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**THE GLADNESS OF GOD**  
**By Howard Vassar Miller**

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## INTRODUCTION

It is by no means an easy matter to face life in all of its scope of realities. Men are prone to take an escapist attitude toward the more difficult and complicated aspects of human existence. And since this part of human living bulks rather large, man readily becomes evasive and readily rationalizes-and all in the name of reality.

The truth of the matter is, the real Christian is the only one who faces life as it is, refusing to be satisfied with aught less than an adequate solution of the problems that confront him. The following chapters are but the simple recognition of this fact and a frank attempt to state the common Christian view of things. May these pages help you who read as they have helped me in facing these problems for myself.

H. V. Miller

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## FOREWORD

The following chapters are by no means closely related. They are, rather, devotional messages somewhat arbitrarily chosen from our personal ministry. Many have claimed inspiration and personal help from these messages as they have been preached here and there to the extent that we have been led to believe that others might in turn find some measure of spiritual stimulation in the reading of them. We offer the following pages, then, with the hope that someone's faith may be quickened and his path made a bit clearer. These are days when every spiritual incentive possible should be made available to good people everywhere that they might live hopefully and triumphantly in days that are so challenging.

H. V. Miller

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## 01 -- THE GLADNESS OF GOD

Thou hast put gladness in my heart, more than in the time that their corn and their wine increased (Psalm 4:7).

The conflict between values, seen and unseen, began with the creation of man. And that same conflict is still on today. When God assured Adam and Eve that peace and gladness would be theirs through obedience to His holy will, Satan immediately challenged the integrity of God. Satan assured our first parents that the benefits of disobedience would utterly outweigh those of obedience. It would be theirs to be infinitely wise; to enjoy the vast treasures of what today is termed realism; to taste and experience the multiplied emotions of life to their full. All of this,

Satan assured them, was of unspeakable value over against docile dependence upon another, even if that other were Jehovah. Life should be experienced in its glorious external realities. Such inward compensations for obedience as would be theirs fell far short of outward delights and the sophistication of experience. It was to these subtleties that Adam and Eve gave heed.

And the pattern of life has never materially changed. Man today still finds greater delight in the corn and wine of this old world than he does in the inner gladness of God. Somehow gladness is too intangible while corn and wine can be felt and tasted. As a consequence, from then till now, the vast multitudes of humanity have lived only for that which one can taste, touch, smell, see and hear. Man's interests are primarily of the body and sensuous. All else seems tame and unreal.

These two terms-gladness and corn and wine -- stand as representing the two great emphases of life. Gladness stands for inner character; corn and wine for outward satisfaction. Gladness implies eternal values; corn and wine temporal interests. And this in substance is the constant conflict on moral levels whenever man is successfully challenged by spiritual things. In every church across the land wherever the gospel is actually preached, this is the battle ground. Wherever the same gospel vibrates over the air waves and reaches men's ears the same challenge is raised.

We endeavor to convince people that the gladness God can give surpasses all the corn and wine this world has to offer. People ponder the problem and the vast majority turn away unconvinced and unchanged. To them, the wisest decision is corn and wine. These, if you please, are tangible. They can be tasted, felt and seen. It is corn and wine that pass in the world's mart of trade. One must be practical, he must live. And after all why is this world here unless it is to be enjoyed. Now is the time to capitalize on corn and wine before the darker and more foreboding things of life may come. Only corn and wine will take you places, and it is up to each of us to achieve material success in this life if we are ever to do it. Gladness may be well and good but it is all too impracticable for this practical world. We are here without asking to be and we must live. Perhaps at some later time, when life has been heartily and adequately exploited, one will turn to gladness, but not now. It is ever the old, old choice between personality and things, the unseen and the visible, the eternal and the temporal.

The verse immediately preceding our text seems to reflect the matter well from the spiritual point of view. Here David is testifying, "There be many that say, Who will show us any good? Lord, lift thou up the light of thy countenance upon us." In substance David seems to raise the same old question only to answer it. There are many, says he in substance, who ask "What's there to it?" For his reply David turns to God with this plea, "Lord, bless us who enjoy Thy gladness and prove through that blessing that gladness is worth while." Herein is the constant challenge to the Christian. It is a fundamental need-a vital experience of religion. But we should ever ask from God the outward exploitation of that inward reality that the world may see its beauty. We should constantly seek to keep a freshness and a fullness in our religious life so that the overflow will show to a world of heartaches that after all we have an internal something that they need. If there ever was a day when we should seek in our lives the meaning of Jesus' statement, "I am come that ye might have life and that ye might have it more abundantly," it is now. If there ever was an hour when we should yield our lives utterly to the persuasion and thralldom of the Holy Spirit it is now. There will be no other way to convince a cynical and unbelieving generation of the reality of our

faith -- the gladness of God -- but by an abundant, joyful, triumphant life. David was right though he spoke centuries ago.

I want to lay before you the reasons why the gladness of God surpasses the corn and wine of this world. And our faith and experience is not without rational content even though it is based in revelation and is spiritual and mystical. Much of the talk today of Realism is but a misnomer. There is no more profound realism than that which genuine Christian experience holds. To pin one's definition of realism to mere material substance is both awkward and untrue. Some of the most profound realities are those intangible and unseen. Who can gainsay this?

The gladness of God is superior to the corn and wine of this old world because there is a constancy to gladness whereas there is a definite uncertainty in corn and wine. Gladness is something that is in my heart. It is therefore normally a stable quality. Corn and wine are external, hence utterly dependent upon many factors. Corn and wine are fluctuating and temporary. Gladness is stable and sure. Corn and wine depend upon multiplied factors, mostly beyond one's control. Gladness is contingent solely upon one factor, an obedient and submissive will to a loving heavenly Father. And after all there is a vast difference between happiness and joy. Happiness depends upon happenings. If things "happen" right one is happy. If his job continues; if his friends stick with him; if life breaks right and health continues he is happy. But when things turn against him; when friends desert and forget; when health fails; when the security of prosperity gives way happiness goes like a phantom shadow and cannot be found. But joy does not depend upon externalities. It depends upon an attitude of heart and remains constant and real regardless of outward conditions. Thus one may have the constancy of gladness and joy regardless. Let reverses come. True, they are hard to bear and perplexities of life can weigh us down. But in the very midst of it all there is a "deep settled peace." There is a fundamental foundation to life that cannot be unseated. There is an inner confidence and assurance that all is well. And all of this issues in a conscious gladness of heart that outstretches all else in reality.

Notice that David in this Psalm says that God has put gladness in his heart more than in that particular time that their corn and wine increased. In other words, long before they had their bumper crops of corn and wine he had been enjoying the gladness of God. This old world has little to testify to in hours of material pressure and stringency. Only in times of prosperity is it buoyant and happy. Only in the hours of abundance can it declare the values of corn and wine. But David assures us -- and he but speaks the heart of true experience -- that long before their corn and wine was enjoyed he was realizing the benefits of the gladness of God.

But the value of gladness outweighs corn and wine even more. It is discovered in the fact that gladness is inward and corn and wine outward and superficial. And we mean something different from constancy. Perhaps the best way to make it clear is to review the record of one whose life was conspicuously a success in terms of this world's appraisal. Some years ago I read in a popular periodical the record of an interview with Mr. Statler of hotel fame. The interviewer sought for the secrets of success in this man's accomplishments. As I recall the incident, Mr. Statler began his career as a bellboy in a hotel. His ambitions for life were such that he could not be content to remain on this plane of service. By faithfulness in service and earnestness of application he achieved his first success in becoming a night clerk. When asked by his interviewer if he was not satisfied then, he replied with a measure of significance, "I thought I would be, but I was not. I

wanted to become a day clerk." And again there was a reward for application and Mr. Statler was promoted. But again his satisfaction turned to restlessness and an urge to climb higher. He longed to manage a hotel. Once more reward came from toil and he became the manager of his first hotel. When queried again by his interviewer if he had not at last reached the goal of final achievement he declared that he had not. He now wanted to own a hotel of his very own. And eventually his longing and effort became a fact. Mr. Statler owned his first hotel. At the time of this interesting and revealing interview Mr. Statler had reached the height of his business achievement. He was the owner of one of the great hotel chains of the East. Once again the interviewer questioned him, "Are you not now satisfied?" "No!" replied Mr. Statler, "I want more hotels." This incident is not merely the record of a successful man and the revelation of what one can accomplish in life by faithfulness and diligence. The fact drives deeper than this. It is the tacit revelation that a man cannot find satisfaction in things, regardless of their abundance. You simply cannot satisfy the inner cravings of personality with things. The immediate thrill of conquest may for a time submerge the longing and stifle the cry but not too long. There ever comes a time when disappointment and disillusionment take their toll. The human soul is too deep to probe with material values. Corn and wine just will not satisfy those inner cravings. It was the woman whom Jesus met at the well in the long ago who spoke unwittingly but truly, "The well is deep." Yes, the well is deep. You cannot transmute outward values of corn and wine into inner qualities of gladness. The latter comes only from God. One might as well attempt to satisfy the ravished soul of the painter, as he feverishly attempts to put on his canvas the exquisite hues of a gorgeous sunset, with a piece of pie as to satisfy the human soul with things. It cannot be done. Only the inner conscious gladness of God can satisfy the cry of personality.

But there is yet another angle to the proper evaluation of the gladness of God that we cannot escape. It is the practicality of gladness as against the uselessness of things. Though this strikes the human heart as a paradox yet the truth remains. There is a definite practicality to gladness that corn and wine do not hold. So many people seem to think that things will bring them everything that is worth while. But there is no greater or more fundamental fallacy in life. Corn and wine are mediums of exchange and have a limited market. There are, after all, but few places in life where their purchasing value is real. How deceived are the multitudes! If they could only have wealth the problems of life would be solved. Ask the man who is wealthy and he will tell you the truth. Money may buy you vast estates and palatial homes. Wealth may have power to transport you about the globe. Lavish means may enable you to culture the sensuous and cultivate the externalities of life. It may, for a time, have a magic power of placing unreal barriers between you and the hurts of life. But sooner or later perplexity and sorrow will break through such temporary defenses. And when you come to grips with grim realities, corn and wine will help but little.

Corn and wine are of little avail in the sorrows of life. When life has at last ebbed from the form of that loved one and you stand in the stark presence of death with all its grim reality, corn and wine cannot help you then. When all the pomp of material things is torn away and the cold facts of human loss smother your unprotected soul, corn and wine reveal their silly futility. Too often we have stood in funeral parlors and endeavored to bring words of comfort and tried to lessen the sting of it all. But ever in vain when those to whom we would minister have foundationed their lives in corn and wine. Their sorrow is tragic. Their helplessness is appalling. But the one who has learned the secret and meaning of the gladness of God is able to cry out of the

deep of his sorrow, "Thou hast turned for me my mourning into dancing: thou hast put off my sackcloth, and girded me with gladness" (Psalm 30: 11).

But more than this. In that hour of personal test to which we all must come; when life ebbs away and the material becomes a dim mirage, corn and wine will mean but little then. A strange and sickening sense of the misplacement of life will overwhelm you. As you vainly try to lay hold of that which you thought was so substantial and real it will mockingly elude you. Then you cannot drink your wine. No longer will its exhilaration sustain you. No longer can you hide yourself from the realities of life by its momentary intoxication. Nor can you take your corn with you. Your fingers will relax their stubborn and clinging hold upon the things of earth. Corn and wine can then but mock you in their fundamental unreality. While you can keep your corn and wine as a smoke screen in life all will be well. But this at its best is but momentary. You must face it sooner or later. And only then when you do, will the practicality of gladness prove its merit against the uselessness of things. It would be better to find the gladness of God now and experience its beauty now and-then. We stood at the bedside of an aged man some time ago. He had sought the gladness of God through the years. He had invested time, talent and means to this one end. I had not been in the sickroom long before he told me that he was fully satisfied. He declared quietly with a calm confidence that betokened his sincerity and forethought that he had reviewed life scrupulously and was prepared to say that there was not a single disappointment upon his horizon. He was ready to go. His life was full. He had no regrets. The secret of it all was that he had long ago shared the secret of David and had found that the gladness of God surpassed the corn and wine of the world.

But what is gladness? Can it be defined? What is its content? The word in its original meaning, as far as we can ascertain, means literally to brighten up. It reminds us of the periodical housecleanings of the housekeeper. How glad-hearted is that housewife who has finished the last closet, rearranged the last drawer, replaced the last curtain and rug. Housecleaning is over and rejoicing is due. There is an obvious moral application herein. Gladness is found when inward moral renovation is complete. Only when the transforming power of the Holy Spirit has caused old things to pass away and all things to become new can there be a basis for gladness of heart. Gladness is morally and spiritually foundationed for it comes from God.

But gladness carries with its significance the thought of gleeful, merry-hearted rejoicing. In fact, gladness was an apostolic disposition. "And they continuing daily with one accord in the temple, and breaking bread from house to house, did eat their meat with gladness and singleness of heart" (Acts 2:46). Scanning apostolic records with this emphasis in mind one cannot escape the constant atmosphere of gladness and buoyant victory. Gladness is a word filled with action. It is positive, virile, alive.

Gladness is the gift of God. Note that David declares, "Thou hast put gladness in my heart . . ." The heart of gladness is experiential. It is something that one receives direct from God. True, all the blessings of life are from the Father of Lights with whom there is no variableness, neither shadow of turning. But the origin of gladness drives deeper than this. A corporation may issue bonuses to its employees but a personal gift from the president of that corporation to one employee is an entirely different matter. The former, though sincerely appreciated, is so spread out in its expression that it loses any personal significance. It is just a bonus. But the latter narrows down to a distinctly personal matter. And so it is, although we are men and women of earth and are the

constant recipients of the benevolence of a loving God, the gift of gladness to an individual heart as a personal experience of grace is another matter. And this is the source of gladness. God puts it there Himself.

But gladness has its basis first of all in a clear conscience. "Light is sown for the righteous and gladness for the upright in heart." One cannot hold to gladness apart from a clear conscience -- a clear moral horizon. And this condition of gladness is maintained by constant victory over all that would violate this sense of moral satisfaction or frustrate divine favor. In other words, gladness must lead one to constant triumph in moral conflict. Isaiah implies this as he prophesies the victory of Israel over the hosts of Assyria when he declares, "Ye shall have a song, as in the night when a holy solemnity is kept; and gladness of heart, as when one goeth with a pipe to come into the mountain of the Lord, to the mighty one of Israel" (Isaiah 30:29).

There is one more important aspect of gladness and that is the prospect for the future. Nothing could frustrate the gladness of the soul like a dread and distrust for the tomorrows. And so it was the wise man of old said, "The hope of the righteous shall be gladness: but the expectation of the wicked shall perish" (Proverbs 10:28). When one possesses gladness he can confidently face the future unafraid. His trust is in God whose gladness he possesses. He rests confidently upon his pillow at night and awakens for the morrow with the same assurance as yesterday. And more than that, he confidently trusts his God for the eventual triumph of right. No dread fear for truth grips him. He knows somehow, some way, in the end all will be well. He takes the words of Isaiah again upon his lips, "The Lord hath sworn by his right hand, and by the arm of his strength, surely I will no more give thy corn to be meat for thine enemies; and the sons of the stranger shall not drink thy wine, for which thou hast laboured; but they that have gathered it shall eat it, and praise the Lord; and they that have brought it together shall drink it in the courts of my holiness" (Isaiah 62:8-9). And so the one who has the gladness of his God in his heart has an assurance that some day God will bring justice out of injustice and righteousness out of iniquity. And if he persists in keeping the gladness of God as the big prerequisite of life the time will come when God will add to the possession of gladness corn and wine. Jesus said, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things shall be added unto you." If that addition does not come in time it will in another age. To the one who possesses the gladness of God there comes assurance for the future.

But finally, how may one actually become the possessor of the gladness of God? The solution is simple though the application is difficult. If one is experientially to know the gladness of God he must make a choice of this gladness as against the corn and wine of the world. And this choice must become crystallized into a principle of life. The quest of life itself must be that of divine gladness and its exploration. The one must be deliberately relinquished for the other. And that choice must be sincere and final. We repeat the words of the Master, "Seek ye first the kingdom of God and his righteousness and all these things shall be added unto you." The kingdom of God must be our quest. Its exploitation must be our life. All else must be subservient.

Jesus made this principle clear in His gracious last prayer for His disciples in the seventeenth chapter of John's Gospel when He asked of the Father, "Sanctify them . . ." (John 17:17). The word sanctify in its basic meaning comes from the root word which literally means earth. To the root is added the negative prefix which makes the word sanctify literally say, unearth.

Hence Jesus' prayer for those disciples then and for us today, as He himself declares, is that we might be unearthed. Only that one who answers the challenge of Christ in this prayer can know gladness and its fullness. Only when one is unearthed and shaken free from the obsessions of time and things can he realize the meaning of David's testimony. And this does not mean to be taken from the earth. Jesus in the very same prayer made clear His thought when He asked the Father that they should not be taken out of the world but kept from the evil in the world. Thus if you would know the implications of the gladness of God you must have your heart "unearthed" from the dominion of self and things. Your heart must be cleansed from the earthly dross of personal interest to seek first and always the gladness of God.

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## 02 -- THE BASIS OF TRUE VALUES

Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through and steal (Matthew 6:19-20).

It is a simple though vital question we put to you: -- What constitutes true values? And we cannot help feeling certain that the query is a timely one, for if there ever was an hour when one should be certain of his position as to true values, it is today. When the world reels about us drunk with war; when many, many things formerly accepted as basic, magically almost disappear before our very eyes; while so many relations that hitherto seemed so certain now startle us with their obvious unreality; while the things that formerly mattered so much are of so little consequence now, there is but one hope for us -- to find an adequate basis of true values that the storms of life cannot dislodge nor the uncertainties of life bankrupt. We sorely need a measuring stick wherewith to measure such realities as still remain.

What is value, a term we have so glibly and readily used in the days of the past? And yet many if pressed for an actual definition would stand perplexed. Today a piece of property is valued at six thousand dollars. In a near tomorrow you can purchase that same piece of property at forty-five hundred dollars. What do we mean by values? An article purchased today across the counter may tomorrow be marked at one-third the former price. Some time ago we were entertained in a home where a new radio had that very afternoon been delivered. In mutual interest with our host we discussed its merits in tone, selectivity and power. We admired its cabinet and unique features and in the discussion the obvious question of price arose. And but a moment later after the price had been divulged, someone looking through the evening edition of the daily paper discovered a full page ad listing the same radio for twenty dollars less than the price paid for the one delivered that very afternoon. What, after all, we repeat, constitutes real value?

An interesting anecdote came to my attention some time ago. The American Express Company of Boston suddenly became the handlers of a valued consignment. It was a slat covered crate imprisoning a bird of some kind. As express packages are supposed to indicate their value, this crate bore the mark visibly affixed-value \$500. What sort of a bird could this be, wondered the express employees. Repeatedly they peered between the slats of the crate discussing the interesting consignment. It was a fighting cock en route to some destination in Latin America. The



sequel is merely this, the costly bird upon reaching its destination was put in the fighting pit with a competitor whose lightning-like skill made short work of this fancy bird. There it lay, just a small heap of feathers, skin and bones. What was it worth then? May I ask again, just what do we mean by value?

There is at least a partial answer we can give. Nothing has value apart from human personality. The term value can be attached to nothing save in its relation to human interest or need. Nor is this difficult to sustain. It is an old story, but no doubt in substance true, that Manhattan Island was purchased from the Indians some years ago by a few hard bargaining Dutch for twenty- four dollars and an array of gaudy glass trinkets. What is Manhattan worth today? Even though I could give you a tangible appraisal the figure would be so stupendous that it would be most difficult to grasp. Why this phenomenal contrast? Merely its value in terms of human interest and usefulness. Numerous times I have driven beneath the Hudson River through the famous Holland Tunnel or across some of the magnificent spanning bridges, each engineering work by itself soaring into the millions. I have as often passed in the shadows of mighty structures rearing their towering stories hundreds of feet above the pavement below.

And all in contrast are the ghost towns of the West Today one may visit the moldering remains of onetime thriving little centers, formerly beehives of feverish industry. Some time ago I visited one of these interesting towns. Now the streets are virtually deserted, still haunted, perhaps, by the ghosts of jostling, eager men in the quest of gold. They tell us that out of the little town of Idaho City, onetime capital of the state of Idaho, several millions of dollars were carried out in the gold belts of prospectors alone to say nothing of the recorded millions placed in the custody of express companies for transit. Then food was sold at fabulous prices and the many commodities of life passed hands in feverish haste at prices never known before. Today? Property could no doubt be purchased for a song. One may drive along the silent streets observing ruin and decay all about. Windows long since deserted are dimmed with dust. Boards that felt the harsh scuffing of miners' boots now silently rot before the elements. Why all the change? Merely the matter of human interest and concern.

But as we are about to decide that here is an adequate basis of appraisal for real value -- things in terms of human interest and worth -- we suddenly recall the simple fact of the constant decay of things. All that relates to time and substance about us faces ceaseless decay, and life becomes a major task of resisting the corrosions of time. The constant wear and tear of life is the common plague from which there is no escape. The deterioration of things is the perplexity of man. The business man who would remain solvent must charge off at least ten per cent of his values each passing year. The manufacturer feels compelled to replace obsolete machinery with modern if he would keep abreast of competition. All about us is hectic haste to beat the specter of decay. Houses must constantly and repeatedly be repaired. Buildings that once bore the marks of permanence and timelessness have been ruthlessly razed to give way to more modern and adequate structures. One who had not visited our own national capital at Washington for a long time would be amazed at the utter absence of old landmarks along Pennsylvania Avenue as well as the amazing congestion of modern buildings sprawling in every direction. Quickly and adroitly men cover the scars of time with greater pretense of permanence but all in vain. All about us is in constant decay.

And this rather unpleasant fact is only accentuated when we remind ourselves that the Bible itself speaks in no uncertain terms of the brevity of things. The warning is given that all that now exists will some day come to a sudden end, for we hear the Apostle Peter declare, "But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up" (II Peter 3:10). And the hour will come when all that today seems so substantial and real will pass away as another order -- now mysterious and unknown -- takes the place of the present

But can there be any adequate basis of values even in man alone? Since things have no value apart from him and since things themselves, in spite of man, will some time no longer be, cannot we find our measure in man alone? A few observations may suffice to solve this important problem. Some years ago my duties frequently took me through a model village in the old state of New Hampshire. This beautiful hamlet was the dream village of a wealthy woolen mill operator. His name was known far and wide. His power and prestige were unquestioned. One day, while wintering in Florida, he called for his chauffeur. Driving about the winding beach roads he ordered the car to be stopped. Stepping out he coolly pulled a gun from his pocket and putting it to his forehead pulled the trigger. What was he worth then? Worth? It cost money to dispose of his body. Only a short time ago I stood on the broad expanse of lawn overlooking Miami Beach. To my left was a magnificent white mansion beautifully commanding as it stood glittering white against a Florida sky. Upon inquiry I found that its present owner was serving time in a Federal penitentiary for income tax evasion. Its former owner, an automobile magnate, had taken his own life. Only a few years past there was a name well known in Wall Street circles, a name to be conjured with. Wealth, prestige and power were his. His influence was far-reaching and significant. But the hour came when, stripped of all his power, he too spent time in a Federal institution for violation of the law. What was he worth then? The truth is it cost Uncle Sam cold cash to pay his board bill. Today he lives beneath a shadow of disgrace eking out a mere existence as compared with his former position and power. Such a review of the fortunes and power of men could be almost endlessly traced. And it all can mean but one thing. There must be some other adequate basis of values save in man himself.

Where, then, can we look for an adequate basis of values? If it cannot be found in things, nor even in man plus things -- if it cannot be measured even in terms of human personality -- where can it be found? There is but one answer to this question, all absorbing and vital. There is no adequate basis of values apart from a human soul plus his God. Only thus do we dare to estimate true worth. Only on this level can we find substantial and penetrating meaning. This is the solution for one of life's most puzzling riddles -- true value can be found only in man plus God.

This we dare to declare in the very face of current philosophies that will take our answer as a huge joke, as utterly inadequate in the face of our modern scientific understanding. And yet in the face of all the weighty and bold assumptions of the hour we refuse to yield our ground--there is no final basis of values apart from human personality plus God. The impartial and properly informed will have to admit that wherever Christian values have gained a foothold life has taken on meaning never before known. Wherever the gospel of Jesus Christ, with its sole emphasis on human worth in the light of the eternal, has gone the home has been honored, womanhood ennobled, child life made sacred and the fundamentally dearer things of human existence made profoundly

worth while. All that marks the best of civilization is stubbornly related to this perspective. Education itself is the offspring of the church even though the child has long since deserted her mother. Hospitals and all the agencies of mercy and human kindness are born of holy parentage. The Church has been the mother of all the good of life directly or indirectly. And while men have so often either ignored or cursed the realities of Christian principles they have continued to benefit from all these values.

But there is a corollary of this truth, the terrific blight against which we brace ourselves today. Wherever God is forgotten moral values depreciate and basic values decay. Accept the truth or refuse to accept the facts-the truth remains. This world today has this hour become a blood drunk world because man no longer is held of value in the light of the Infinite. All because of the fearful ideology of the subservience of man to the state. The very powers who have accepted this untoward approach to life are the ones who have by their mad hates drawn nearly all the remaining peoples of the world into a hideous maelstrom of war.

It is admittedly a far cry from these staggering sad realities to the following rather ludicrous story. Yet beneath it all the same sober truth persists. The story tells of a group of survivors from shipwreck temporarily sheltered on a mid-ocean isle. Fortunately for those saved from the ravages of the sea the tiny island was inhabited by a few frugal folk who had in the years past been Christianized from cannibalism. And ironically enough one of the survivors was a rather bombastic infidel. As soon as he discovered the actual situation that prevailed among the kindly folk who gave to him and his comrades of their meager fare, he began boasting of his infidelity. Arrogantly he informed his benefactors that it was unfortunate indeed that they were dupes of a religion now long since outlawed by intelligent men like himself. If they understood as they should they would no longer espouse a cause now so utterly undone. To all his blatant talk one of the natives quietly told him that it was fortunate indeed for the infidel that they were Christians, else he would have been in the pot long ago.

No story of modern time holds such a thrill as that of Charlie Soong of China. How inescapable is the lesson of true values told. In the year of 1880 Colonel Moore, a Sunday school teacher in a Methodist church at Wilmington, N. C., moved by a stirring missionary message by his pastor, went to the docks to round up some pupils for his Sunday school class. Arriving at an hour when most of the sailors were gone he approached a Chinese lad and invited him to Sunday school next Sunday. This Chinese mess-boy from the Coast Guard Cutter Colfar thanked the colonel for his invitation with all the suavity of eastern courtesy as though some great honor had been conferred upon him. True to his word the lad was present the following Sabbath. Soon he was converted and received into the church. The reason for his early response was the godly influence of Captain Charles Jones of the Colfar who had diligently read the Bible to the Chinese lad and often talked with him of Christian things. Under such warm influences the seeds of truth had quickly germinated in the life of the lad from a far-away land, and so it was that when asked for a Christian name for baptism he replied, "Charles Jones Soong."

It was not long before General Carr, a well-to-do merchant of the same church, became interested in Charlie, and through his far-seeing generosity Charlie Soong was educated. He made his way back to his homeland to live for the Christ he had found in Wilmington, N. C. Success came his way as well as a happy marriage. From this marriage were born several children, four of

whom play an important role in the subsequent history of China. The oldest daughter, Ai-ling, became the bride of H. H. King who became minister of finance of China. Ching-ling, the second daughter, became the secretary of Dr. Sun Yat Sen, and finally his wife. Dr. Sun Yat Sen, destined to be the first provisional president of the republic of China, breaking the age-long chain of the Manchu Dynasty, was deeply influenced by his wife. Since his death she has been known as the Joan of Arc of China. The youngest daughter, Mei-ling, married General Chiang Kai-shek. It was through the influence of Mei-ling that the general made a public confession of Christ even at the peril of his life. A son, Chas. V., is at this very hour a financial power in the government of his own struggling nation. All four of these children have been staunch Christians, and today China, buffeted by the militaristic peoples of Japan, continues to fight valiantly for national existence with a heroism and versatility hitherto unknown among nations. Best of all, the leadership of China is shot through with Christian principles. Her courageous leader, with his Christian wife, bows humbly at the beginning of each day asking God's blessing upon their leadership. A distinct Christian background in both leadership and emphasis affords a unique background for the coming days of a nation gradually coming to a rebirth in unity and hope.

And what is the significance of it all? Although Charlie Soong 'died in 1925 the driving influences of true value have pressed their way through the welter of confusion and change of intervening years, and all because a number of real Christian men, in different walks of life, looked beneath the saffron skin and tattered clothes of a homeless Chinese boy. Their perspective, molded by a conception of true values, saw beneath the unlikely exterior a human personality to be touched by God, and so it is today -- the entire nation of new China is touched with Christian influence. There is but one basis of true values-the human soul plus his God.

But why is this all true? Why is the basis of real values to be found only in human personality plus God? The answer is not at all elusive nor hard to find. Righteousness is the foundation of social security. Only as fundamental principles of right are maintained by men does life remain secure and real, and there is no refutation of these facts. Any candid and careful retrospect of history will prove this. There has always been a definite relationship between true human happiness and the righteousness of governments. All of this is true because a human soul apart from his God is a moral liability, as well as stark tragedy. The only likeness to fact is that of a helpless derelict riding the seas alone. The presence of the abandoned vessel is both menacing and sad in its undirected driftings and absence of life for which it was destined. Stanfield's picture, *The Abandoned*, measurably depicts the truth. The lowering sky, the flashing lightning, the heavy over-clouds, the angry tossing ocean, the wild waves, the utter dreary loneliness. The only thing in sight is the huge hull ominously helpless without mast or man. This is the personality of man without his God-without compass or chart and no Master hand to guide. But multiply this by countless numbers in whose thoughts God hardly exists and you face a frightful but real world when man and God are separated.

But push back the restrictions of time for a moment and think of values in terms of an eternal horizon. If the Bible means anything, God is now building a new race of men. Part in this new race is found by personal choice of the will and way of God, for this kingdom or race that God now builds will be eternal. Since it is eternal it is builded not upon coercion or force such as the Axis powers now endeavor to build, for then it could not be eternal, for any kingdom founded upon force cannot endure. Hence, true value cannot be reserved for time alone. Even though the

Bible gave no positive intimation of the eternal purposes of God the very instincts of man drive him in hope beyond the present. He feels the sheer necessity of a world beyond. True value must project itself into the eternities to come, and this is possible only through relationship with an infinite God. Over the triple doors of the Cathedral of Milan are three inscriptions spanning the splendid arches. Below one, carved with a wreath of roses, is the legend, "All that pleases is but for a moment." On the middle arch is a sculptured cross beneath which are the words, "All that troubles is but for a moment." Underneath the central entrance to the main aisle are the words, "That only is important which is eternal." Only eternity can encompass the destiny of man and become an ultimate and therefore real index of values.

All this, without question, is what Jesus meant when He declared, "Lay not up for yourselves treasures upon earth, where moth and rust doth corrupt, and where thieves break through and steal: but lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven, where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through and steal." For one to ignore or evade his relation to his God is to miss real values. There can be naught that is really worth while apart from personality touched by the holiness of God. What will a soul be worth in eternity apart from God? Worthless and hopeless, a universal tragedy and grief to God. But what will a soul be worth in eternity when vitally adjusted to the will of God? Only God himself knows the answer. Human personality tied into eternal purpose means a growing worth that sweeps on without end, accumulating values of personal worth that elude the grasp of mind and heart. There is no basis of true values apart from God and man. Earthly substance will fade with the stars of earth, decaying and crumbling into dust. But man, tied to God in His eternal purpose, will push on through limitless space, with meanings of value that are true and timeless.

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### 03 -- CHRISTIAN SIMPLICITY

But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ (II Corinthians 11:3).

Paul the apostle, rugged of spirit and iron of will -- such a conception of the great apostle is almost universal. We often think of his spiritual rigor and his austere personality. But here and there throughout his sublime and enduring epistles we find glimpses of a warmth and tenderness of heart that is captivating. In the setting of the particular scripture that is before us we catch Paul in one of these unusual moods. Here we discover a spirit of kindness and almost sheer hesitancy that is a strange element in the positiveness of Paul.

The intimacy of this scripture is not hard to feel. It bears a beauty of spirit and delicacy of approach that is delightful indeed, for Paul seems to say, Please do not think me childish or unduly sentimental, nor even unnecessarily concerned for you. For I do hold a genuine jealousy for your spiritual welfare. In fact when I mention the matter that is upon my heart many of you will smile and be tempted to think I have become triflingly sentimental and that my unusual care for you in this particular verges almost upon the foolish. Such we readily read between the lines as we read the remarkable lines he penned to the Corinthian church in this remarkable mood, "Would to God ye could bear with me a little in my folly: and indeed bear with me. For I am jealous over you with

godly jealousy: for I have espoused you to one husband, that I may present you as a chaste virgin to Christ. But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ" (II Corinthians 11:1-3).

Paul's perspective and concern are by no means foreign to the true minister of Christ, for it is ever a characteristic of a true ministry that the man of God will do his utmost in bringing those charged to his keeping safe to God. He is a shepherd of the sheep who looks tirelessly and loyally to the flock-jealously resentful of any influence that would hinder, or of enemies that might devour, and Paul was not lacking in these marks of true spiritual leadership.

In fact thoughtful consideration of this matter compels us to admit that Paul's concern for the Corinthian church struck a vital depth. It was not a burden for the popularization of the gospel in their city. It was not a mere desire that their numerical growth should be rapid. It was not a concern for finance or places of worship. It was rather a burden for the character of their faith in Christ, for its spirit and content. Paul was troubled lest they lose that distinctiveness in quality of heart and attitude that can hardly be expressed other than in the term of Christian simplicity.

There is no question that simplicity is a mark of true identity in Christian faith and practice. Both in terms of individual experience and in collective character this is true. It is hardly necessary to remind you that as time placed the early church farther away from apostolic simplicity the more involved and ritualistic the spirit and form of the church became, and this collective reflection was but an index to individual spiritual condition. It is difficult to evade the implications of these facts in terms of the church of today. More and more are men wont to assume increasing elaborations of worship in a subtle effort at awkward substitution for reality. In many churches today where formerly there stood but a simple altar or penitent form now stands a chancel with its candles and cross-a sacred place where one would hardly deign to come with tears and confession.

But back to Paul -- he was aware of the implications of life in this direction. He saw far down the road toward the possibilities of spiritual decay at the very heart of reality.

As paradoxical as it may seem the gospel of Jesus Christ is the outstanding simple philosophy of religion. The false faiths of the world are invariably stilted and strained. Many of their teachings are so intricate that even their adherents are unable to comprehend them, and with some of them books of guidance and keys of explanation become imperative. But not so with the gospel. In spite of its eternal mysteries that were hidden from mortal minds through the ages past; in spite of its infinite sweep and limitless depths, the gospel is a plain path to all who seek it. The way is so plain that the wayfaring man though utterly untutored in the philosophies and erudition of his time need not stumble or err therein. And this does not imply that the gospel of Christ can be grasped on a mere rational basis alone, for this would mark its teachings as merely human. The gospel does challenge a personal faith in unseen fact Faith has its place but faith is not irrational nor do the claims of Christian faith trace their way back to something vague and insubstantial. Thus, regardless of its infinite and profound aspect, the gospel of Jesus Christ offers, to all who will accept, a heart faith and a simplicity of experience. It drives straight to the very heart of all reality.

And the Founder of the Christian faith bore the same spirit. Jesus' ministry was outstandingly simple. He constantly turned to the common things about him that the multitudes seldom saw and from the commonplace taught the basic truths of time and eternity. He referred to the lilies of the field which neither spinned nor toiled and taught His hearers simple trust in God. He called attention to the humble sparrow and reminded men that the providences of a loving heavenly Father are unerring and trustworthy. Simplicity does mark the teachings of Christ and of the gospel He proclaimed.

Does it not follow, then, that those who take to themselves this same gospel and personal allegiance to Christ will identify the reality of that allegiance and acceptance by the same unique simplicity? It was the loss of this very characteristic that Paul was concerned about. For here -- in truth -- is a center of spiritual reality. Here is a plumb-line that tests the accuracy and pattern of true Christian faith. One needs but think back to those early hours of his own newfound faith to realize the truth of this. Is it not true that back there our faith and reactions to all the truth constantly coming to us were marked with utter simplicity? Did we not lay hold of all that came within the personal horizon without hesitancy or question? Did we not eagerly take to our hearts all that seemed to have divine origin whether it was from the Book or from men? Has it been possible that as time has gone on the sophistications of everyday experiences have driven us from that sweet, unassuming simplicity that gave charm and reality to our early faith? Paul was concerned then and we can well be concerned now. The danger is persistently present and the tragic fact is that many have failed at this very point. Hence to an honest and sincere heart Paul's warning is timely.

Simplicity is a mark of greatness in any realm. The genuinely educated man is always simple. He does not parade his learning or lord it over his fellows because of his superior knowledge. His is rather an attitude of humble acknowledgment that he has barely touched the threshold of truth. Someone has defined the highbrow as one who is educated beyond his intelligence. This is not true of intellectual genuineness for there simplicity is always present. The same is true of real wealth. The man who is genuinely wealthy is unspoiled and simple in his attitudes. He does not lord it over others nor does he think himself above them. And thus the principle of simplicity runs consistently through life in realms of reality. How much more, then, should Christian reality be marked with genuine simplicity?

The analogy of childhood will stand us in good stead as an illustration of the truth before us. Who admires a sophisticated child? Rather is there a common repugnance toward such abnormality. Childhood in normal life is charmingly simple. Let us mark, then, some of the characteristics of childhood that are analogous to spiritual realities. After all, our figure is not so unfortunate, for it was Jesus himself who likened true spiritual life to childhood. He told us that except we become as little children we can in no wise even enter the kingdom of heaven.

Take for example the realm of faith. Childhood is simple in its faith, a good reason why those who have to do with childhood should maintain toward childhood an unfailing integrity. Unfortunately this is a fact too often ignored by both parent and teacher. Childhood is prone to trust without question those whom it loves. It was the little girl who insisted, "It's true whether it is true or not, because my mother says it is." How trustful we were in those early days of our new experience. How unhesitatingly we laid hold of all that we understood. The Word of God was so wonderful in its beauty and appeal that we drank it in without reserve. But could it be, that with the

passage of time and the accumulation of knowledge seemingly so contradictory, we lost that freshness and simplicity of faith we once enjoyed? If the question of revivals was raised we unhesitatingly declared our faith for one. But how many times when the matter of a mighty manifestation of God is mentioned today many draw back in superior wisdom to declare that it would be difficult for it to happen here. In terms of material trust as well we did not hesitate to put our hand in His and walk along the pathway of obedience. But some way with the passing of the years, hard and bitter experience has sometimes hurt that simple trust of yesterday and we have felt compelled to lean hard upon our own resources rather than simply trust our heavenly Father. The missionary had come down to a little group of native believers at the outstation to consult with them and encourage them about the new chapel they sorely needed. About the humble little hut, now their place of worship, they all knelt in prayer. After the missionary had finished praying they all eagerly said, "Come, teacher, we will show you where we will build the church." "Oh," said the missionary, "but we must wait until --" "But have we not prayed?" chorused the natives. How chagrined and even startled was this sophisticated white man who had come from another clime to lead these simple people in the ways of eternal life.

Then there is the realm of obedience. Is it hard to lose that readiness and eagerness of obedience so characteristic of a fresh found faith? Surrounded by the problems of life and constantly harassed by the contradictions of circumstances one is prone to settle down to a qualified and reserved obedience. Normal childhood is ever eager to obey those superior to them; ready to respond to command under the impulse of love. So it is with unspoiled Christian faith. Obedience is simple and real. The only demand is to know the will of Him who calleth. Not that there do not come repeatedly into our lives problems that are difficult to decide and issues too complicated for our human minds to fathom. But having once understood the will of God, obedience is both eager and sincere. This disposition will mark everyone who is genuinely related to our Christ and His gospel. This gracious fact should never be lost to our conscious judgment by the unseemly things of life for He has promised to guide the meek in judgment. "Trust in the Lord with all thine heart; and lean not unto thine own understanding. In all thy ways acknowledge him, and he shall direct thy paths" (Proverbs 3:5-6). What better instance can we find in support of this statement than that of Abraham and Isaac. What a tense hour that must have been when the Lord said to him, "Take now thy son, thine only son Isaac... and offer him... upon one of the mountains which I will tell thee of" (Genesis 22:2). We need not be troubled about the ethical problems involved in the proposed sacrifice of human blood. To be sidetracked here is but to lose the point of vital truth. The fact remains that Abraham straightway prepared for the journey and rising early in the morning taking two of his young men with him, and Isaac, went forth to obey. Abraham was eventually listed among those choice intimates of God and we cannot help believing that this major expression of ready obedience played a large part in putting Abraham in the envious place where "he was called a friend of God." Truly, "to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams." Such was the rebuke of the Prophet Samuel to King Saul when the king failed to do all the will of God. Rationalizing is meaningless as a substitute for ready obedience. It is God's part to plan and provide, ours to heed and do. Straightforward obedience must be preserved at the cost of all the sophisticated expedients of life if one would keep that intrinsic mark of Christian genuineness in obedience -- simplicity.

There is another characteristic of childhood that marks the way of spiritual genuineness. We call it artless affection -- or love. What is usually more refreshing to one who has long "been



on the way" than the artlessness of a soul recently redeemed? Why should such a life mark a contrast in our thinking? Could it be that we sometimes have lost that unique touch we, too, once had? We should keep the romance of our faith at all costs. We sometimes talk in jest of the aftermath of honeymoons in our earthly loves. But, after all, is there anything more tragic than a husband and wife who merely endure each other. The romance of early days is gone. Personality differences have been magnified by friction until the strain is hard to endure while appearances of love are kept up to the unobserving onlooker. We sometimes fear that the "harmless" jesting at this point has belittled the fact of the lasting romance of human love that is not so easily dissipated after all but rather accumulates in the common sharing of life's toils and changing experiences. And it is ever the same spiritually. The romance must be kept -- and it will be if we really walk with Him. We must keep in love with Him who bought us with His own blood. We can never allow our attitude toward eternal matters to be hurt by irksomeness. Artless affection and love must remain if experience is to be real. It was Elimelech with Naomi and their sons Mahlon and Chilion who went to the land of Moab because of the famine in their own country. And now Elimelech and the two sons are dead. Naomi, heartsick and worn, with none to comfort her save her two foreign daughters-in-law, turned her way back toward Bethlehem-judah. She admonished the girls to tarry in their own land while she returned to hers. Orpah turned back while Ruth declared, "Intreat me not to leave thee . . . for whither thou goest, I will go; and where thou lodgest I will lodge: thy people shall be my people, and thy God my God" (Ruth 1:16). What artless affection! What loving loyalty! What a revelation of character upon the part of Ruth and what a revelation of her abiding love for Naomi. Her reward was abundant. Ruth became a part of the honored line of our Lord's earthly lineage. One cannot read the Book of Ruth without inhaling the sweet perfume of love and sincere simplicity, and we cannot help feeling that this same sweet fragrance will be known in the life of one who keeps his spiritual romance fresh with the simplicity of artless affection.

There is one more characteristic of childhood we should not overlook in our appraisal of Christian simplicity, and that is purity. What is it about that tiny tot who entreats you with outstretched arms, compelling an instant surrender to its appeal? It is the unquestioned purity of childhood. Here is seemingly the one unspoiled spot on earth. Childhood in its sweet innocence stands as the sure symbol of purity. What heart can remain unaffected by the presence of childhood purity? The same is true of Christian simplicity. Purity is there, regnant though unassuming. The life of one whose inner self has been cleansed by the power of the eternal Christ spreads about him an inescapable atmosphere wherever his path may lead. Skepticism and unbelief may deny the ground of his faith but they cannot gainsay his purity.

But the unhappy fact remains that some have lost that unquestioned purity of early days. It reminds us of the department store counter stocked with shelf-soiled stock now conspicuously placed and marked with the significant placard, "Slightly soiled and greatly reduced in price." It does not take a big smirch or glaring smudge upon the otherwise pure life of a professing Christian to greatly depreciate his worth. The soiling touch of life is all about us and its plague is ever present. Only tireless devotion to holy things and a close walk with Christ will avert this calamity -- the loss of the simplicity of our purity.

But how, one asks, can the simplicity of experience be destroyed? The scripture tells us how. The mind is corrupted from its simplicity by the beguilings of Satan. Just as he beguiled Eve by challenging the integrity of God so he does today. He comes by direct attack and bold

insinuation in the hour of human difficulty. When The body is tired and the nerves fagged; when the pressures of life seem more than can be humanly born, his subtle, "Hath God said?" beats against the soul. Not in the hour of joy and strength does he come but rather in the time of spiritual leanness or human weakness. It is then unbelief will be sown in a heart which is pressed to doubt. He comes, too, through the influences of the day. They press tirelessly and blatantly in upon us every waking moment. They blare at us over the radio. They stare at us from the billboard. They dog our steps in the daily grind of life. They present their insinuations in the current literature of the day. Just as the unseen soot permeates the house with its telltale smirch; just as the air we breathe is filled with unseen dangers -- so our lives are constantly in peril of moral pollution that relentlessly seeks to blight our lives and faith.

Strangely enough, too, the attack is strengthened by the temptation to mediocrity. All one needs to do is just to submit to the pressures about him and quietly settle to levels below his ideals and vision. When he does this explanations are necessary to one's own soul and the rationalizings of men spoil that sweet simplicity of the past. But once more, the inconsistencies of people provoke some to yield their ground of Christian simplicity. Paul said that the comparing of ourselves among ourselves is not wise. Yet people persist in doing so. The seeming failures of others shock the very morale of the soul until faith is hurt and the mind is confused till the spirit gives way before the test. How many have yielded to the despoiling influences of others. "Looking unto Jesus" is the appeal of scripture. We dare not do otherwise if we would keep the simplicity of our faith.

Positively, there are two facts that must be borne in mind if we would keep the unspoiled reality of our first experience. The first is the necessity of pure motives. The motive of our life must be love to God and man. Jesus reminded us that to love God supremely and our neighbor as ourselves was the entirety of the law of God. We must watch the motives of our lives and test them in the light of divine love and light. A right heart attitude is imperative in a successful Christian life. And, then, we must give expression to that which is within our heart Love is positive, expressive. It cannot remain silent or unmoved. It must express itself to live. We must take out into the activities of life the experience within. We must exploit that love toward God and others. We must, once more in the words of Jesus, "Occupy till I come." With a heart cleansed from sin and filled with purity of love that is carried out into actual life -- that will positively guard us from the deterioration of the precious simplicity of our faith.

It was a significant incident we read one day in an Associated Press news report. An old World War general who served under Pershing in France lay weak and ill in a hospital in \_\_\_\_\_, Nebraska. Though ailing and infirm the spirit of the old gentleman was still strong and perplexing. It brought a real problem to the nurses who cared for him. With increasing difficulty they endeavored to carry out the orders of the doctor for when they sought to minister to the old man he would stubbornly protest with querulous tones, "Who are you to give orders to General \_\_\_\_\_ who served under Pershing in France?" His indignation was extreme and his spirit obdurate. One morning as his nurse approached the bed a bit of strategy suddenly occurred to her. Gently she asked the old general to take the medicine but as usual his protest was strong and the same question once again came to his lips. The nurse quietly replied, "General Pershing commands it." Without a word the thin white hand raised to a feeble salute while the nurse gently gave him the medicine.

May we ever remember that our love and obedience is to One who bought us with His own blood. Our allegiance is to Him and we will not disappoint Him by losing the simplicity of our faith. We will make the charge of Paul of long ago a personal one. His warning to the Corinthian church will stir our own hearts to heed, "But I fear, lest by any means, as the serpent beguiled Eve through his subtilty, so your minds should be corrupted from the simplicity that is in Christ."

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#### 04 -- SPENDING AND SAVING

For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it (Mark 8:35).

Money in its varying forms has played a conspicuous part in the history of mankind. The statement of the Bible that the love of money is the root of all evil is no overstatement of truth, regardless of seeming exaggeration. Underlying all the intrigues of time that have issued in war and the upheaval of nations is the love of money. The subtle yet tenacious power of money in the lives of men and nations is seldom realized.

But the problem of money is most apparent and significant, as far as we are individually concerned, in our everyday lives. The problems of spending and saving are among the most absorbing interests of our entire human existence. Here is a problem that in truth looms large in this hectic life of ours. We always admire that individual of thrift who seems to possess an almost uncanny ability to accumulate provided he exploits it with true sportsmanship. But with most of us poor mortals it is a matter of spending and trying to save.

It was on the level of these very common and real experiences of life that Jesus propounded a universal truth which fell for the first time upon the ears of men. As fundamental and universal as it was it had never been stated before in human language. "For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it." These words of the Master, characteristic of all His teaching, are far more profound and penetrating than they seem at first hearing. There is always a startling drive and accuracy in the words of Jesus and this declaration is no exception. He is dealing with the age-long problem of spending and saving but He does not speak of mere monetary values. He does not have in mind the common thought of men -- stocks and bonds. He is not concerned with bank credits or the possession of houses and lands. His emphasis rather is in terms of soul values. He speaks of human personality, eternal relationships and worth of character. In this statement of Jesus is no thought of a mere earthly medium of exchange but rather of those intangible things which have fundamental worth in both time and eternity.

A man standing on a street corner one day inadvertently overheard a conversation something like this:

"Brown is surprisingly successful isn't he?"

"Yes," replied his companion, "but I am not surprised at it myself considering what kind of success it is. Brown has been following money ever since he came into his teens -- and the close pursuit of hard cash usually wins it. But I would rather have Barrington's success, wouldn't you? Why, Barrington has no thought of success in mind. His whole heart and mind are concentrated on his work -- and it's a fine piece of work he is doing -- but I don't believe he will ever exert himself toward success."

"No" replied his friend, "Barrington will never follow success but success will follow him. He will not make any mean sacrifice for it as Brown constantly does. He will not stoop one inch or neglect one duty to reach it and yet I venture he will have a better success than all Brown's mud -- bedraggled motives and tattered principles can bring him. Following success is a dangerous business but letting it follow you interferes with none of your ideals." The voices of the two men died away in the noise of busy traffic while the unintentional eavesdropper went thoughtfully on his way.

Jesus states here in this vital proposition that it is possible for one to either save his life or lose it. In fact he clearly infers that the matter is entirely up to you -- to me. It is a question that we must personally settle whether we will have it so or not. We must face this vital matter, building our attitude toward it into our very philosophy of life. It cannot be escaped, and ignoring it will not prove a way out.

But the strange thing about this declaration of Jesus is that His idea about saving one's life is the very opposite of the world's conception of the matter. It is fundamentally opposed to the accepted philosophy of this world. The warning of Jesus cuts straight across the viewpoint of this world -- "For what shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world, and lose his own soul? Or what shall a man give in exchange for his soul?" (Mark 8:36-37). In the words of Hosea Ballou, "It is what we give up, not what we lay up, that adds to our lasting store." Someone tells this story of the famous English actor, Garrick. He had just finished building a fine residence in the environs of London. He invited the Bishop of London over to see it. After they had gone from floor to floor and room to room in the spacious mansion, the bishop was overheard to murmur as he left, "Houses like this make it hard for their owners to die." I know that the words of Jesus ring strange upon worldly ears. But the serious part of it is that, regardless of how skeptically men may react to this saying of the Master, Jesus always spoke the truth. Time has profoundly vindicated these words of Jesus. Life follows the pattern we persist in making. If we insist on saving our lives we eventually lose them. If we spend them for the gospel's sake we save them. I have watched it work unerringly time after time. I have seen the one who tenaciously clung to his own selfish way; who refused the call of God and the cry of humanity. I have watched that same life silently, but awfully, shrivel and die of dry rot. The tragedy has invariably been -- that very soul has been oblivious to the curse that was upon him. And the opposite has been as true. I have watched another who has almost recklessly yielded his life to the service of others in the name of Christ and that life has grown in character, strength and power of influence. His life has taken on compensations that have far outweighed all that he seemed to sacrifice for others.

And the same principle is just as apparent in national relations. Our own loved country has in these past years given way repeatedly to selfish interests and ends till the entire political structure as well as economic and moral, has been shot through with self-aggrandizement while the

very soul of the nation has silently shriveled. The modern world has often cynically laughed at our Pilgrim Fathers. Yet we could well turn back to some of the basic attitudes of life that inspired them to found a new nation dedicated to the dearest principles of a free existence. Well may we repeat today the familiar lines of Goldsmith:

"Ill fares the land, to hastening ills a prey,  
Where wealth accumulates and men decay."

But how, one may legitimately ask, may a man lose his life by attempting to save it? It sounds so utterly paradoxical that it becomes almost impossible to accept the declaration of Jesus without an explanation.

How, you say, can a man lose his life by saving it? Remember that no man liveth unto himself. In a certain sense your personality is the composite of, not only the heritage of your parents, but of all with whom you have contact and relationship. We grow and live by an exchange of personality as strange as it may be. In other words, if you attempt to withhold your life from others they in turn instinctively withhold from you. If you selfishly refuse to contribute to the lives of others they refuse in turn to give of themselves to you. Thus you shrivel and die within while you attempt to save your own life. There is a fundamental moral law known as action and reaction. It was first declared by Sir Isaac Newton. That law in substance is this. As you act toward conditions, people and God, conditions, people and God will react toward you. It is a moral principle as relentless and inflexible as the despotic laws of other realms. It is impossible to escape the implications. Think as one may, here is a law that persistently takes its toll. Let him who will foolishly attempt to live to himself and while he does life about him will instinctively react the same toward him and he will be left alone -- to die. You recall that time the disciples argued among themselves as to who would be the greatest. "And he came to Capernaum: and being in the house he asked them, what was it that ye disputed among yourselves by the way? But they held their peace: for by the way they had disputed among themselves, who should be the greatest. And he sat down, and called the twelve, and saith unto them, if any man desire to be first, the same shall be last of all and servant of all" (Mark 9:33-35).

One of Balzac's famous stories was founded upon the myth of the magic skin. The possessor of this magic skin could have all that he wished for. The magic skin had fallen into the hands of a youth who reveled in its power as it again and again granted his every whim and want. But to his horror one day he noticed that each time he made a wish the skin perceptibly shrank. He tried in vain to curb his lustful wants. He drew a line about the irregular border of the skin only to watch it shrink the more. And the hour soon came when the skin was gone and his own soul filled with insatiable yet helpless desire. Selfishness is a sin this old world has long tried to condone, but all in vain. Selfishness eats at the very heart of all life's vital relations and irresistibly follows the law stated by Christ so long ago.

But there are other ways in which one may lose his life while he vainly tries to save it. One of these ways is based upon the operation of the common law of use and disuse. When you fail to consistently use an organ or function of the body that organ or function ceases to live. Many a person has been through the excruciating experience of a long illness only to discover that he must learn to walk again. Almost like a child he must once more learn the co-ordination of limb and

balance because these functions have deteriorated through disuse. A patch over an eye, a tightly bandaged arm, if persisted in will eventuate in the atrophy and uselessness of the organ. How much more will it be so with the human personality with its delicate functions and capacities of expression. The biggest exercise of the soul of man is in giving of itself to others. Thus when you withhold from others, centering your life narrowly and egotistically upon yourself, the soul will shrivel and die. Men walk our streets, carrying forward the activities of life -- dead within. They are dead within even though they are physically and mentally animated. And it is right here that the subtlety of the matter hangs. Just because physical life can continue; because mental alertness may persist; because the surface functions of life remain apparent, people little realize the spiritual atrophy within. This is how men are dead in trespasses and sins while they remain alive to many of the normal relations of life.

It is recorded of Charles Darwin, that while a student at Cambridge, he was exceedingly fond of music. His sheer love for the beauty of harmony and rhythm was so compelling that he often went to Kings College Chapel to hear the anthems of the choir boys. He even hired the choir boys to come to his room and sing for him on numerous occasions. But as he became more and more engrossed with science he neglected his love for music. At the age of fifty-nine he received a most cordial invitation from Sir J. D. Hooker to attend a rendition of "The Messiah." He courteously acknowledged the invitation of Sir Hooker, saying that hearing "The Messiah" once more would be the thing he would keenly delight in. But he declined with the reluctant admission that he feared his soul was dead to all but science, which had been his sole and absorbing interest for a number of years. Yes, 'tis true. The finer faculties of human personality atrophy and wither with disuse. And so the man who lives solely to himself, stubbornly and blindly trying to save himself thereby, is but the loser in the end. Once again Jesus was right. And it merits comment -- these simple but powerful facts strike a terrific blow at the current doctrines of self-expression and individualism. Current philosophies may arrogantly cast aside the eternal principles enunciated by Jesus, but in so doing they take a fearful toll in the social and moral disintegration of men.

There is yet another way in which a man loses his life while trying to save it. And that is by growing callous to the cry of humanity about him. The human spirit is naturally delicate and sympathetic. If one resists the call of human hearts about him, refusing to heed the sigh of human woes, he builds around his very soul a callous of vicious hardness until his better self is smothered and dead. He becomes eventually hard and cruel and bitterly selfish. When you shut your heart, close your eyes, withhold yourself from the insistent pleadings of human need you commit spiritual suicide. I recall that rather lurid story by a French author wherein an army officer surprised his wife and her secret lover by his unexpected return. The lover fled, secreting himself in an adjoining closet. Cruelly the officer cross-questioned his wife as to whether anyone was there. Upon her persistent and frantic denials he called for a mason with his trowel. Coldly he stood by while the door to the closet which hid the secret lover was slowly cemented in. Thus it is that men imprison their own souls within the walls of brutal selfishness, stifling every breath of warm passion and every throb of love. And it is true today just as it was back yonder when the words fell fresh and startling for the first time from the lips of the greatest teacher of all time, "For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it."

But this fundamental law is not only true in its larger sense but in terms of spiritual preservation as well. If you would keep alive that measure of spiritual life God has granted you through His grace you must use it. Grace unused ceases to be grace. Since the greater includes the lesser, the general law of use and disuse, so applicable in every realm of life can find no exception here. Some, with a limited conception of the sovereignty of God, may decry works and insist that salvation is entirely upon God's part, both in the giving and in the preserving of grace. But this universal law still operates in spite of theories and theologies. If one does not exploit grace he will soon be void of grace. If one carelessly fails to witness to a heart experience that experience will become uncertain and will wane. The grace of God cannot become a candle hidden beneath a bushel. It must be set as a light upon a hill so that its gleam, unsmothered by selfish fear, may lighten the dark horizon. The paradox persists -- if you would keep you must give; if you would save you must spend.

But we would turn this vital question to its positive side, for the other side is but a corollary of the same truth. If you would save your life you must give your all. It was the man of wealth who said when dying, "What money I have spent is gone; the money I have saved I leave behind; only that which I have given goes toward my eternal reward." Here is a paradox indeed. And how hard for the uninitiated to understand. We are reminded of the Scotch schoolmaster who was counseling a bright young man in whom he had taken a keen interest. Urging the lad to push ahead to success in life he said, "Draw a line behind you, laddie, and remember that in the grammar of life the only verbs worth conjugating are the verbs to be and do, not to get and enjoy." Sound advice indeed in view of the laws of life. It is a pitiful fact but true -- few are those who choose to give heed. Life holds nothing for the one who will not serve his fellows. Multitudes today, if they would bare their hearts in the light of honest introspection, would have to say it is true. Life truly holds nothing of value to the one who will not serve.

But trying to serve in one's own name or strength will but feed the fires of selfishness. Such a motivation for service -- if it can be called that -- can only turn back upon itself and give to one a deeper and more blinding self-righteousness. Someone long since marked a contrast between two great lives. One of them served from the motivation of self, the other from the motivation of Christ. One gave to this world beauty in the ideal while he himself withered within. The other gave to the world beauty in character while he himself pushed back his horizon into eternal perspective. And the words of Jesus, guard the truth so well, "Whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it." Lord Byron gave to the world a wealth of beauty in poetry but he served in his own name. The Apostle Paul gave to the world a wealth of Christian thinking but he served a Master whom he supremely loved. Each left his testimony at the close of his life:

"My days are in the yellow leaf,  
The fruit, the flower of life, is gone.  
The worm, the canker and the grief  
Are mine alone!"

-- Byron

"I have fought a good fight; I have finished my course,  
I have kept the faith;

Henceforth there is laid up for me  
A crown of righteousness."

-- Paul

One cannot read these contrasting lines without a profound sense of the truth of it all. The life of self rears a horizon of time while the lift of Christ has an eternal skyline.

But even from the viewpoint of the brevity of life, endeavoring to save one's life becomes an exceedingly precarious business. Life is all too brief and the possible maximum of life's accumulations all too meager in the light of another world. A young man had come to a clergyman asking him to officiate at the funeral of a brother.

"Let me see," said the minister, "your brother was thirty-two years old, wasn't he?"

"Yes," replied the brother.

"He worked hard for twenty years didn't he?" asked the minister.

"Yes," said the brother.

"Well, what did he get out of it?" queried the minister.

"Oh," said the brother proudly, "he left eighty acres of fine land, money in the bank and some \$3,000 of insurance."

"Yes," said the minister, "that's what you get out of it -- but what is he going to get?"

After a moment of silence the brother answered, "Oh, well, we are getting him a \$150 casket."

But against the background of an eternal horizon the loss in saving one's life is irreparable. Eternity will have no place for material interests and values. In that world the standard will be neither gold nor silver. The weighing of things will not be upon temporal scales. For the one who has lived merely for self and things eternity will be a place of poverty. The one who has labored solely for self has deliberately ignored the major phase of existence. After all, Paul's statement to Timothy was true, "Godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come" (I Timothy 4:8). To the one who has selfishly exploited life eternity will be empty of hope, but the one who has served others out of his devotion to Christ will find eternal rewards that will be rich and enduring. He will at last know the full significance of Jesus' challenge, "Lay up for yourselves treasures in heaven where neither moth nor rust doth corrupt, and where thieves do not break through nor steal" (Matthew 6:20). "For whosoever will save his life shall lose it; but whosoever shall lose his life for my sake and the gospel's, the same shall save it."

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## 05 -- GOD'S TEST OF SPIRITUALITY

The Lord said unto him, Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark upon the foreheads of the men that sigh and that cry for all the abominations that be done in the midst thereof (Ezekiel 9:4).

Who was it that said one of the major surprises of heaven will be the presence of some who we never thought would be there as well as the absence of some whose faces we were confident we should see. No matter who did say it, there is without doubt some measure of truth in the thought. Our estimates of genuineness are often so meager and our appraisals so superficial that our final judgments are far from correct. And it is this very fact that no doubt motivates the statement of scripture that we are to judge nothing until the time.

And if our appraisals are so inaccurate they surely will mark a contrast to those of the Infinite Mind, for we cannot wisely ignore the facts, as stated in Isaiah 55:9, that as the heavens are higher than the earth so are God's ways higher than our ways and His thoughts than our thoughts.

Thus it is quite often true that we of the pulpit are prone to identify true spirituality by some aspect of truth that is no doubt vital but not final. We sometimes tell the people that if they will consistently bring their tithes into the storehouse of God this will mark them as spiritual indeed. But on second thought we realize this is a slight distortion. For the fact remains that some have been most faithful with their means in the support of the cause of God yet obviously lacking in vital piety. In deed there are those who have openly broken relationship with Christ who still loyally persist in giving. Thus it becomes most apparent that as vital a place as giving does play in one's devotion to God it is not the acid test. No doubt the best way to leave the matter is merely to say that one can give and not be true to God but one cannot really know Him and withhold his means.

Sometimes we are prone to identify spirituality by doctrinal correctness. But this too falls s of ultimate test, for the sad fact persists that we have known people here and there whose doctrinal perspective was as clear as day but their hearts were as cold as ice. We do not deny that correct thinking is of vital import to right living but after all it is but one of the contributing factors to real piety, for genuine piety cannot be characterized by any one identifying sign. We sometimes, as pastors, are prone to urge loyalty to the house of God as a sure index of spiritual reality, -- here again our appraisal is biased by an outstanding personal burden for the consistent presence of the people at the services in the house of God. And again our insistence, if persisted in, falls short of the whole truth. Christian piety is a composite of qualities difficult of analysis by any single external emphasis.

But we do think we can come vitally near the heart of true spirituality. In our endeavor to do so there is but one desire -- that we may mutually be urged into a closer relationship with the One whose presence and blessing surpasses all human ties.

In the ninth chapter of Ezekiel there is a strange picture recorded by the prophet which we cannot help feeling comes the nearest to true spiritual identity. Here the lesson is not an emphasis upon externals, no matter how vital they may be, but rather upon heart condition and attitude. After

all it is heart attitude that counts and one's spiritual reactions come closer to the truth than anything else. That is without doubt the emphasis of this strange record of Ezekiel. Here Ezekiel gives to us the sad portrayal of apostasy among His chosen people. Iniquity was flagrant and general. Indeed, conditions had come to such a pass in the very heart of Jerusalem that God called for those who had charge of the city to draw near. Each came with instant obedience carrying his slaughtering weapon in his hand. But the prophet's attention was arrested by one in their midst garbed differently from the others. This strange figure was clothed in linen and instead of a slaughtering weapon he carried an inkhorn at his side. Ezekiel listened with keen interest as God spoke to the one who carried the writer's inkhorn, for it was to him that God uttered the words of our text, "Go through the midst of the city, through the midst of Jerusalem, and set a mark upon the foreheads of them that sigh for all the abominations that are done in the midst thereof." To the others who bore the weapons of slaughter he commanded that they should follow in his wake slaying utterly without fear or favor. "But," said God, "come not near any man upon whom is the mark."

What a significant command -- slay utterly but spare those whose foreheads bear the mark of him that had the writer's inkhorn because they sighed and cried for the iniquity that was in the midst of the people. Is there not hidden here a strong suggestion of God's estimate of vital religion? He would spare those whose hearts bore a deep and genuine concern because of the sin and apostasy about them. May not this then, after all be the closest and most accurate single test we may dare to make of real spirituality? Dare we not insist that whatever other qualities of vital experience may be apparent, here is one that must not be missing? Men may generously support the cause of God and yet be remiss in heart relations; many may maintain what is often called religious liberty and yet be as sounding brass and tinkling cymbal; some may insist upon the orthodoxy of their views and still possess only the righteousness of the scribes and Pharisees which Jesus so utterly condemned.

"But," someone insists, "can this picture of long, long ago find aptness to us today? Can the test of Ezekiel's day be the test of ours as well?" We think it can. And to support our position we remind you of the significant words of the Book, "As he was so are we." In other words, the life of Christ must be in us if we are truly His. His was outstandingly a life of compassion and burden for the people about Him. We cannot forget His nights of prayer or the times yet a great while before day when He went to desert places to pray. We can never escape those significant words as He looked with breaking heart upon Jerusalem where were housed the very ones to whom He came but as His own would not receive Him, "O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!" (Matt. 23:37). "If any man have not the spirit of Christ he is none of his," is a declaration carrying tremendous significance. Yes, Ezekiel's test is our test today, for it was that very spirit which was utterly fulfilled in the life of our Lord and we are to follow in His steps.

Dr. Skinner long ago said that a church and its minister might exhibit almost any type of piety save one, and sinners remain unconverted. And that type of piety he deemed so vital was "a sense of the powers of the world to come." How true! We can be scrupulous in our deportment, exacting in our doctrine, pious in our attitudes and still fail to reach a needy world with the gospel. Only when the church becomes possessed with a consuming concern will we find ourselves driven out into the highways and hedges to compel them to come in. For centuries the non-Christian world

lived on in its horror and darkness while the Christian Church smugly worshipped. It was not until many, many years had passed and Carey the shoe cobbler caught a throb of the powers of the world to come that the heedlessness of the Church was rudely challenged. And even then opposition was rife and only as a sense of the powers of the world to come invaded the Church did men arouse from their self-centered listlessness to seek for others as Christ had sent them to do. Heart passion is an index of true piety! A sigh in the soul for others is the only impulse that will vitally drive us up to the levels of Christ-like living. Dr. Rees in his book, *If God Be for us*, tells the gripping story of a father whose daughter labored in faraway Korea as the wife of a medical doctor. One day she wrote home of plans that were being made to erect a much needed building on their compound, casually adding that she wished he were there to oversee the work. To the utter amazement of the doctor's wife a cablegram came informing her of the soon arrival of her father, a retired lumberman of eastern Canada. He came and took full charge of the erection of the new building at his own expense. He toiled early and late six days each week and on Sunday eagerly asked for scripture portions and tracts and a boy who could speak a little English. She feared that her father was overdoing it, but she could not restrain him. And one day some time later the elderly father, upon return from an arduous trip, fainted. His daughter, much perturbed, admonished him, but with a light in his eye he replied, "I wouldn't do it for anyone else but Jesus. He went all the way to Calvary for me, you know."

Is it not strange that God can find many more whom He can bless than those whom He can burden? How quick we are to seek the delightful manifestation of His presence in terms of joyful blessing. But how seldom do we seek His face asking Him to give us a burden for others if He can but find us worthy. A burden is to be cherished above a blessing any day and yet how hard it is for us to realize it. A sigh and a cry in the soul for others! A deep and constant concern to reach as many as we can for Christ while it is yet day! How this passion should drive us on for more of devotion to Him! It is this spiritual mark of Ezekiel's day that the Church of Jesus Christ needs in this hour of strife and worldly clamor more than all else beside. It will be at this point that the genius and the genuineness of our living will be identified.

But it is possible for one to believe he meets the challenge at this point and yet miss it all. Should one accost Christians generally in the ranks of those who take their religion at all seriously nearly all would declare that they carried a real concern for others. And it is often that a casual concern is misconstrued for a real burden. Many a Sunday school teacher seems but little concerned about the actual salvation of those in her care. The limit of the vision is a meager preparation for the Sunday lesson and an occasional concern for the presence or absence of the pupils. But it seems to go no farther. How often, too, have we seen the difficulty in getting men and women to gather about the altar where precious souls are seeking, to help these souls battle their way through the powers of darkness. How eager, oftentimes, is the church to have another revival series but in the hour of actual conflict seemingly lack an inner heart urge that would drive them earnestly to their knees and thence out into the homes to reach the sheep that are lost. How many Sunday schools continue at minimum levels while a pastor's heart cries out to God for ways in which to stir an indifferent membership to undertake the task. Yes, it is all too stingingly true that it is possible for one to have a casual professional concern for others while he with some measure of sincerity believes he is living up to New Testament levels. Ezekiel said in a preceding chapter of this same general context of scripture, "They have blown the trumpet, but none goeth forth to the battle" (Ezekiel 7:14).

We trust that it will not be interpreted as exaggeration when we say that sometimes a sentimental concern is misconstrued as a real burden for others. "My dear church" may be but the cry of sentimental emotions which become substitutes for deep soul passion for others. It has happened more than once where the demands for greater service for God and the kingdom would necessitate a change of location or the erection of a more commodious place of worship. But the cry of "our church" and the precious recollections of the past have frustrated the best interests of the kingdom in that city.

There is but one other misconception which we could mention though there may well be others. And that is what we would term a personal concern. Sometimes matters have not moved to the liking of some in a local church. As a consequence these good folks have become greatly exercised for the future of the work, feeling meanwhile that they were sincerely burdened at heart for the perpetuity of that work, but beneath it all was a keen disappointment that plans and methods had been chosen which they did not approve. Self-importance and personal opinions have found it difficult to bow to the judgment of the majority, and putting it psychologically, people have sometimes rationalized themselves into a state of great concern for the cause.

But, after all, what does constitute a real burden; what are the marks of real soul concern? What constitutes genuine spirituality? Specific definition is illusive, for what we might term as a vital and intrinsic quality of this all-absorbing passion another may feel to be irrelevant. And yet we will hazard a few conservative suggestions, feeling that all will be willing to accept these though perchance desirous of adding others. Thus we give them to you for appraisal.

One cannot experience the heart of genuine spiritual concern without a sense of the lostness of souls. Surely that must be included. There will be an indefinable yet conscious yearning toward humanity, realizing in some measure their lostness. There will be a disposition to see beneath external characteristics, be they good or bad, to the image of God hidden there. Each soul becomes a potential trophy of grace. Each life is a throbbing challenge to win from the power of Satan to God." We would not wish to convey the impression that this concern will always be present in overwhelming sense but rather that always and ever the interpretations of life in terms of eternal values will predominate. There will be ever present a reach of heart that will eagerly capitalize every open door of opportunity to reach another soul for God. This basic sense of soul values will ever press the life to prayer ever welcoming an intercessory appeal for others. John Welch was often found at night by his wife praying earnestly for the souls of men. Repeatedly she chided him, reminding him that he was unduly exposing himself to illness, whereupon he always replied, "My dear, I have the souls of some three thousand to answer for and I know not how it is with many of them." We would not weary you with oft-repeated stories of many from the long ago till now, who have caught this vision and have left behind them unforgettable footprints along the pathway of time. These, we intuitively know, were genuine in their piety and devotion to God regardless of name or denomination. Yes, a sense of the lostness of souls must mark in some measure the genuineness of our claims to Him.

But there is another element we feel it is imperative to include, and that we can name in no other way than a grief that our Lord is being dishonored. Whenever His name is lifted in vain blasphemy it strikes as a sword to our souls. When men turn heedlessly away from His pleadings

we feel as though we ourselves have been deserted. When cruel minds make light of His utter abandon to the redemption of men we feel the cruel stab of it in our hearts. Truly do we, in the words of the apostle, become a partaker of His sufferings. In some inscrutable way, led by the Holy Spirit himself, do we feel with Him the indifference and disregard of men. Our hearts throb with Him; our minds are anguished with His; our spirits wait and long with His. His grief is our grief and His burden ours insofar as these human spirits can grasp the meaning and sense of the redemptive plan.

One more element we cannot forbear to add, and that is a living repugnance toward sin. If our spirits are genuine in their spiritual grasp and quickening, we will ever carry about with us a sense of the damning power of sin. And this is not so easily held. Sin is so common, its faces so multiplied, its power so impious. It shrieks at us from the radio, it cries from the printed page, it leers at us from the billboards. Its strident tones weary our ears until, like some discordant note upon the air, we wish it either to cease or long to shake it from our conscious attention. Wearied with the presence of evil we can so easily close our ears to its sobs and become callused and almost oriented to sin. This must not be. Unfortunate is the professing Christian when sin becomes ordinary to him. How imperative that we tirelessly seek the place of prayer and keep keenly alive a sense of the awfulness of sin. How necessary that we saturate our souls with the pure Word of Life that we may never lose the sense of the subtle sting of sin. One day I sat in a restaurant with a Christian friend. The atmosphere was that which is typically worldly, with its cloud of tobacco smoke and cruel and empty lightness. I remarked about the surroundings to my friend to which he replied, "Oh, well, I've gotten used to it." Surely he did not mean it as I was prone to take it, for one who is truly Christ's will never "get used" to the atmosphere and presence of sin. Its sting will never lose its shock. Its stifling depressiveness will never be other than abhorrent to us. We must not ever become accustomed to sin! And if we would keep in our hearts that greatest of all marks of real piety we will seek to keep sin at arm's length, utterly feared and hated. These qualities, we feel certain, must become an intrinsic part of true soul passion. These are unerring marks of real piety.

Before closing I would call your mind back to the context of our lesson once more. There are two startling facts we must not pass by for they accentuate the challenge of the message and warn us of our unfailing need to cling close to God in days of spiritual indifference and formality.

How startling are the words of command to those bearing the slaughter weapons in their hands, "Slay utterly old and young, both maids, and little children, and women: but come not near any man upon whom is the mark: and begin at my sanctuary..." (verse 6). Begin at my sanctuary! How ruthless! Why, here at the sanctuary of all places piety should be found. Rather begin the slaughter elsewhere. But no, God commands it. Condemnation falls the quicker where the greatest privileges have been enjoyed. What people will fall the more quickly under the condemnation of our God than those who have claimed to love Him with all the heart and mind and strength? If judgment must fall, it will fall fearlessly upon those who have long walked under the clear favor and light of God, not upon those whose light has been dim and whose path has been uncertainly marked. Thus it was with Israel then, so it must be with the Israel of God today. Begin at my sanctuary! Let us take the warning, let us earnestly seek His face, asking Him for a greater and deeper concern for lost humanity.

The second fact stands startlingly declared in the third verse, "And the glory of the God of Israel was gone up from the cherub, whereupon he was, to the threshold of the house . . ." What breath-taking uncertainty! The glory of God poised upon the threshold for sudden flight. What clear condemnation upon the part of God! Israel had become so callous, so self-seeking that the Shekinah glory had left His permanent abode between the cherubim and now stood poised, as it were, giving one last opportunity for repentance before final flight. We do not infer that such is our case today. Rather should we note the implications of the past and take such wholesome warning as shall stimulate our souls to action, for when one settles to levels of spiritual indifference and mediocrity the Spirit of God is grieved. God's presence, so sweet to the soul, stirs restively within the breast, convicting us if we will but heed the warning. We must not grieve Him with indifference and cold professionalism. We must keep our souls warm and passionate, for such is the atmosphere of a God of love. He is ever seeking men and can rest content in a human heart only where that dominant spirit still impels.

We leave with you the truth. Weigh it well, consider it sincerely. Is not the genuineness of your spiritual life and mine finally indexed in this startling picture of Ezekiel? We feel it is. Thus stirred by the lesson we have read we will not turn away forgetful hearers but rather we will seek the place of prayer, asking the Spirit of Grace to stain our cheeks with tears and fill our spirits with His concern, thus keeping alive in our souls that all essential element of true piety -- a genuine passion for the lost.

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## 06 -- PRAYER AND THE PRACTICALITIES OF LIFE

They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; they shall walk, and not faint (Isaiah 4:31).

Life is a conflict -- a fact we cannot afford to forget. Tireless opposition confronts us in every field of life. And the reason is not hard to find. It is the same old question of the problem of evil, that persistent plague which has given rise to countless philosophies and schemes of life through the passing centuries. One cannot brush the implications aside with a simple gesture of unconcern or trivial impatience. The brutal fact remains -- life is filled with conflict. Nor can this fact be rationally explained. The blind effort to drive life back to a rational basis has always failed, and what is sometimes worse -- left men in hopeless and skeptical despair. There is no rational explanation for things as we humans find them. There is but one solution and that is to humbly turn to the revelations of God's Word. We find there an adequate panacea for all the ceaseless perplexities of human existence.

This conflict, even though it did have a moral beginning, has, like a flood, swept far beyond the banks of moral channels, taking in all the varying levels of life. Even in the most common relations the conflict is felt. It is the struggle for sheer existence. The conflict is relentlessly waged as we fight against the ravages of disease. The struggle against deterioration and decay, the ceaseless effort to stave off the inevitability of old age, all these experiences of our common lot but bespeak the unending conflict that is ours.

It is obvious that in the field of Christian relations and experience this conflict will be the more real and apparent. There are two plain facts of Christian truth we should never forget. The first is a tacit recognition of our foe. The moment one steps into the arena of Christian warfare he challenges a relentless and skillful foe, and just so long as the earthly field is held every inch of Christian achievement will be challenged and purchased at the price of conflict. Perhaps such an anticipation would tend to discourage and hold no heartening hope for the beginner, but even so it would be far better to face the facts at once and gird for the battle rather than to meet stinging defeat in the future. "For which of you, intending to build a tower, sitteth not down first, and counteth the cost, whether he have sufficient to finish it? Lest unfortunately after he hath laid the foundation and is not able to build, all that behold begin to mock, saying, This man began to build, and was not able to finish. Or what king going to make war against another king, sitteth not down first, and consulteth whether he be able with ten thousand to meet him that cometh against him with twenty thousand?" (Luke 14:28-31). And even so some have unwisely hoped that even though the conflict of the Christian life may at the first be keen, the time will eventually come when the way will be easy. The conflict of Christian struggle will rage relentlessly till the final hour of triumph. And some, finally realizing all this, have chosen rather to fight a battle of mere desultory skirmishes. They could not face the relentless conflict with courage.

The other related truth is that as Christians we are on probation. God has accepted us with the understanding that we shall prove ourselves by His grace. No cheap thinking of unqualified security will change the scheme of things. If we choose God's way we must accept the school of probation and test, for whom He loveth He chasteneth and that for our profit. But it is all in the nature of a conflict, real and earnest.

A frank admission of this militant background of Christian experience merely emphasizes afresh the practicality and place of prayer. No one can hope to run the gauntlet of life without a settled resolve to give prayer its vital place. Prayer is the only adequate resource of Christian security. It is our practical means of achievement in the warfare that we have willingly accepted. The simple difference between defeat and triumph is the difference between a life without prayer and one with prayer. Recognition of this truth at the very beginning and a settled resolve to bulwark the life with prayer will be the only assurance of final victory. Consistent prayer is one's spiritual margin of safety. Believing prayer is that fundamental strategy that always outwits the enemy.

Isaiah brings home to us in a unique and striking way the practicality of prayer in the problems of life. "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; they shall walk, and not faint." Several facts Isaiah emphasizes clearly. Only the one who actually waits on the Lord can know the practical value of prayer, for each of life's adventures must be prefaced with waiting on Him. Only after one waits upon the Lord can he win in the practical tests of life. And Isaiah fearlessly declares that prayer can meet all of life's practical issues, for when one has, to use the imagery of the prophet, flown with eagle's wings -- or run with persistent endurance -- or plodded on in the sheer weariness of life, there is little else to experience. Life is pretty well covered with these exploits. And do not forget-prayer will be always the secret of success, whether it be flying, running or walking.

Now flying is not a normal function for we were never made to fly. Such is only for emergencies. But even though God did not make us for flying, life's sudden demands can be met by the one who persistently prays even if it requires the unusual demand for eagle's wings. Isaiah is simply telling us that prayer is practical in the emergencies of life. There is no other Christian way to face the crises of life except through prayer. Would that more would see it -- prayer is a truly lifting power in hours of baffling emergency. Have you ever suddenly found yourself confronted by an impossibly rugged mountain? It has loomed threateningly before you with discouraging unmoveableness. There seems no escape. You look to the right and to the left and only the rock-ribbed expanses meet your vision. You gaze at your feet but to realize that your obstacle seems rooted as one of the eternal hills and you are powerless to tunnel under, and then in one last despairing hope you look up only to become dizzy in the presence of the ominous height that meets your gaze. Thus baffled and pressed you resort to prayer, and, in some strange manner, while you pray, eagle's wings lift you up and up, and from the elevations of faith you look back to find your mountain shrunken to pigmy size. Through prayer you have gained spiritual elevation and perspective that enables you to see your problem clearly, so forth from the secret place of prayer you go to conquer where before you feared.

How many have thus exploited the practicality of prayer. Hemmed in by a seemingly impossible predicament, prayer gave wings to soar above it all. I know, for I have been there myself. How well do I recall those trying hours in years gone by. One whom I dearly loved was compelled to seek physical retreat in a sanitarium for recovery from a dreaded disease. The baby daughter found shelter with grandparents, while I alone in my human weakness tried to fight on. Again and again I would resort to that precious place of prayer -- my courage almost gone. It seemed more than my spirit could endure. But yonder in the secret place God again gave wings and in the midst of the utter perplexity and complications of life I found soaring strength that carried me up and on. At last one day, becoming desperate in the presence of God, I recklessly pleaded for a pledge from Him that would silence the cry of my heart. And then I did that which I have never done before or since -- I opened my Bible at random with a cry from the deep of my heart for a promise for my heart alone. As my eyes dropped to the opened book before me on the floor I read these thrilling words, "Fear not: believe only, and she shall be made whole" (Luke 8:50). I need not tell you the thrill of triumph that was mine nor the assurance of hope that followed in the days to come. As ever, God was true to His word; He raised up this loved one to health and strength. I had found eagle's wings in prayer.

But this we must not overlook-God does not furnish us the wings. We furnish them. God never does what we can do for ourselves. He did not make us pawns upon a board of fate to be moved coldly here and there. He endowed us with capacities to work in harmony with His eternal will, so when we give Him the co-operation of these capacities in the realm of prayer, life becomes triumphant and joyful. God does not furnish the wings -- we do. They are wings of faith and obedience. Hannah Whitehall Smith in her classic work, "The Christian's Secret of a Happy Life," tells of the secret of the wings of faith and obedience. These are our wings, God-given faculties. God cannot believe for us, neither can He obey for us.

"Trust and obey  
For there is no other way  
To be happy in Jesus,



But to trust and obey."

These wings must work together. Faith may struggle to help us mount up but all in vain. Obedience, too, may frantically press but we remain earthbound. Only as we learn the secret of the relationship of faith and obedience can we know the thrill of mounting over our perplexing problems. But immediately when we begin using our wings God instructs us in the technique of flight. Vainly we struggle alone but it is then God comes to our aid and in some strange way we find ourselves accustomed to their use and we soar above all that has kept us earthbound, and even more than this, God furnishes the one who prays with "atmosphere" for flight. Regardless of how heavy the atmosphere of unbelief about us, God sends the heavenly gales that support our wings of flight, but it all comes through waiting on the Lord.

Wings may be for emergencies but running implies endurance. Prayer again finds its place in the problems of human endurance and hours of pressure. To many Christians there have come times of heaviness through manifold temptations. Emotions have utterly subsided. Nothing seemed to betoken hope of release, and this experience was not for the short duration of a few brief hours. It stretched timelessly on through the weeks. Nothing but prayer brought the final triumph. The margin of endurance was found in prayer. The true source of reserve was found in waiting on the Lord. Prayer is for just such experiences as these.

It might not be too bold a statement to say that the failure to appreciate the collective value of prayer in this respect is the reason for the lack of greater revival tides. Too often we have easily yielded ground to the enemy at this point. Forgetting that the weapons of our warfare are not carnal but mighty through God to the pulling down of the carnal strongholds of sin, we have let gracious opportunities pass by for mighty manifestations of God. And all because we could not take the time to wait on the Lord. How many of us are all too familiar with the setting. The revival period has come and gone. We have bemoaned the failure of that which we had so carefully planned, and then we settle down to wait with a feeble measure of hope that the next revival period may bring that longed for outpouring of God upon the church. Some way the place and practicality of prayer in real revivals has lost some measure of its meaning. The days in which we live are too cluttered. So many proper pressures ply us with their insistence that it hardly seems possible to pull ourselves away for the greater good. Oh, it is not that we do not pray. We gather for those stated seasons when we are expected to pray. But to make the revival issue the major and persistent task through waiting on the Lord has somehow so often evaded our attention. We have somehow missed its vital practicality while we longingly wait for seasons of spiritual refreshing that will come in no other way. Some more persistent and united waiting on God would eventually bring God to hand and new blessings to our hearts.

But do not overlook the fact even here that running is a human function. It is not that we do not know how to run. It is rather that we possess no endurance in the running. How foolish and well-nigh exasperated we felt as we ran for the bus, the car, the elevated only to watch it slowly gain momentum as we stood pantingly conscious of our lack of endurance. We started bravely but that bravery was soon swallowed up in shortly spent strength. Here is the practicality of prayer, then, in the problem of endurance. If we will run and pray God will supplement our human weakness with His might so that we may endure. You, too, may have heard of the colored youth who struggled heroically to win the race. But just as the goal slowly came in sight his feet were

laden and his heart pounded in his ears with a frightful warning of helplessness. Just as he summoned his last remaining strength a prayer spontaneously formed on his lips, "Lord, you pick 'em up and I'll put 'em down -- Lord, you pick 'em up and I'll put 'em down." He won the race. So will you and I if we but pray it out and through. When one cries from the heart, "Lord, you pick 'em up and I'll put 'em down," in some mysterious but glorious sense God will complement our human efforts and supplement our failing strength. And as He does, new courage and faith will come. Hope to hold on will be ours and whether it be the personal struggle known only to the secrets of our own hearts or whether it is the dire need of another mighty outpouring of the presence of God, persistent prayer will bridge the gap. Once more it will prove its efficacy in life's perplexing needs. It will mean victory where otherwise there would be defeat, and fulfillment instead of wishful thinking. "They that wait upon the Lord . . . shall run and not be weary . . .

There is yet another relationship in these practicalities of life we must not overlook and that is walking. And here again prayer proves its power. Walking symbolizes the humdrum of life. Just the everyday, monotonous round of common things. For the housewife, the same dishes-the same beds-the same floors-the same laundry-the same plaguing need to suit the family's fastidious tastes. For the farmer, the same fields-the same animals -- the same endless rotation of crop -- the same struggle against frost and drought. With the business man, the same office -- the same endless chain of letters -- the same hours of coming and going-the same relentless struggle to keep one's head above the swirl of modern business. With the man in the shop, the same time clock-the same roar and din-the same unchanging pay check-the same meaningless grind. It is the humdrum of life that, after all, demands real heroism. Most humans can stand up against the sudden crises, out of the very instincts of life. But the weary wearing of the same drab round of things -- that takes pluck. As for the Christian it is just as true. I like what Oswald Chambers says in "My Utmost for His Highest" on this very point. He suggests that in Peter's case walking on the water was not hard for impulsive pluck but it was the same Peter on dry land who followed afar off. In many respects we do not need the grace of God so much to stand up against the crises -- human pride and nature will aid us then. But we do need the grace of God to face twenty-four humdrum hours a day unflinchingly. The challenge of the saint is not particularly the martyr's death. It is the ability to go through the drudgery of each succeeding day in a Christian way. As Chambers so aptly puts it, we have to be exceptional in the ordinary things, among mean streets and among mean people. And the secret of all this is found in waiting on the Lord. That place of prayer is the storehouse of spiritual reserve. Prayer will not only help us to face the humdrum but face it gloriously. The time with Him is the hour of daily renewing.

But here as in the other instances we must remember walking is a human function. How fortunate we are that God designed our bodies with those instincts of poise and balance and rhythm. What a tedious existence, if we had to will each succeeding step. But even though walking is a natural propensity few can walk far. Some will recall the boastful anticipation of that thrilling hike or hunt. How soon the limbs slowed with weariness and the feet refused to continue their vigor of stride. Prayer is that unseen source of energy that enables one to plod on through the weeks and the months. Prayer will make it possible to sing in your heart as you plod. Whether it be in the home, the office, on the farm or in the school that margin of safety in waiting on the Lord will become the secret of steady and buoyant progress in the midst of tiring things.

The point is tantalizingly apparent. In the persistent oppositions of life most people lack endurance. And it is sadly true today that many who started bravely in the past became weary in well doing solely because they failed to avail themselves of a life of prayer. One could talk with men and women here and there in whose lives the light of joy and life is gone. With one accord they would tell you it all began with prayerlessness, But the one who eagerly, persistently waits on God will find his strength unfailingly renewed and in that renewal he will learn the vital place prayer holds in the toils of everyday.

But remember, God is not going to carry us. We must walk. He will not do our running for us. We must run. He cannot afford us mere supernatural means to surmount our sudden problems. We must furnish Him the wings of obedience and faith. But when we through prayer do give God the chance, He will enable us successfully to fly; He will grant us exultant endurance; He will replenish the daily supply of grace for another tomorrow. God will supplement our human capacities with grace, and ordinary states of grace with added grace, for He giveth more grace. It is the happy secret of the coordination of the human with the divine, but He will give us those staying qualities that are necessary for the final victory.

Let us not fail to avail ourselves of that spiritual margin of safety -- the place of prayer. May we determine that in spite of life's monotony or sudden shock we will know the secret of spiritual preparedness in the place of prayer. Let us wait on Him, and though the enemy of the soul stubbornly try to thwart us let us as persistently find that gracious place of holy waiting. We will catch the significance of the prophet's vision of the long ago, "They that wait upon the Lord shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; they shall walk, and not faint"

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## 07 -- CHRISTIAN PERSPECTIVE

Preserve innocence, and keep equity in view; for the man of peace shall leave a numerous posterity (Psalm 37:37).

There is a constant temptation in this upside down world of ours to doubt the fairness of it all. Bewilderment amidst the dizzy contradictions about us provoke many to abandon intelligent hope in a moral universe, and today we are face to face with the stunning and disappointing facts of world upheaval. Not only were the minds of antiquity plagued with those problems of life in its bewildering array of inequalities and human suffering, but we of today, with all our bold declarations of wisdom, are more baffled than ever. The best minds of our day are still at grips with the philosophic problem that lies close to the foundation of things -- the perplexing problem of evil. This matter is by no means restricted to the philosopher alone. The common heart is as often plagued though his fears may not find expression in the profound terminology of the philosopher.

The humble Christian heart, too, is often perplexed, and on the ground of his perplexity Satan wages a relentless conflict against him. How can God be fair when things turn as they do? Temptations to question God concerning His goodness or His power are not so hard to find. All

about us today this wonderment is given voice while many, without the anchorage of Christian faith, have practically abandoned all hope in a moral universe and an Infinite Arbiter of right.

But we are glad that in spite of all the flux and flow of currents of doubt, light can be found even in this dark hour if one will but seek it. God's Word has, through the passing centuries, held an answer for all that has occurred, and in this problem-the problem of perspective -- it has an answer. This great psalm which we have chosen will give us, I am confident, a firmer grip on reality in our hours of uncertainty. Christian perspective will mean little to the uninitiated but to the Christian there will come a better understanding as we lay hold of the highlights of this psalm of David.

In order to catch what we believe to be the distinctive viewpoint of the psalm we choose a different reading from that familiar statement of the King James version, "Mark the perfect man, and behold the upright: for the wend of that man is peace." Strangely enough there is at least one other version of these familiar words that seems to make the thought of David much clearer. It is, therefore, that version that I choose, "Preserve innocence, and keep equity in view; for the man of peace shall leave a numerous posterity."

We would like to discover a sane and happy perspective of life that will be truly Christian; one that will frankly face problems as they are instead of attempting to foolishly rationalize or vainly ignore. We want to find an outlook on life that will neither deny nor decry its realities but see through them to ultimate reality. We cannot afford to burrow our heads in the sands, ostrich fashion. We want to find a penetrating perspective that can interpret these problems of life in terms of eternal relation and meaning. And we are boldly confident that this can be done.

There is one definite challenge in our text that is marked with particular significance in the light of the task set out before us. And that challenge can be phrased thus: "keep the end in view." Our text puts it thus, ". . . keep equity in view . . ." How basic, how vital this is, if one is to have an adequate perspective of life. How easy it is to lose sight of the end through confusion with the means. So much of life turns unfortunately at this very point One becomes so absorbed with the immediate present that the ultimate purpose of it all is forgotten. Many, many times, smothered and confused by our human limitations we become so shut up with present circumstance and vicissitude that the end is totally eclipsed, and in that eclipse we lose our bearings, and in losing our bearings, like the one lost in the woods, we become confused and begin making circles -- frantically getting ourselves nowhere.

From our Christian viewpoint all this seems so strange and unnecessary in the light of the consistent cautions of scripture. We are earnestly exhorted not to think it strange concerning the fiery trial that is to try us as though some strange thing had happened to us, for all of life's involvements, if accepted aright, have clear meaning in the refinement of character, and yet we invariably do that very thing-we begin to wonder why this or that had to fall to our lot and ere long find ourselves on the perilous verge of questioning the faithfulness of the One to whom we have unreservedly committed our lives. Like Peter, we start well over the waves but suddenly the heaving waters momentarily obscure His face and we begin to doubt and would sink but for His loving patience with our human weakness. If we would finally make the goal we must hold to a

definite perspective, no matter how ominous or real present circumstances may be, and that perspective must always insistently keep the wend in view.

This simply means that the Christian must obtain and keep a clear vision. He cannot be like the group of young folks who came to an unmarked crossroads one day as they drove merrily along. Momentarily they stopped confused and perplexed-which way should they go? They asked a passing farmer as to which way the road led ahead. "Which way do you want to go?" he asked. "Oh, it doesn't make any difference," they replied. "Then," replied he, "you don't need to know where the road leads," and drove on. But the Christian does know where he wants to go and he is anxious to find the road that leads the right way, and to be certain he is going the right way he must do two things: he must pray his way through to a settled experience and he must think his way through to a clarity of vision. The one without the other is bound to lead astray. We have known those who prayed their way through to a definite consciousness of harmony with the will of God, but they failed to surround that roadway of experiential consciousness with the signboards of spiritual intelligence and when the roads came bewildering and the confusions of life pressed them hard they lost their way. They could not reconcile the facts of life with their heart experience so they cast away their confidence and drifted aimlessly on in unbelief. And, on the other hand, we have known some who evidently were clear in their thinking but they failed to get their feet down on the clearly marked road of Christian experience -- the highway of holiness-and they were unable to coordinate their thinking with life for the lack of inward power. Remember, Christian perspective is rooted in a clear vision built upon a personal realization of Christ in the abandonment of the life to Him.

The Christian must have fixed principles of life. He must have basic principles into which he ties and interprets all that takes place. These basic principles can come only from personal experience. It is through the crystallizing power and impact of a reality of experience that they become fixed and settled. Just so long as he keeps the wend in view these principles will remain the governing factors in his conduct and attitudes of life. One of these fundamental principles of life is the difference between what is commonly called worldliness and other worldliness. This discrimination is repeatedly expressed in scripture. The apostle pleads with us to "Set your affection on things above, not on things on the earth" (Colossians 3:2). Mark you, he did not say affections -- he said affection (singular). In other words, we are exhorted to set our very affectional nature on eternal matters, not upon this world alone. We are to persistently see through the maze of things to realities beyond; to use the tools of daily living to shape the stones of an eternal abode in that city which hath foundations. Again and again this emphasis is expressed: "Love not the world, neither the things that are in the world. If any man love the world, the love of the Father is not in him" (I John 2:15). "Know ye not that the friendship of the world is enmity with God" (James 4:4).

But when we speak in such familiar terms as worldliness we fear that with many the definition is pitifully restricted. They think merely of externalities and outward pleasures. There can be little question that worldliness does include all these and we can but hold pity for those who allow themselves to be demeaned by these petty things of life. But after all, these are only the superficial expressions of worldliness and exceedingly trivial in comparison with the real spirit of worldliness. The meaning of the term drives far deeper than externalities, and the tragedy has often been that because such superficial conceptions have been held many have unwittingly allowed the

very essence of worldliness to dominate their lives while they tried unconsciously to compensate their inconsistencies by decrying mere outward marks of weakness.

Worldliness is essentially an attitude. It is a disposition of mind and spirit that lies far below the surface of human sense. It is definitely a perspective just as other worldliness is a perspective. It has its certain goals in sight and its own ends in view though unacknowledged and unowned. It is the deliberate granting of temporal interests and concerns precedence over moral and eternal issues. Subtly the mind can acquiesce with outward standards while the heart's affection is set to selfish ends, and it is this very tendency to rationalize while professedly holding to Christian perspective that marks the danger. There must be an inner resolute change of disposition as regards the perspective one shall live by. To hoodwink oneself will mean but playing the hypocrite.

The meaning of worldliness is somewhat revealed in the rather familiar story told of Mr. Roger Babson's visit to one of the Latin American republics. Mr. Babson was the guest of the president of that country as they sat about the luncheon table. As the conversation drifted to comparisons between the countries of the North and the South. Mr. Babson was bluntly asked why the United States had made such advance and marked progress during its rather brief history, a marked contrast with the land of his host. Before Mr. Babson could reply the South American answered the question himself. "The reason," said he, "is that our forefathers discovered and founded my country in the quest of gold. Your Pilgrim fathers founded your great country in their quest for God." Here is the simple though profound difference -- God or gold. Jesus told us that we were to lay up treasures, not upon earth where moth and rust could corrupt and thieves could break through and steal, but in another world where neither decay nor thieves could despoil our treasure. He exhorted us to consider the lilies of the field which neither toil nor spin and yet their glory exceeds that of Solomon. He reminded us of God's care of the lowly sparrow and assured us that the very hairs of our head are numbered. All of this teaching of the Master--so often pushed to the background--lays insistent emphasis upon an eternal perspective and not an earthly one. It all bears home the truth that the Christian must ever keep himself free from the obsession of time and things. He must seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, leaving to the discretion of his Father the matters of material blessings and abundance. This attitude by no means condones shiftless idealism. One can come to grips with the toils of life and yet remain aloof from them. If one becomes conscious of a growing domination of things he must quickly readjust his attitudes and emphasis toward these things of time. The Christian, if he would maintain a true perspective, must ever insist upon an inner disdain and contempt of things as the true means of happiness and success. It must ever be a matter of other worldliness against worldliness.

In marking this insistence of discrimination between these two principles or perspectives of life, there are certain other related principles that must become realities in the Christian heart and mind. The first of these is that God is primarily building character. All too many have based their evidence of the blessing of God on material prosperity. If they are materially secure they are blessed of God, if they are hard put financially, God's disfavor is upon them. Granted that God's mark of favor upon Israel was one of material prosperity. Their flocks and herds were to multiply as a token of His favor. Their increasing possessions were to measure Jehovah's blessing. But not so in our day. We are the spiritual seed of Abraham and heirs according to the promise. Our heritage is a spiritual one and not material. To base our final evidence of God's favor on material

things is therefore a fundamental error. God is building character at the expense of all else. God's first emphasis is character -- not things. Things are ever to be the servant, not the master. Character is to reign supremely over these things of earth. This simple fact must become a settled personal conviction. Jesus' words, "Ye cannot serve God and mammon," have a wider implication than many are aware of. There is no reconciliation between the two. One or the other must hold power. For the Christian, God, spiritual values, character must always have the preference. God loves to bless His children with the things of earth but He will never do it at the cost of an eternal emphasis. Few there are whom God can trust. There is a subtle power in wealth that few can resist and God is jealous for our best. He will not permit the good to become the enemy of the best. Indeed, if in His loving judgment suffering and trial are necessary to accomplish the glorious end He seeks, suffering will come. "My brethren, count it all joy when ye fall into divers temptations; knowing this, that the trying of your faith worketh patience. But let patience have her perfect work, that ye may be perfect and entire, wanting nothing" (James 1:2-4). "Wherein ye greatly rejoice, though now for a season, if need be, ye are in heaviness through manifold temptations: that the trial of your faith, being much more precious than of gold that perisheth, though it be tried with fire, might be found unto praise and honour and glory at the appearing of Jesus Christ . . . receiving the end of your faith, even the salvation of your souls" (I Peter 1:7, 9). Never forget -- God is building character at the cost of all else -- if we will but let Him.

Another definite principle that must become an instinctive part of one's thinking is a settled confidence in the eventual outcome of right. True this does sound trite and almost superficial. But if you could read deep into the lives of many who sincerely claim supreme love to God you would find an occasional haunting fear that perhaps it may not work out right after all. Only when one's vision is clear can he press through the dark and really believe in the outworking of God in a moral universe. He must know within himself that life is basically moral and hence a good God will finally bring things out all right. When iniquity has fully spent its course then an infinite God will say it is enough and bring the moral issues of the ages to terms with Himself. The reason the Christian will firmly believe all this is not founded on a frantic determination just to stick to his point. Rather he has become experientially acquainted with the God whose hand still holds the reins and that acquaintance has so utterly guaranteed the love of God that he can never doubt the integrity of the universe. He knows that God is love.

But the thinking of one who has established a vital Christian perspective drives still farther. He has come to the final and settled conclusion that vital relationship with God surpasses all other relations. He scorns any intimation of other affections. He looks with disdain upon any hint of compromise of his allegiance to God and right He takes as an insult the sly insinuation that he has his price. Regardless of the bids that may come there is no price immense enough to buy him. It is a fallacious saying that every man has his price. There are many who just cannot be bought. They have settled, once and for all, that vital relationship with their God is a treasured possession that has no price.

But we cannot, in the light of the context of our lesson, overlook the character of the one who reacts thus in the common experiences of life -- the one who actually has a true Christian perspective. David clearly characterized him in this psalm.

He trusts in the Lord (v.3). That is, he trusts in the Lord and not in men. Not that he is a cynic, but rather he does not pin his final confidence and expectation on men. He appreciates his fellows truly. He lives at peace with all men as far as he can but he is no hero worshiper. How often the young Christian has broken here. He is prone to stake his hopes on the integrity of someone whom he outstandingly respects, and as the days go by his idol seems to fall and his faith is undermined. The one who persists in maintaining the true Christian perspective will never put his confidence in human flesh but will ever trust his God. He has decided that man at his best is weak. To find that God is dependable is enough -- he needs no other source of confidence.

But again, he delights himself in the Lord (v.4). He is pleased with God's dealings in his personal behalf. He ever has a sense of the pit from which he was digged and with this consciousness always in the background of his thinking he feels that all that he has is superior to what he deserves. Promotions and honors from men intuitively drive him in fear to God. Not that he lives as a "worm of the dust," rather he lives boldly and triumphantly, but always underneath is the sobering realization that at his best he is but an unprofitable servant. Thus he continues to delight in the Lord and all things for he somehow knows that godliness with contentment is great gain. He believes that "a little that a righteous man hath is better than the riches of many wicked. The Lord knoweth the days of the upright: and their inheritance shall be forever" (vs. 16, 19). In other words he has discovered that when he keeps his emphasis of life on character rather than things the adjustments of life are not so difficult in the hour of necessity. There is no fatal wrench to free himself from things when his life is rooted in contentment in God.

But David's description does not end here for the fifth verse tells us that he also commits his way unto the Lord. He persists in working hard at the task before him and does not fretfully sigh for greater ones. He does not complain because life sometimes fails to bring rewards. He neither whines nor kicks against the pricks but lives resolutely in the law of divine will and purpose. He does not fret himself because of evil doers nor is he envious against them. The Holy Spirit has taught him that they shall soon be cut down like the grass and wither as the green herb (vs. 1-2). He inwardly senses, in other words, that the perspective of the Bible is never time but always eternity. Even though the evil doer may succeed and the worker of iniquity seem to prosper, he reminds himself that their prosperity at its best is but for a moment in contrast with eternity. Thus he quietly trusts and refuses to fret and envy for he has committed his way unto the Lord.

David carries us one step farther in verse seven. He rests in the Lord. He accepts the providences of God without question. He ceases from anger, refusing in any wise to do evil (v.8). Clear perspective will always keep one from getting unduly "heated up." He sees clearly, therefore lives calmly. Somehow beneath all the disturbing things that surround him he finds a calm confidence in his God. And thus he lives -- knowing for a surety that God still holds the helm.

But we must not overlook the assurance that rewards one who persists in maintaining a Christian perspective. David tells us that he will leave a numerous posterity. Controlled by consistent Christian perspective he simply cannot live without wielding tremendous influence. The man or woman who persists in living steadily, dependably and sturdily will find that the impetus of his life will leave its mark on many. Too often the dubious lack of talent or the seeming ordinariness of life has discouraged many. But remember that neither the brilliant nor the



spectacular necessarily have the favor of God. It is required of a steward that he be found faithful. The impact of the quiet and often unobtrusive life will carry many into eternal triumph, and only then will the true driving force of Christian perspective be fully known.

The story is told of an English nobleman who stopped one day in a tiny village in Cornwall. He was tired and hot and thirsty. His quest of drink seemed all in vain. At last he stopped a peasant rather angrily, "How is it that one cannot get a drink of liquor in this wretched village?" The old peasant, recognizing the nobleman's rank, tipped his hat as he politely but quietly replied, "My lord, something over one hundred years ago a man named John Wesley came to these parts."

Remember always, if you would live the Christian life successfully, wisely, consistently and triumphantly you must, "preserve innocence, and keep equity in view; for the man of peace shall leave a numerous posterity."

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## 08 -- MY PHILOSOPHY OF LIFE

And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to his purpose (Romans 8:28).

How vital is one's philosophy of life! The vain philosophies of the hour fully justify the assumption. The vagaries of modern thinking have led to strange and curious assumptions. The common premises of life today, when followed through, lead to unhappy ends. Society with its underlying philosophy of education has produced anomalies of life that are strange indeed. The teachings of personal freedom and so-called realism have bred a chaos now difficult to control; attitudes of life which strike at the very heart of the most precious principles and institutions of time. Yes, one's philosophy of life is of prime importance.

And not only is this true in matured thinking but how critical even in early youth. Consciously or unconsciously each of us in early adolescence, more true today than ever, formulates his attitudes toward life. One may change with the passing of years but we believe that as a rule those first deeply formed attitudes eventually crystallize into one's final philosophy of human existence. Crises sometimes wreck those philosophies insecurely supported, but there they are ruling and significant in all our lives. My philosophy of life unconsciously colors all my attitudes and reactions in terms of actual living. It is sometimes said of one, he is not a religious man. I would be compelled to take exception to such an assertion, regardless of whom it may be said, for underneath a sometimes repelling exterior is a depth of discernment and a certainty of thought in terms of the meaning of life -- the average man's religion. True, that religion or philosophy may be a far cry from truth, it may be a strange caricature of the genuine, yet it is a philosophy of life and the inevitable outworking of an instinctively religious nature.

I want to pass on to you my personal philosophy of life. And this I do without reluctance or apology for I believe I have the only philosophy which really works. Such a statement may seem perilously near bombast and yet I insist that I am proud of my philosophy of life. I am proud of it,

not as a creature of my own mind, for it is far from that. But I am proud of it because of its practicality and reassuring reasonableness. This philosophy of life I have tested in the crucible of many experiences and it has never failed. Whether it has been the bedside of a dying loved one, the loss of a precious friendship, disappointment in those in whom one has put a sure dependence of trust, financial test and stringency, or moral trial; this philosophy has always worked. Can you then blame one for feeling confident before the experiences of life, and not at all loath to reveal findings to others?

No, I have nothing new to offer. And this announcement may carry heavy disappointment to some. But after all this bit of reassurance may be helpful. Religiously or philosophically speaking there is nothing new under the sun. The multitudinous mushroom growths all around us have their roots significantly attached to some empty philosophy of the past. The religions of the past are even finding warm friends who are ready to dress them anew in modern garbs of attempted respectability and pass them off as some brilliant discovery of the present hour. And strangely enough multitudes of supposedly thinking analytical people have fallen prey to just such modern vagaries. It is nothing new that I bring, and that to me brings assurance instead of alarm, for in the important items of life I would much rather have the tried and the true. Even if I were purchasing an automobile this week I would take pains, I think, not to purchase some new make recently placed on the market, no matter how glowing its promises of performance might be. Rather I would seek out some make which has met the grueling test of everyday life in the hands of common men. How much more, then, is the vital necessity for one's life's philosophy to rest secure in that which has endured the acid test of time?

Mine can meet this measure, for it was first expressed in concrete terms in the long ago by the Apostle Paul when he said in his letter to the Roman church, "And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them that are the called according to his purpose." Paul himself tried it out in his hectic and remarkable life only to settle down upon it beneath the very shadow of martyrdom, for it was then he restated it in different terms yet fundamentally the same, "I have fought a good fight, I have finished my course, I have kept the faith" (II Timothy 4:7). From then till now men of God have relied upon this truth and have always found its integrity intact under all the tests of life. Many whom I have met here and there over the country have assured me again and again of its proved value in their lives; thus I am convinced beyond peradventure of the value of this philosophy of life.

The very first fact I call to your attention is that of the practicality of this philosophy. It comes to fearless grips with life itself. And, after all, what is life made of? What is the stuff that makes the whole? I think I can tell you-it is a thing. This is the smallest divisible unit of life, a thing. Could you put life into a test tube and break it down over the flame of a Bunsen burner it would yield no more. Life is made up of just things, homespun, commonplace, everyday things. You make your plans for tomorrow and some thing happens and all your plans are thrown away. Plans are made with care and thoughtfulness for the future, then some thing takes place and the future is eclipsed with the necessity of readjustment. Life, as one said, is not a little bundle of big things it is a big bundle of little things. With all too many, things control them rather than they controlling things. They live in a constant maze of uncertainty because they cannot clamber atop of things. Thus they live in slavery beneath the surveillance of things. Others, in turn, lose the end through the absorption of things. They start somewhere but end in circles. They are honest in the

beginnings but unseated in the quest, lost in the maze of things. Things should become steppingstones, not millstones. But of the latter, there are all too many. It is right here my philosophy will help for it comes to grips with life itself, "and we know that all things..." It deals with the very stuff life is made of, subordinating and controlling things, yielding to my control a well-directed life with evident purposefulness and certainty of end.

"But do you mean to say," my questioner still persists, "that you actually believe that all the things of life will work together for good to them that love God and are called according to His purpose?" That is exactly what I mean to say. I fully realize that such a comprehensive statement will be challenged by many, but truth stands on its own integrity. Here is a man who sincerely challenges the proposition. He tells me his story something like this: Insisting that he had no desire to be rich, he tells me that for a time business was good and prosperity seemed fully within his grasp. It was fortunate, for just at the time he was rearing a family. One son was in graduate school, two in college and a remaining one or two in lower schools. Just at this juncture his business ventures failed completely and he was temporarily thrown out of employment, his children were deprived of adequate preparation for life. Earnestly he looks me in the eye, saying that he would like to believe that all things work together for good to them that love God, but he cannot. He insists that could he really accept the principle it would lift the burden and relieve the pressure, but he cannot. Then, a woman approaches me with the same plea. It is hardly necessary for her to tell me the details of her story, I can read it in her face and demeanor. Right at the most crucial period of family life, with a growing family and a happy home, her husband was swept into eternity. Her hands are scarred with toil, her shoulders stooped with burdens and her hair prematurely streaked with gray. Almost pitifully she assures me she would like to lay hold of this philosophy but cannot grasp it. But against these testimonies and all the multiplied numbers that would run the entire gamut of human test, I would be compelled to still insist that I know "that all things work together for good to them that love God and to them that are the called according to His purpose."

Let me see if I cannot make the point clear. Indulging in a freely imaginative picture; I am not feeling well. At last under the pressure of seeming physical necessity I go to my doctor for a general examination. After a careful scrutiny he informs me that there is nothing serious but that some consistent diet is necessary as well as discretion in hours of labor and leisure. He closes the visit by giving me a prescription and directions that I am to take a tonic before each meal. I go to the druggist. He informs me that he can fill the prescription at once. Thus I stand by and with curiosity watch, for in the back of my mind is the consideration that I must take this tonic internally three times each day. Immediately I am startled for from the shelves of drugs the druggist pulls a large bottle bearing the lurid label: Poison. I interrupt the druggist with the admonition that there must be some mistake, but he continues unperturbed. Now fully interested, I watch his procedure only to eventually call a halt in the compounding of this tonic, for at last he takes another bottle from the shelves on the front of which a skull and crossbones is glaringly exposed. I immediately inform the druggist that this is too much. It is not a question of being ready to die, but rather a definite unwillingness to do it purposely. With some betrayal of indignation the druggist sets down the bottle to admonish me. "There is little question," says he, "that an overdose from this first bottle would make you mortally ill. And further," he continues, "even a small amount of this last bottle would kill you. But remember, sir, I am not giving you this or that alone, but rather it is the combination of the whole. One chemical acts upon another. The doctor knows what he is doing and

so do I." Yes, that is it. Sorrows, joys, lights, shadows; all the complexities of life blending together into one composite of experience which, if accepted from the hand of God within His will, will work out character in me for God's eternal glory. God will blend, with infinite wisdom and loving consideration of my needs and welfare, the lights and shadows of life into one harmonious whole that will bring forth from my life the best in capacity and attitude. I can never forget those lines, the authorship of which I have never learned:

"My life is but a weaving  
Between my Lord and me.  
I cannot see the pattern  
He weaveth steadily.

Full oft He weaveth sorrow  
And I in foolish pride,  
Forget He sees the upper,  
And I the under side."

Thus with a submissive will and a heart of faith I push on through life's perplexing experiences fully persuaded that all things are working together for good to me.

But mark you, I did not say in any generalized way that all things work together for good to all, regardless. That would not be true. This promise of God's Book is just as much qualified as any other promise. But the limitations are simple and obvious. All things work together for good to them that are called according to His purpose and to those that love Him. That is it. The first question is, have I heard His call? Have I yielded my human will to Infinite Love and purposefulness? Am I loving Him with all my heart, and keeping His commandments as best I know? If I have heard His call and if I am now living daily for Him and His will, God will, if you please, compel the all things of life to work to my benefit and His glory.

How foolish, after all, for one to plan his life apart from God. For us, who cannot know even the next tomorrow, to coolly calculate our future is presumptive indeed. God alone can know the future. He alone can plan for us. But if one stubbornly persists in planning apart from Him, God is powerless to help him. God would like to anticipate his tomorrows for his good, but his will frustrates the desire of a loving heavenly Father. Thus God stands aside watching the baffling circumstances of life beat that one down into defeat. God could have worked it otherwise but man's will forbade, and when one does this, down the road is defeat, discouragement and cynicism. If that hour should unhappily come, do not blame God or people as is often done. Rather blame yourself. God would have spared you much if you had let Him do it. All things will work together for good to the one who will love God supremely and listen to His gracious guidance through the years. God, because he is God, can and will lead one through the labyrinths of life, tempering the blast to human weakness, modifying life's perplexities to one's temperamental ability so that the whole of life will sum up into a harmonious total that will bring glory to Him and good to me.

Would that I could make this clear. Bear with me further in a simple illustration or two. I am walking down the pathway of life over which we all shall travel -- from the cradle to the casket. Just ahead in my tomorrows, headed straight and unwittingly toward me, is a test which

will crush me if I meet it. The obscurity of my tomorrows hides the fact. Thus innocently I pass along my way oblivious of the danger impending. But God in mercy, in whose sweet will I have placed my life, with a divine dexterity leads me around this crisis unbeknown to me, and my future continues assured. You and I who love God today can thank Him, not only for the many things we know He has saved us from, but for the many things we have never known he has saved us from. But once more, I am plodding on along the same pathway and, as sometimes happens, the fogs of tomorrow momentarily lift and I can catch a glimpse of something just ahead that paralyzes me with fear. I talk with my heavenly Father about it, assuring Him that I can never face such an experience as I see approaching. He smiles with patience and as I draw nearer to the trial He firmly holds me until I find myself plunged into the bewildering test. After it has passed and my composure has been regained I turn to Him with praise, telling Him that I would not have missed that experience for anything. Only a loving, gracious, Infinite Father knows the best for me. But with my will in His I find happy assurance and confidence as time piles up its accumulating evidence that after all, all things work together for good to them that love God, and are called according to His purpose.

Would I could show you the actual benefits of this philosophy of life. Oh, that I might help you to see what it will mean to you to place your life in the center of Infinite purpose. This I know, it will grant you a courage of life that is undefeatable. For if one really believes that all that comes into his life is ultimately for his good, how can he be defeated? I have often insisted that were there no eternal prospect before us at all I would be a Christian merely for the present mental poise and sturdiness it gives me. If I can find a wholesome approach that helps me to sincerely believe that all that may come into my life in utter confusion, but works out my best good I will find an adequacy of life that is worth while.

The illustration of this fact is not hard to find, for here and there we see those whose lives bear the definite mark of suffering and human disappointment, who still rest sweetly in this assurance of divine purposefulness in their suffering and pain. Many a courageous, trusting heart has been a benediction to a pastor as he called upon that one in his invalidism of suffering and wearying weakness, and all because there was a settled principle of life woven into the very fabric of his character, that all things were working out for his good regardless of the dark and sometimes foreboding hours of suffering; that back of it all a loving God watched with anxious care as He worked out for him an exceeding and eternal weight of glory. My philosophy of life will give you a courage of life that cannot be beaten or overwhelmed.

But it will accomplish even more. It will give you faith to stand steadfastly confident in the confusing contradictions of life. If you have lived very long as a Christian you have already discovered that life has its hours of contradictions. You had followed the course you earnestly felt was right only to find some seeming challenge blocking all the paths that would lead you in the direction you had felt you had to go. It is an old story about George Mueller, yet ever filled with fresh inspiration at each telling. Mueller was bound for appointments in that great section of Britain's far-flung empire of Canada. As his vessel sped toward North America it was suddenly surrounded by dense fog. Sail was slacked and hourly watch was maintained to save the boat from the treacherous icebergs floating silently by. After some delay Mr. Mueller approached the captain who nervously paced the deck.

"Cannot we make any progress, Captain?" asked Mueller.

"No," replied the captain, "it would be suicide in this fog with icebergs all about."

"Is there any chance of the fog lifting?" again asked Mueller.

"Little chance," was the reply.

"But if the fog should lift now could we still make port on time?" again queried Mueller.

"Yes," assented the captain wonderingly.

"Let us go below and pray," said Mueller. Eagerly the captain followed Mueller below. He had heard much of this great man of prayer and wished to hear him pray and here was the opportunity. They dropped on their knees beside the bunk in the captain's quarters. It was but a simple prayer directly addressed to his heavenly Father that Mueller voiced. The captain was just starting to voice his added petition when Mueller arose.

"Let's go on deck, Captain, God has heard," said Mueller.

When they clambered again to the deck the fog was beginning to silently but deliberately separate from the rolling, tumbling waters. They made port on time. What was it that gave George Mueller such faith in the midst of dark challenge? It was his philosophy of life that assured him that this predicament was but another opportunity to prove his God, for he fully believed that all things were working together for him because he loved God and was following His will in full devotion.

This is my philosophy of life, but not mine alone. Thousands have laid hold of it too, and with me have found that its truthfulness has ever held. I would urge all who hear or read to believe that it is so. Some time ago I heard of a young woman who felt the call to a foreign field. Each time she attempted to follow that call she was frustrated and seemingly defeated. The years slipped by as hopes dimmed like a setting sun. Her lot seemed inevitably to be to care for the members of her family. A parent had died leaving her with an unmistakable burden, just as she thought the way was opening. And now the years of opportunity had gone. She nourished and cultured in the things of God the precious children left in her care. First one was called to fields of service far away and still another. At last the beauty and meaning of it all broke over her soul. God had shut her up to duties seemingly defeating the purpose and call of her life. But now her dreams were fulfilled as two or three of her own flesh and blood took up the torch for her. Through her obedience to God she was finding herself multiplied on the mission field. Contentedly she rested in the sweet love of God, seeing against the perspective of time, the gracious workings of One who knew far better than she how to bless her life and bring glory to Himself.

Have you heard His call? If so, commit your way unto Him without reserve. Let Him plan your tomorrows and He will, with infinite graciousness, compel circumstances to be your slaves. He will turn barriers into blessings, shadows into sunshine, by-paths into sudden climbs to higher heights. He will give you wings to fly and feet to plod, eyes of faith to penetrate the gloom of time.

He will make all things work together for your good because you love Him supremely and with a heart of confidence keep His commandments.

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## 09 -- THE SILENCE OF GOD

The secret things belong unto the Lord our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children forever. . . (Deuteronomy 29:29).

The silence of God has ever been a perplexity to the human mind. A tireless longing persists in human hearts for explanation. Why does God, if He exists at all, stay so still in the background of human events? Why, when the world He made reels in sorrow upon the very verge of ruin, does He continue to seemingly ignore it all? Here is a question that has hurt the heart of man so long it would seem futile to attempt an answer, and even then, in the answer that we would give, there can be little hope of bringing forth from our treasures ought but that which is old and well known. Indeed, we claim no originality for the very title we have chosen, but in spite of all we cannot help feeling that there is good ahead for us if we will once again think over together this mooted matter -- the silence of God.

No sooner do the intonations of some other new tragedy die away into silence than men instinctively begin to wonder, will God speak now? In fact this very emotional experience has been so often repeated that the vast majority of humanity have long ceased to even listen and wonder why. The commonplaceness of the problem has taken away its jar and challenge, but, in spite of it all, down deep beneath conscious thought the query persists, and deep in the heart of man a restlessness of spirit abides while on the surface anxiety has turned to listlessness, and wonder to unbelief.

Such were the days, when Jesus came. Men had long looked for Him who would emancipate Israel from the thralldom of foreign yokes, but His coming had stretched out so wearily through the centuries that hope had broken in the strain and hearts had failed in the waiting. Eyes that had reverently looked in hope had looked in vain. Lips that had over and over repeated the words of promise were numbed with doubt, and when He did come unbelief and fear obscured His presence for a time.

And so it is, even today, men have hoped for a voice from the skies or a sign written in the heavens overhead until a veritable pall of cynicism has benumbed their minds. Unbelief has gripped their hearts until but few alternatives invade their thinking. Perhaps God is not. Such is the naturalistic philosophy of the hour. All that is, they say, is but the moving of matter itself as it changes back and forth within itself. But others a little less driven by utter pessimism feel that He is the kind of Being who cares little about human tragedy and heartbreak but sits back in the shadows absorbed in His own thoughts. To some God is either merely a symbol for the fatalistic processes of a blind universe running wild or else He is merely some mysterious first cause who in the dim distances of past eons precipitated certain evolutionary processes and then departed, His work done.

Blasphemies and vile desecrations unparalleled take place in Russia. God is ruled out of the nation by the ruthless heel of force and His name outlawed. Yet God remains silent. The carnage of war has swept China until over sixty millions are left helpless and hopeless refugees who grope stolidly for a few morsels of food to stave off starvation, and when these efforts fail they sit down by the way submitting to death, and God still remains silent. The entire continent of Europe is torn with indescribable strife while its millions are in misery and want and fear while dictators live in luxury, sweeping ruthlessly aside any who would raise a question, and still God stays silent. As the weary years creep by, millions silently suffer from pagan ignorance and dread plagues of disease, blindly believing that the anger of the gods is against them, and yet God remains silent. Nations flagrantly cast aside every moral precedent of good and press their diabolical selfishness to the hurt and horror of the multitudes and God still remains silent. Flood and devastation and war have blotted our own fair land as all the world around while a strange inexplicable silence reigns over all the chaos and grief. Is there an answer to this plaguing and persistent fact?

There is an answer, we are sure. Some time ago my eyes fell unexpectedly upon a book bearing this very title. With eagerness I purchased it and hurried home with the hope that here was an answer to the cry of my own heart and that of multitudes more. The book did not adequately answer that cry of the heart though it did point the way that I should go in my quest, and out of that contemplation have come assurance to my own soul and answers to the question that are sufficient to satisfy me. My answer may not satisfy you but it does bring sufficient adequacy to my own mind and heart to enable me to face the continued baffling silence of God unafraid; and not only unafraid, but assured that there is infinite Intelligence and love behind these hectic shifting scenes of life, and that now I see but darkly through the dim glass of human sense; now I know all will meet the regal challenge of truth and divine integrity. I am satisfied that God still firmly holds the helm of this universe of worlds and when He shall choose, clouds will be swept away and that which is obscure and challenging shall be made plain. Meantime I can wait, confident and unafraid.

One must realize that this problem finds, in part at least, a simple solution in a common fact-the greatness of God in contrast to the finiteness of man. In our anxiety to master the universe about us we sometimes forget that we are humans and God alone is the Infinite. Baffled, we become bitter and arrogant and complain that we should know when that knowing would be but a further surfeiting of our human pride. It seems even now a consummate tragedy of time that God has allowed us to know so much, for we brutally turn that knowledge to the destruction of our fellows instead of to their good. Man has unlocked so many secrets, harnessed so many powers, brought under his finite control so many capacities of nature that a certain distasteful arrogance has crept into his heart, till he has lost the proper perspective between God and himself. Man has bombastically changed places with God, taking the throne of lordship for himself and placing God in mere co-ordination with evolutionary law. It would be well to fill the billboards that crowd the highways and dot the landscape of our land with the words of Isaiah, "For my thoughts are not your thoughts, neither are your ways my ways, saith the Lord. For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are my ways higher than your ways, and my thoughts than your thoughts" (Isaiah 55:8-9).

Should a child question the actions of a parent just because of some petulant whim? Should he refuse obedience and trust just because that parent gave a command consistent with his larger



knowledge and experience? Should a subject doubt the integrity of his sovereign just because that ruler knows the undercurrents of diplomacy and even intrigue that his subject could not understand? May God deliver us today from that unmeaning arrogance, so common to the hour, that presupposes intelligence superior to that of the One who made and ruleth all. We are still human in spite of all our exploits. God is still infinite in spite of His gracious release of truth and power to human hands. Rather let us rest in the assurance that One who would bring a glorious universe into being like the one we know cannot be either impersonal or imperious. If we will soberly consider our limited estate in contrast to His we will find a partial answer to the question of the silence of God. There will be at least a rift in the dark horizon of mystery and day will show itself not far away.

But again, man's frustration of God's original plan can help to at least partially solve our problem. Back yonder God conversed with man in his innocence. God and man walked together in the cool of the day. There was an intimacy there that could be nothing short of loving fellowship and mutual anticipation. Man was close up to God's plans for his tomorrows. "And the Lord God took the man, and put him into the garden of Eden to dress it and to keep it.... And out of the ground the Lord God formed every beast of the field, and every fowl of the air; and brought them unto Adam to see what he would call them: and whatsoever Adam called every living creature, that was the name thereof" (Genesis 2:15,19).

It cannot be doubted, from reasonable assumption, that it was God's plan and purpose to further unfold His purposes to man as time went on. God and man were to walk hand in hand, as it were, in this renewed earth of His. But man shut the door between himself and God. He put such a distance between himself and his God by disobedience that God was pushed far away and was compelled to keep His secrets to himself. God was frustrated in His plans, and this the apostle so clearly explains in his sermon on Mars' Hill long ago: "Ye men of Athens, .I perceive that in all things ye are too superstitious. For as I passed by, and beheld your devotions, I found an altar with this inscription, TO THE UNKNOWN GOD. Whom therefore ye ignorantly worship, him declare I unto you. God that made the world and all things therein, seeing that he is Lord of heaven and earth, dwelleth not in temples made with hands; neither is worshipped with men's hands, as though he needed any thing, seeing he giveth all life, and breath, and all things; and hath made of one blood all nations of men for to dwell on all the face of the earth, and hath determined the times before appointed, and the bounds of their habitation; that they should seek the Lord, if haply they might feel after him, and find him, though he be not far from every one of us; for in him we live, and move, and have our being." (Acts 17:22-28). Thus, had man not broken allegiance to his God, he would have been led on into the unfoldings of divine purpose throughout the ages to come.

Still it must not be overlooked that it is yet God's plan to reveal His purpose to man and through redemption take him once more into the knowledge of His eternal purposes. Paul reminds us of these future unfoldings in Colossians 1:25-27, "Whereof I am made a minister, according to the dispensation of God which is given to me for you, to fulfill the word of God; even the mystery which hath been from ages and generations, but now is made manifest to his saints: to whom God would make known what is the riches of the glory of this mystery..." And so it is, although redemption would yet bridge the gap, sin has put a moral distance between man and God so that God has been frustrated in His plan of keeping man in His confidence concerning His eternal purposes.

And it cannot be denied that -- admitting the presence of sin in this world -- God continues His silence while sin runs its course. It will bear many repetitions, though often said, that there is no rational explanation to life as we now find it. There is a background of tragedy through the distortion of relationships by sin that cannot be ignored. God by sovereign choice made man a sovereign like Himself in respect to choice and destiny. Thus God is compelled to remain in the background of man's disobedience until sin bears its full fruition and results in final chaos. Paul confirms this in his second Thessalonian letter wherein he declares, "For the mystery of iniquity doth already work: only he who now letteth will let, until he be taken out of the way." God's silence reigns while man's tragic destiny through sin must run its course to final consummation.

But in striking contrast to these vital facts yet another remains in explanation of the silence of God. We are now living in a day of grace. It is this gracious fact, dovetailing, so to speak, with the former background that enlarges our horizon of the understanding of the silence of God. Grace means patient waiting, gracious forbearance, infinite longsuffering; waiting for man's return to his heavenly Father; waiting for all men to humble themselves under the mighty hand that they may in due time once more be exalted. It is, to me, a startling fact; God is willing to be chided as slothful; He is willing to be indicted a sluggard; He endures the blatant ridicule of cynical unbelief, waiting with a graciousness of which infinite love alone is capable for man to accept His proffered grace before the consummation of all time. "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness; but is longsuffering to usward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance" (II Peter 3:9).

For centuries God was silent as with infinite adroitness He labored with rebellious man, shaping the destinies of nations until He could bring to pass a day of grace for all. Finally, in the fullness of time, He spoke by His Son: "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" (Hebrews 1:1, 2). And God having spoken in clear terms of grace and mercy, again lapses into silence waiting for erring humanity to awake and return.

The present silence of God's waiting grace is eloquent with meaning. Some would tell us that other revelations are yet to come, but not so. The plea is to us upon whom the end of the age is come. For God has spoken in these last days. It is Peter who tells us that God, having spoken in mercy, now waits but will speak once more and then in judgment and in a final consummation of His eternal purpose. Thus God's silence today is a silence of love and patient waiting. He is silent because, as expressed in the words of the hymn writer, there is naught else He can do.

How firm a foundation, ye saints of the Lord,  
Is laid for 'your faith in His excellent Word  
What more can He say than to you He hath said,  
To you, who for refuge to Jesus have fled?

This, then, is the composite picture of the meaning of the silence of God: God's greatness and our finiteness; man's frustration of the plan of God; the menace of sin in the world; the patient waiting grace of God.

But the story is not yet complete. Anyone who will, can break the silence of God. His very silence, against His background of grace is a bold invitation for one to invade that silence by faith in the mercy of God through Christ. Listen to Christ as He himself speaks: "In that hour Jesus rejoiced in spirit, and said, I thank thee, O Father, Lord of heaven and earth, that thou hast hid these things from the wise and prudent, and hast revealed them unto babes: even so, Father; for it seemed good in thy sight. All things are delivered to me of my Father: and no man knoweth who the Son is but the Father; and who the Father is but the Son, and he to whom the Son will reveal him. And he turned him unto his disciples and said privately, Blessed are the eyes which see the things which ye see: for I tell you, that many prophets and kings have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them, and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them" (Luke 10:20-24). And to all today who will, like those trusting ones of Jesus' day, forsake the wisdom of this world, by which God cannot be known, and turn to Him in humble faith, yet boldly, the silence will be broken. And this is not a mere hazard of speculation for there is a universal testimony from those who have personally and boldly invaded the silence of God. Their startling testimony is ever, "I see! It is not in the sense of ultimate grasp that they cry thus but rather by an inscrutable divine intuition and revelation they grasp the mystery of divine purpose and revelation, and for them the silence of God is eternally broken. For, "As it is written, eye hath not seen, nor ear heard, neither have entered into the heart of man, the things which God hath prepared for them that love him. But God hath revealed them unto us by his Spirit...." (I Corinthians 2:9, 10).

One fact remains to complete the picture of the silence of God. There is yet a day to come when God will break His silence, and that forever. We repeat, "The Lord is not slack concerning his promise, as some men count slackness, but is longsuffering to us-ward, not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance. But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night; in the which the heavens shall pass away with a great noise, and the elements shall melt with fervent heat, the earth also and the works that are therein shall be burned up" (II Peter 3:9, 10). "The mighty God even the Lord hath spoken, and called the earth from the rising of the sun unto the going down thereof.... Our God shall come, and shall not keep silence: a fire shall devour before him, and it shall be very tempestuous round about him. He shall call to the heavens from above, and to the earth, that he may judge his people" (Psalm 50:1-4).

Hear again the words of the Revelator in this same vein, "But in the days of the voice of the seventh angel, when he shall begin to sound, the mystery of God should be finished, as he hath declared to his servants the prophets" (Revelation 10:7). The day comes when the universe shall again hear the voice of God; when He, for the last time, shall break the silence of the ages. The very earth will feel His tread. The created universe will bow before the word of His voice. The whole creation that groaneth and travaileth together even until now in the anguish of sin will burst forth into a mighty major crescendo of deliverance from the bondage of sin and the silence of God. This old earth like an age-long bound Prometheus, will shake itself free from the shackles of bondage at the voice of God. The discordant tones of time will be tuned into a great harmonious chorus of praise to Him who hath spoken the final word of eternal authority. To all who have invaded the past silence of God, the instruments of redeemed personalities will burst forth like a mighty organ into one symphony of praise to the God of eternities who has spoken the glorious words of grace. "And I heard a voice from heaven as the voice of many waters, and as the voice of a great thunder: and I heard the voice of harpers harping with their harps: and they sung as it were

a new song before the throne.... I beheld, and, lo, a great multitude which no man could number, of all nations, and kindreds, and people, and tongues, stood before the throne, and before the Lamb, clothed with white robes, and palms in their hands; and cried with a loud voice saying, Salvation to our God which sitteth upon the throne, and unto the Lamb" (Revelation 14:2-3; 7:9, 10). "The secret things belong unto the Lord, our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children forever" (Deuteronomy 29:29).

\* \* \* \* \*

THE END