerous, because they may lead one to renounce all righteousness. Here is a man who for many years has been a good citizen, perhaps even a church attendant (and I should say in passing that a man cannot be a good citizen and not go to church). But suddenly he has a terrible moral breakdown, and everyone wonders, "How could that be? He was good and respectable so long." That is just the answer. He was good and respectable so long in his own strength that he just became tired and quit. True it is, during the period of his "goodness" he was not really making progress; he was standing still, though he was trying.

Spiritual advancement provides its own springs and wells as one goes along. The Christian does not live by artificial respiration. He does not need mechanical aids as when a diver goes deep beneath the surface of the ocean or the aviator soars high into the blue. The closer one gets to God the more complete the fulfillment of his spiritual being, the more naturally he lives and breathes and loves and acts. It is sin which is unnatural; it is when a man goes down into sin that he must live in a diving bell under pressure.

Progress furnishes its own power. I think that is what the Psalmist meant when he said, "They go from strength to strength" (Psalms 84:7). Climbing the golden stairs to heaven, one does not need the inducement of artificial rewards. The thrill of the upper air, the increasing clarity of one's vision, the widening horizon of understanding, the increasing glory of the divine Presence are their own rewards. One sometimes climbs a mountain to hunt or fish or to prospect for gold, but one does not need some "thing" up there to induce one to climb a mountain. Mountains are climbed just because they are mountains, with rugged beauty, breathtaking views, rarified atmosphere, and rocky lonely peaks piercing the sky and circled only by eagle and osprey.

The Christian life is not a starting out with great purpose and strength and then a gradual running down and slowing up until one barely makes it to the pearly gates. The Christian is like the baby, weakest when he is born. He grows, develops, and advances. But in the spiritual life he does not reach maturity, cease growing, and then begin to die. There is no time limit on eternal life. One goes on and on and up and up and up. Deuteronomy 33:25 tells us, "As thy days, so shall thy strength be." The Lord "strengthenedst me with strength in my soul" (Psalm 138:3). "But the path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day" (Proverbs 4:18). This principle of self-sustaining progress is shown very clearly in II Corinthians 4:16-"For which cause we faint not; but though our outward man perish, yet the inward man is renewed day by day."

When he was an old sick man, Reverend Ithiel T. Johnson, pioneer holiness preacher and founder of Ithiel Falls Camp Meeting, was assisted to his feet in the
New England District Assembly. He could hardly stand erect and his voice shook a little. As he testified he confessed his weakened physical condition, "But," said he, "my soul is running up the shining way so fast that I expect when I get to heaven it will take me fifty miles inside the pearly gates to come to a stop."

I think we may be safe in saying that when one ceases to find strength and spiritual sustenance one has ceased to make progress. The burdens may seem heavy, persecutions may seem to hurt and sting, Jordan may seem a "hard road to trabble." But if one is not finding a source of strength and blessing one is not progressing, for in the Christian climb progress furnishes its own strength. Spiritual progress is not so much our making more and more effort as it is our laying ourselves more and more open to God's power and His power laying hold more and more upon us.

We climb the golden stairs fastest upon our knees, and on our knees we find the power of God coming to us. Along the New England coast one summer they were building a bridge across a river mouth. Everything was in place but the large center span; that was resting upon barges and, when the tide came in, it was lifted and floated into place by the mighty power of the Atlantic Ocean.

Heaven Given and Heaven Gained

In the plan and execution of salvation there is a strange and wonderful balance between the human and the divine. As one man put it, "Verily, God doeth it, but He doeth it by a man." Sometimes one is tempted to make salvation all of God or all of man -- theologically this is called monergism. But Scripture and experience insist upon both human and divine elements in salvation -- this is called synergism. There is a sense in which heaven is given and a sense in which it is gained. The former truth is more foundational, but it is incomplete without the latter. We must never forget the former, but in this concluding chapter we wish to emphasize the latter.

1. The Great Motive. The great motive of Christian living is "for Jesus' sake." This little expression so familiar to us is found only twice in the Bible, both times in the fourth chapter of II Corinthians. There are numerous phrases like it, such as "for Christ's sake," "in Christ's stead," and "in the name of Jesus." These expressions have become so much a part of our thinking that we rarely conclude a prayer without using one of them, and this is quite in harmony with God's Word, for Jesus said very specifically to His disciples, "Whatsoever ye shall ask the Father in my name, he will give it you. Hitherto ye have asked nothing in my name: ask, and ye shall receive that your joy may be full" (John 16:23, 24).

This blessed name is the key which opens all doors. There is no situation to which the name of Jesus does not bring help. Especially it is the channel by which the grace of God flows to us and by which our love and service flow back to Him. It is "for Jesus' sake" that God pours out His grace upon us. Revelation and the
whole redemption scheme come to us through and for Jesus. Forgiveness, the riches of divine sonship, cleansing, daily grace, and our final resurrection glory come to us by and for Jesus' sake.

But this "for Jesus' sake" is not only the pivot on which God's grace swings; it is also the pivot on which all of our lives swing -- it is the great Christian motive, "for Jesus' sake." There are and will be lesser motives, but there must be none that conflict with, none that are not subordinate to this, "for Jesus' sake."

2. The Great Reliance. If Jesus is our great motive, then the Holy Spirit must be our great reliance. He, the Third Person of the Trinity, is the Immanuel of this dispensation. He is the executive agent of the Godhead. He is the representative by whom the will of deity is made effective in our lives. We are convicted by the Holy Spirit, born of the Spirit, cleansed by the Spirit, kept by the Spirit. It is "Not by might, nor by power, but by my spirit, saith the Lord of hosts" (Zechariah 4:6).

Nothing, absolutely nothing, can be accomplished in the realm of spiritual values except in reliance upon the Holy Spirit. We might well paraphrase those familiar words of I Corinthians 13: "Though I speak with the tongues of men and of angels, and have not 'the Spirit; I am become as sounding brass, or a tinkling cymbal. And though I have the gift of prophecy, and understand all mysteries, and all knowledge, and though I have all faith, so that I could remove mountains, and have not "the Spirit; I am nothing. And though I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and though I give my body to be burned, and have not "the Spirit; it profiteth me nothing." No advancement can be made in climbing the golden stairs except in reliance upon the Spirit.

Nevertheless, we have a very real, an earnest and vigorous part to play.

3. The Technique Of Climbing. Such an expression as "the technique of spiritual climbing" may suggest to some the thought of medieval saints with their mechanical practice of prayers and piety, the wearing of hair shirts while they shaved all the hair from their heads, sleeping on hard cots in narrow cells and getting up terribly early in the morning to mumble memorized meditations. Or it may suggest the modern classroom where everything is boiled down to a scientific formula, or a social pattern, or a thought area. Life is not quite that simple; it is not made by a little sour-visaged piety; it cannot be contained in a mathematical equation; it is not shown completely in some diagram on a teacher's blackboard or even in the chart used by some ambitious preacher in a special crowd-getting lecture.

But it still is a fact that life is based upon certain principles. It is a fact that for successful living one must find and live by such basic principles; and our endeavor here is not to wrap life up in a clever little formula, it is to find some practical down-to-earth help in our get-to-heaven climb.
It may be true that some good Christian people have swung over almost to antinomianism, to the place where it is all of grace. I have even heard holiness people testify with an emphasis something like this, "Bless God! I am saved and sanctified. God has taken the 'want to sin' out of my heart. And now I just do as I please. I do everything I want to do because I want to do good."

Thank God for the truth there is in such a testimony as that, but there is danger as well. There is the danger of spiritual ease and selfishness. Though we may be saved and sanctified we are still in the flesh and still in a world of probation. Paul said, "I keep under my body and bring it into subjection" (I Corinthians 9:27). The devil may work along the avenue of some legitimate desire and lead us into selfishness and sin. So that while the Scripture says, "It's God that worketh in you" (Philippians 2:13), it also says, "Work out your own salvation with fear and trembling" (Philippians 2:12).

There must be self-discipline along the line of "I ought" if there is to be spiritual progress. Henry C. Link, the author of The Return to Religion and a practicing psychologist in New York City, said several years ago that most of the people who came to him for consultation needed little more than to shift to the plane of duty, "I ought." Dr. Alexis Carrel used an expression like this in speaking of the possibility of social or moral advancement, "the small laboratories of our private lives." Says Carrel, "Discipline summons from our deepest cells unsuspected stores of energy. It is essential to man's harmonious functioning. The man who has daily drilled himself in little gratuitous exercises of will, who has been systematically ascetic or heroic in small matters, will find that he is supported by strong inner buttresses when winds of adversity rage around him .... Life leaps like a geyser for those who will drill through the rock of inertia." (8) Alexis Carrel, "Work in the Laboratory of Your Private Life," Reader's Digest, September, 1940. Used by permission.

I would like to suggest two general sets of principles as an aid to spiritual progress. These are intended to be suggestive, not final hard and fast rules; if they stimulate the reader to a more earnest application to this business of Christian living they will have accomplished their purpose.

a) One set of climbing principles.

(1) Disciplined use of time. I think it was Sir Francis Bacon who said, "A man though young in years may be old in hours if he improve his time."

(2) Disciplined development of one's personality: Intellectual, social, aesthetic, moral, and religious.

(3) Disciplined practice of good. The one great danger of such a pattern as this is its lack of emphasis upon our need of God. This pattern could safely be followed only in connection with a deeply religious dependence upon God.
b) Another set of climbing principles. For this let me suggest two historic expressions which serve to balance one another and which together, it seems to me, offer a wonderful formula for a successful Christian life.

(1) Practicing the presence of God. This old expression which originated I believe with Brother Lawrence is not so commonly heard as it used to be. Its emphasis is upon "God-consciousness" and it makes one think of that old gospel song by W. D. Longstaff.

Take time to be holy, speak oft with thy Lord;
Abide in Him always, and feed on His word.
Make friends of God's children; help those who are weak;
Forgetting in nothing His blessing to seek.

Take time to be holy, let Him be thy Guide,
And run not before Him, whatever betide;
In joy or in sorrow, still follow thy Lord,
And, looking to Jesus, still trust in His word.

Take time to be holy, be calm in thy soul;
Each thought and each motive beneath HIS control;
Thus led by His Spirit to fountains of love,
Thou soon shalt be fitted for service above.

As Wordsworth said, "The world is too much with us," and if we are going to make progress in our heavenly climb we cannot have our eyes and our interests on the earth. We will get dizzy and fall, or our steps will lag and then turn backward, if we think and think and think about the world. We must think and think and think about God and spiritual heights, if we would climb. Whatsoever things are lovely, of good report, of spiritual value, think, think on these things! I believe that is the formula given to us in II Corinthians 3:18 -- "But we all, with open face beholding as in a glass the glory of the Lord, are changed into the same image from glory to glory even as by the Spirit of the Lord."

One goes where he looks. One becomes like his ideal. One becomes what he thinks. Someone has said, "Man is not what he thinks he is; but what he thinks, he is." We must not so glorify the cloistered life of meditation as to rob Christianity of its vitality and practicality. But we must have God uppermost in our minds wherever we may be if we are to be spiritually minded.

(2) The Imitation of Christ. This expression was made classic in the book of the same name by Thomas a Kempis. On the surface it seems to smack of self-righteousness or salvation by works. But first of all, we must remember that the word "imitation" had a more profound meaning originally that it has today; to imitate means to pattern after. Originally the word did not have the connotation of
"poor substitute" which it has today. A further safeguard against a "salvation by works emphasis" is remembering that one must be brought into grace before one can grow in grace; one must be born before one can grow; the sinner (child of the devil) must partake of the nature of Christ before he can grow in Christlikeness. With these thoughts in mind let me suggest that we may:

(a) Imitate Christ in being.

i) He was physically clean and strong. His muscles were hard with handling the crude carpenters' tools of His day. His back was sturdy and straight, His lungs capacious, His face tanned, His eyes clear and strong. When the money-changers tumbled out of the Temple, they fled before a real man.

ii) He was intellectually alive. To be sure He was God with infinite omniscience, but He was also man. As a boy in the Temple He talked with the doctors and lawyers. He increased in "wisdom." He was courageously honest and alert. Oh, the wonders of that mind!

iii) He was aesthetically sensitive. What beauty there is in His descriptions! "Consider the lilies of the field, how they grow; they toil not, neither do they spin: And yet I say unto you, That even Solomon in all his glory was not arrayed like one of these" (Matthew 6:28-29).

iv) He was socially responsive. He loved the little children and held them in His arms. He went to weddings and sat at feasts even with the publicans. He and His disciples sang together ("and when they had sung an hymn"). What a male chorus that must have been when those thirteen bearded Jews sat on the hillside at night under the Palestinian sky! In the agony of Gethsemane Jesus wanted the companionship of His disciples. When He was on trial His heart bled that His disciples left Him, and there on the cross His most pathetic cry was, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" (Mark 15:34).

v) He was morally vigorous. As a lad He felt the call of mighty duty -- "Wist ye not that I must be about my Father's business" (Luke 2:49). His soul burned within at the desecration of the house of God and He drove the money-changers from the Temple. He discerned the hypocrisy of the Pharisees who brought the adulterous woman to Him; He accused them unmercifully, for they were guilty but unrepentant; but with tenderness He forgave the woman, for she was confessedly guilty, but repentant.

vi) He was spiritually dynamic. He lived so close to the Father that He could say, "I and my Father are one."

(b) Imitate Christ in doing.
He was no library philosopher, no parlor saint. He gave His life, His love, His blood. "Let this mind be in you, which was also in Christ Jesus" (Philippians 2:5). "Jesus of Nazareth .... went about doing good, and healing all that were oppressed of the devil; for God was with him" (Acts 10:38).

Think of the great Christians you have known and of whom you have read. Did they ride along to greatness on the wave of unfailing joyous feeling? No! None of them like Topsy "jest growed." They were God-cultivated, parent-cultivated, friend-cultivated, self-cultivated, adding their own resolute wills to the grace of God and the help of others to make of themselves great souls.

In the words of Reginald Heber:

A noble array, men and boys,
The matron and the maid,
Around the Saviour’ s throne rejoice
In robes of light arrayed:
They climbed the steep ascent of heaven
Through peril, toil, and pain;
O God, to us may grace be given
To follow in their train.

*     *     *     *     *     *     *

THE END