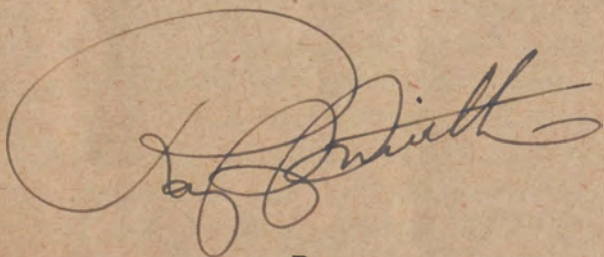


Little Lessons
in
SPIRITUAL
EFFICIENCY

by

Roy L. Smith

**LITTLE LESSONS
IN
SPIRITUAL EFFICIENCY**

A large, elegant, handwritten signature in dark ink, which appears to read "Roy L. Smith". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, looping initial "R".

By

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Editor, The Christian Advocate

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Spiritual Efficiency and the Abundant Life

JESUS one time described his major purpose in life by saying, "I have come that ye might have life and have it more abundantly," and in his endeavor to open the way to "the abundant life" he undertook to teach men how to become spiritually efficient.

Fundamentally, life is a spiritual enterprise. We may be surrounded by every creature comfort the heart can desire, and we may have intellectual training of the highest order, but if the spirit of our life is wrong, there can never be any real success or happiness for us until our spirit is made right.

The highest joys we will ever know, and the deepest pains we will ever suffer will always be spiritual experiences. To lose one's sight or hearing is a very great tragedy, but to lose one's faith in life or one's confidence in himself is an even greater disaster. To be afflicted with cancer is almost certainly fatal, but to be afflicted with jealousy or envy is absolutely fatal.

The truly great possessions of life—those things which make up the "abundant life"—are not

houses, jewels, luxuries, fine furs, and vast estates. Rather, they are spiritual qualities like courage, faith, patience, hope, vision, cheerfulness, self-control, and moral integrity. Jesus made this perfectly plain when he said, "A man's life does not consist of the abundance of things which he possesses."

Life has a way of closing down upon those who never learn the fine art of managing their spiritual life. Dr. C. C. Jung, the great Austrian psychiatrist, says that the great majority of those who have come to him suffering from mental maladies are persons who have lost, or who have never had, a stable, religious faith.

On the other hand, life has a way of opening up for those who become spiritually efficient—those who learn to live by the great and eternal principles which govern the spiritual life. Serenity, poise, confidence, strength of soul, gladness of heart, tranquility, peace of mind—these are not special gifts bestowed upon favored individuals by a whimsical God, but personal spiritual achievements which are within the reach of any individual who is willing to make the

effort necessary to attain them.

Life cannot be left to chance. He who takes it as it comes, making no effort to master the forces of evil within him or to enthrone the good impulses that rise up in his soul, becomes the victim of every caprice of fortune. He will arrive nowhere because he sets out for nowhere. In the hour of stress and strain, when hope and faith survive only because heroic efforts are put forth, he will perish because he has no stores of spiritual resources within his own soul.

Life must be mastered. This means that great spiritual powers must be cultivated, that life must be organized in harmony with the eternal spiritual principles which God has laid down. All of life's capacities and interests must be organized around the highest and holiest purpose in sight. Every faculty of mind and heart must be focused on this great major objective. Every vagrant impulse must be brought under control and subjected to an unwavering discipline. Only so can life be prepared for the heights.

Those whose desires are undisciplined, whose passions are imperious and wanton, whose moods are unmanageable, whose convic-

tions are unstable, live life at its worst. Tempers, prejudices, fears, and doubts despoil their sweetest joys, render impotent their greatest efforts, and reduce life to chaos.

Those who live life at its best, reaping its richest rewards, are those who have become spiritually expert. Their desires are disciplined, their attitudes are carefully chosen, their faith is well reasoned, and their whole existence is unified about one compelling and eternal ideal. Body, mind, and spirit are united under one mastery—a devout purpose to do the will of God.

To the task of revealing and interpreting the mind and will of God, Jesus dedicated his life. He lived every day in the supreme confidence that *he knew how to live*. Living the most triumphant and victorious life that has ever been lived among men, he said, "I am the way." His confidence in the superiority of his way of living rested back on his complete confidence that he knew the mind of God and was doing his will.

As we learn the truth he taught and live according to that knowledge, we become spiritually efficient and correspondingly free.

II

We Must Realize That We Are Problems

IT came as a terrible shock to one Christian when he discovered that *he was a problem*.

Being extremely self-centered, he did not know that the program of the entire family had to revolve about him. His whims, his likes and dislikes, his peevish preferences, and his unyielding opinions had made life a great burden for the people he loved most. On a number of occasions he had "gone to the altar" in special consecration services and "put his all at the disposal of his Lord."

But he did not know he was selfish, and he did not know he had become a serious problem in every circle in which he moved.

It never occurred to him that he could be improved. Oh, of course, he admitted in public that he "had his weaknesses" and that he was "far from perfect," but down in the deeps of his heart he believed neither confession. If he had put the truth into plain words he would have said, "I know I have weaknesses, but I do not know what they are. I suppose I am not perfect, but I do not know in what respect it may be."

He prayed, but there was never

any real penitence in his prayers because there was no sense of wrongdoing in his heart.

He was the Pharisee in Jesus' story who said, "Lord, I thank thee that I am not as other men are." He went away from his prayers unblessed because he knew of no blessing he really needed.

He made frequent trips to his pastor's study to talk with him about "problems in his home," but, strange to say, those matters which gave him concern were always questions of the behavior of other members of the home. He never went saying, "I seem to be making a mistake in my dealings with my people."

He seemed to be very alert in discovering the faults of other people. Indeed, he had unusual skill in diagnosing the causes of their difficulties. But he seemed utterly unable to exercise any such skill in examining himself, because he saw no need of any examination, since he saw no wrong in any action of his own.

He was possessed by a violent temper which, he said, he had inherited from his father. When

his tantrums were passed he usually laughed them off, saying, "That's my weakness, you know," and then never attempted to do anything about it. Although he condemned the tempests of other people, he expected his own to be forgiven as a matter of course.

He was easily irritated but was always astonished when other people lost their patience. He was easily "hurt" but was never able to understand why others suffered when he inflicted wounds. "They ought to know," he would say, "that I don't mean a thing by it. Can't they overlook little things like that? You will have a hard time in life if you let every little thing upset you." Then he would get upset because others had been upset by him.

One day, quite by accident, he overheard a conversation between

two other members of the family. One of the children said, "If Dad only knew what a problem he is!" That night he did not sleep. It had never before occurred to him that he was a problem; he had always assumed that he was a solution.

He began watching for his own irritating ways and correcting them. He began thinking first of other people's comfort and found himself much more comfortable. He began listening to other people's conversation and discovered that much of it was more interesting than anything he might have said. He began analyzing his own faults in the light of other people's reactions and found his friends warming up to him perceptibly.

The redemption of his life began when he discovered he was, himself, a problem.

III

The Marks of the Spiritually Mature

MOST of us have observed those unfortunate individuals who have matured physically without reaching intellectual maturity. The psychologists have developed a scientific system for measuring such cases, and the unfortunates are graded and given an "I.Q. rating." One's "Intelligence Quotient" is both an index of his capacity and of his achievement.

Unfortunately, we have developed no such technique for measuring our spiritual development. It might surprise many adults with splendid intellectual development to discover that their "S.Q." — spiritual quotient — indicates that they have never progressed past the stage of adolescence or even infancy.

This is no effort to formulate a scientific technique for the field, but we suggest a few simple tests by which any person can test his own spiritual maturity.

That person is a spiritual adult who has learned to rate his annoyances according to their real value. It is amazing how few of today's worries can be carried over into tomorrow. Rare indeed is the person who can remember today what

worried him six months ago. If a worry cannot last six months, it is not worth worrying about for thirty minutes.

There is evidence of a notable degree of spiritual maturity in the ability to meet criticism with intelligence. Many of the critical remarks which render some people miserable were never intended as criticisms at all. Certainly, they were never intended to wound us. Any person, then, will find it profitable to sort out all such comments and dismiss them without grief. In the case of statements which reveal to us our mistakes, let us be grateful. In others which provide us with a hint for better performance of duty, let us take real satisfaction. But the spiritual adult will never worry about words that were spoken only for the purpose of inflicting hurts.

Happy is the person who can maintain his sense of humor, for he is in the process of growing up. We can laugh our way through many a difficulty which will yield to no other treatment. In every situation, then, look for the funny aspect. It's there. Find it

and enjoy it. Few petty troubles have ever been able to survive laughter. The spiritually mature are able to laugh in the presence of the greatest blows life can inflict upon them.

It is impossible for any person to give major attention to all the problems that arise within the course of a day. It is a mark of real maturity of spirit when we are able to concentrate upon important matters and leave petty things to shift for themselves. This was the lesson Jesus undertook to impress upon Martha when she came finding fault with Mary.

He has attained to a fine degree of spiritual maturity who is able to possess his soul in patience, and allow time to work out some of his problems. The person who has a calm confidence in God and his interest in our welfare, is content to wait. Time is his ally.

One of the best evidences of spiritual maturity is our ability to focus all our powers, concentrating the full force of personality on the task that lies before us. Vagrant impulses, which harry and distract us, sap our spirits, and leave us irritable, exhausted, and diversified. "He that ruleth his own spirit" (who keeps it under a unified control) "is greater than he that taketh a city," said Jesus, and some of us have only begun to learn the deep spiritual significance of that wise comment.

"My defeat is but temporary; I am returning to the attack," said a great soul who had become fully mature in spite of a burden of suffering and sorrow that would have broken many a lesser soul. In his confidence in the ultimate triumph of righteousness, he was attaining spiritual maturity.

IV

Starting the Day With Confidence

AN otherwise good day will be completely ruined if it is launched with fears and misgivings, yet many Christians do that very thing and then wonder why their religion does not work. *To insure the success of any day it must be begun with confidence.*

The story is told of an old Negro who greeted each new day with this simple but effective prayer: "O Lord, help me to remember that nothin' is goin' to happen to me today that you and me together can't handle."

In this homely petition the devout old man expressed the basic attitude of the efficient Christian toward every day. In his words we have the secret of successful living by faith in God.

Nothing is gained by denying the hard facts of life, or minimizing their seriousness. To deny the fact of pain, or to shut our eyes to difficulties, is no solution of the problems. But we can refuse to admit that they surpass the resources at our disposal.

We can admit very freely, of course, that our burdens are more than we can bear *alone*. But the Christian is one who lives in the

confidence that *he does not have to bear them alone*. He serves, and is served by, a God who walks by his side every moment.

To assert this fact at the beginning of each day is to begin the waking hours with the spirit of victory within our hearts, rather than with the spirit of doubt and fear. "Faith wins the victory."

To prove the truth of the old Negro's prayer, take a hurried look back over your life. Count up all the terrible experiences through which you have passed, and note the fact that *you have passed through them*. Make a list of all the burdens you have carried, and then note the fact that *you have carried them*. Add up all the difficulties you have overcome, and then note the fact that *you have overcome them*.

Recall, if you can, the worst day you ever faced. Remember how terrible and threatening it appeared? And yet, by some miracle you have never quite been able to explain, *you survived!* God came to the rescue, and if today looks just as bad as that other day looked, God can be trusted to come to the rescue again!

Perhaps you cannot see now just how he can do it. Neither could you see on that other occasion how disaster could be avoided. But you worked your way through, and though you probably carry some scars, it is very evident that the worst day you ever lived did not prove fatal. Neither will today!

Start your day, then, with that confidence. Declare your faith unto yourself. Repeat the old Negro's prayer over and over again. Of course, if you can phrase it better, do so. But be sure to be positive about the matter.

Do not plead with God for strength with which to meet your difficulties. If God is the kind of God Jesus talked about, he can be trusted to supply the strength when it is needed. To offer up fervent pleas, as though there might be some question about God's will-

ingness or ability to help, is to implant doubts within one's own mind, and any doubt becomes an obstruction which shuts off the inflow of divine power upon one's own spirits.

Get your prayer of confidence started before the doubts begin to arise. Let your first waking thought be an assertion of faith in God, in life, and in yourself. Begin by believing. Look your day squarely in the face and solemnly declare the simple fact—*"God and I, together, are more than masters of any day."*

No matter how weak, how ignorant, how exhausted, or how incompetent you may think yourself to be, *God will make up the deficit.* When you have thrown the last bit of your strength into the struggle, he will supply whatever additional power is necessary to win the battle.

V

Believe That You Are Important

THE tendency of modern life is to make the individual feel unimportant. We move and act as masses and multitudes rather than as individuals.

Chain radios, mass conventions, regimentation, organized labor, impersonal corporations—all these and many more factors in our daily lives have the effect of convincing the individual person that he does not count for much. The result is that the average man begins to assure himself that he is no longer important and to ask, "What can one man do?"

Yet one of the bases for efficient spiritual life is the conviction that each person is important. That makes our opinions, beliefs, actions, decisions, and choices significant. No man will ever live a great and fruitful life, filled with rich and varied satisfactions, who does not maintain a certain sense of self-importance.

For some people this advice may not be necessary. There are those (and they make poor traveling companions) who have an exaggerated sense of their own importance. But there are more people who sin against themselves in their

lack of a sense of importance than those who sin through conceit.

In the case of multitudes, however, life could be redeemed if they could be convinced that they are important to somebody or to something. Therefore, it is a spiritual exercise of great value if we can find a method by which to keep ourselves assured of our own value and worth.

Let that one who thinks he does not amount to much go back to Genesis I and read again the story of man's creation in the image of God, and remind himself that, no matter how humble and inconspicuous he may be, he is still of greater importance than any solar system. No creature made in the image of God, with the mint-mark of heaven upon him, is of no consequence.

Sit down once a day for two weeks, and spend ten minutes thinking upon the fact that you have been born for two worlds—that after this world there is another, in which you are to be a citizen. Consider the fact that today's living is opening doors, or closing them, upon yourself in that other world. Think of your life

in terms of eternity, and life will begin to expand on your hands.

Consider carefully the fact that Jesus identified himself with the inconspicuous and the unobserved when he said, "Inasmuch as ye have done it unto one of the least of these." He made common cause with the common people. He esteemed them so highly that he lived among them. On only one occasion did he spend any time in the presence of royalty, and that was during his trial when he was summoned before Herod.

Remember that God made you an individual, different from every other person in the world. Your tastes, preferences, interests, and talents mark you as an individual. And, as such, you are infinitely precious in the sight of God.

An old French Protestant professor of theology, in one of the religious persecutions in that un-

happy land, was struck down in a street brawl and carried to a charity hospital. There, only half-conscious and branded as a pauper, he was visited by two physicians who did not suspect either his learning or his standing. After a hurried examination, one of them said to the other in Latin, "There's not much use in trying to do anything. He's a pauper, anyhow." Thereupon, the old professor who knew Latin fully as well as they did, spoke, saying, "Isn't any man for whom Christ died worth doing something for?"

Let the person who thinks himself unimportant consider the fact that the Son of God died for him. He is so important in the sight of his Creator that God gave his "only begotten son" that the way of life might be opened up for each person.

VI

"And Do It Without Squawking"

A SERIOUS-MINDED and practical little lad was sharing in the morning prayers with the rest of the family. When it came his turn to offer his personal petition, he prayed very solemnly, "Dear Lord, help us do what we have to do today, and do it without squawking."

That boy, in the wisdom of childhood, had arrived at one of the most important positions of life. He had recognized the inevitable, and he was seeking the courage to meet it without complaint or rebellion.

There are a certain number of inevitables in every person's life. There is work to be done, pain to be endured, disappointments to be met, criticisms to be faced, and weaknesses to be overcome. None of us is immune; none of us can hope to live apart from these inevitables.

One of the most important decisions we ever make is at this very point. How do we propose to meet these experiences?

By complaining about them we do not lessen their number or their difficulty. By rebelling against them we do not soften the

hard facts about them. By evading them we do not avoid them. By postponing them we do not escape them. By accepting them resentfully we only increase their bitter necessity. By allowing ourselves to grow angry over them, we usually double their oppressive weight.

In his prayer the little lad betrayed the fact that he had reached the one conclusion possible, if he was to get any joy out of life. Let us do the thing we have to do "without squawking."

One young college fellow achieved this result by making a game out of his necessities. He found mathematics difficult. Being a star athlete, he adopted the technique of the gridiron and lined himself up before every lesson in mathematics as though he were in a football game. Every problem in the lesson was a player on the other team. With high enthusiasm he rushed into the game, chalking up one score after another. Almost from the start he amazed himself at his string of victories. In the meantime, the simple device robbed mathematics of its terrors.

A housewife, in something of the same fashion, went out each morning to meet her disagreeable duties in kitchen, bedroom, and basement. At times, just to satisfy her mind, she marked up her score on a scrap of paper pinned to the wall alongside her cook-stove. Among her neighbors she became known as a woman who was "always ahead of her work." But, best of all, she was always ahead with a smile, for in her heart of hearts she knew she was a winner.

Gilbert arrived home one evening in high spirits. The family noticed the difference the moment he came through the door, but none knew the reason for his improved mood until late that evening. When he was alone with his wife he confessed: "I got three of the most disagreeable situations off my hands today that I have faced in a year. Two of them I

have postponed for three weeks, until they had me worried sick. Day after day I had shoved them aside because they were so disagreeable. But today I determined to clean them up, and while I was at it, I tackled a third one which just arrived fresh this morning. Now I can go down to my desk in the morning and face it without flinching."

He had restored his own soul by refusing longer to retreat from the thing he knew he had to do. The knowledge that the distasteful thing was now behind him completely transformed his whole attitude—so much so that the entire family circle was illuminated by his own radiance.

The stricken and tired soul could do no better than to take the little fellow's prayer as the first petition of the morning—"Lord, help us do what we have to do today, and do it without squawking."

VII

Anger Is Spiritual Dissipation

NO man can hope to achieve real spiritual efficiency until he has brought all the powers of his personality under one unified control, and that force within us which is usually the last to surrender to any government is our temper.

If it were possible for the hot-tempered person to see himself in a rage, it is very doubtful whether he would ever again allow himself to get into such a state. For the period of his spell of anger he has dismissed his reason, abandoned all attempt at poise, lost control of his own spirit, and is allowing all the wild forces of his being to run riot.

It is true that the angry person strikes with terrific power, but he is very likely to hit himself instead of his critic because his rage has made him blind. He usually shouts his angry threats because his judgment is no longer functioning. While angry he makes promises which he can never hope to fulfill in his sober moments, and these promises haunt him as though they were legitimate.

To master one's temper, once it has become a menace, is one of

life's greatest problems. There is no quick or easy route to self-control, but that one who is determined to rule his own spirit can do so, and perhaps a few practical suggestions will help. Certainly, the new spiritual power that will inflow upon the soul as soon as mastery is achieved is worth all the effort that may be required in achieving this glorious result.

With the first sign of a rising temper, begin to lower your voice. It is extremely difficult to carry on an argument in whispers, or give vent to temper under your breath. A deliberate effort to soften the voice, to lower its tone, and to slacken the speed of your speech will have an immediate influence of restraint upon the temper.

As you lower your voice, relax your whole body. Let every muscle be at rest. Keep your hands outstretched so that the fist cannot be clenched. There are psychologists who declare that it is impossible for one to become really angry while the body is completely relaxed. This will require definite and direct attention which will have the effect of taking one's

mind off the irritation which has caused the rise in temper.

Move the center of your thinking over to another subject. This shift of the mind is certain to have a beneficial effect, for it is a polite dismissal of the annoying theme. Once complete control over the temper has been achieved, one can go back to the subject that has caused the trouble and, with calm mind and organized thinking, some solution can be found that will be superior in every way to that solution anger might have provided.

If you have difficulty in altering the state of your mind and relaxing your body, try singing. Even humming a tune may help. True, the music under such circumstances may lack much and fall far short of being artistic, but even an imperfect performance will make a very definite contribution to poise.

If the temper tantrum is es-

pecially acute, leave the house and go for a hard walk—not an easy stroll that allows time for self-pity and commiseration, but an exacting, strenuous walk that taxes all the muscles of your body and leaves you breathing heavily.

If it happens that you are overtaken by a fit of temper while in the midst of a crowd from which you cannot extricate yourself, try taking a few deep breaths, making sure to exhale completely. If tempted to speak while angry, be sure to use this simple exercise, breathing very deeply and exhaling all breath before uttering the first word. Do not allow yourself to bite the lips, clench the fists, or tighten the jaws. This only accentuates the sense of tension which is the first symptom of anger. Above all, move your thinking over to the thought of God's mercy and goodness, letting it dwell there for a few seconds before making an angry reply.

VIII

Claiming the New Territories of Life

A LITTLE high-school girl, eager and sincere, had just gone through a consecration service for youth in which she had been challenged to go to the altar and there dedicate her life anew to Christ. She was evidently a bit resentful.

"Why is it necessary for me to make a new dedication of my life?" she demanded of her pastor. "I did that at Institute last summer. Doesn't that count?"

"Yes, Dottie," her pastor replied. "That counted for a very great deal. But you have discovered much of life since then, and all this new territory has to be claimed for Christ.

"Don't you remember reading in your history how Columbus raised the flag of Spain over San Salvador, and claimed the little island for his king?"

"Then, when he returned to the Western Hemisphere the next time, he landed at a different spot, and there, too, he raised the flag of Spain and claimed the land for his king.

"Every time he discovered new land he made new claims. That is what we have to do as Christians."

The little girl was deeply impressed, and then, suddenly, her eyes opening wide she said, "Then I have to keep in a 'dedicating state of mind' all the time, don't I?"

Every new friendship must be dedicated, or it becomes a disintegrating influence. Every time we get a raise in wages the question of stewardship comes up again. Every Sunday morning headache makes a new land out of that Sabbath day, which must be claimed for our Lord.

In the lives of most of us there are those interests and issues which keep crowding up and demanding settlement. Some folk live all their lives under the item of "unfinished business." Every such unsettled question becomes a spiritual drain, causing loss of confidence, doubtful security, and unstable purpose.

One young mother who suffered greatly from spiritual confusion accepted the advice of her pastor and began settling her problems at the rate of one each day. Some of her social connections were unwholesome. She spent three days breaking loose from a "crowd"

that was undermining her spiritual convictions. Then she faced the question of holding family prayers with her children even though she did not have the sympathy of her husband in doing so. Through a period of weeks she went from one unfinished decision to another until she had her life cleaned up and organized.

The young mother was claiming the unclaimed territory for her Lord and raising his flag over all her life. As the task neared completion, she was astounded to discover that she was now living with a new ease and serenity. It was so much like a new life that she said, "I guess I have been born again."

We have made a mistake in assuming that, because we once dedicated our lives, they remain dedicated. Consecration is a process, not an event.

Lest there be a too confident

assurance in our mind that we have all these matters settled, let us make a new survey of our lives.

Have we settled the question of tithing satisfactorily? Are we sure we are doing our Lord's will in the matter of our giving?

Have we laid our personal habits before our Lord and asked him to express his preferences? There's the question of smoking, for instance. True, there is nothing in the New Testament that mentions it. It was a question that Jesus never dealt with. But in view of its physical effects, its annoyance to nonsmokers, its influence upon young Christians, what do you suppose the *preference* of Jesus would be in the matter?

The Christian who has raised the flag of Christ over his life will be guided in all things by what he believes the preference of Christ would be.

IX

Let God Take the Night Shift

TWO tired businessmen were returning home after a hard day in the office. The streetcar was crowded and they hung wearily to the straps, but their conversation was tense and strained. It was evident that they were taking all their anxieties home with them. Finally, after a mile or more of swaying and jolting, one of them—a little grayer than the other—shifted his grasp from one strap to another and said, "I think I'll go home and get to bed early and get a good night's sleep. I'll be in better shape for it in the morning."

"Yeah," his companion replied, stooping to look out the window and locate his corner, "that's all right if you can go to sleep. But when I get a thing like this on my mind, I don't sleep."

"I do," answered the first. "I just get into bed, get settled, and say, 'Well, Lord, I'll let you take the night shift,' and then I turn out the light and go to sleep."

Perhaps the businessman on the streetcar was only trying to say something clever, but in his effort to do so, he spoke a word of rare wisdom. Multitudes of peo-

ple lose their spiritual poise and wreck their spiritual health because they insist upon working both the day shift and the night shift. A religion that does not relieve us of the night shift is not worth much.

In the technique suggested by the businessman, there is much value. It will help the person who finds it difficult to dismiss worry and care, if he will visualize God as taking over the night shift. Just as we turn over the controls of the machine at the end of the day to the one who succeeds us on the job, let us turn over the responsibility to God whose cause we have been serving during our wakeful hours.

"I left everything in my Heavenly Father's care when I came to the hospital," said a mother who was just coming through a terrible experience, "and whenever I have been tempted to worry I have reassured myself by saying, 'God is on the job, and I am not needed until I get well.'"

Those who worry know full well that the time spent thus at night when they should be resting, is the most exhausting effort they

expend during the entire day. But to compel oneself to cease worrying is often far from easy; it takes more than a determination not to worry, for the most rigid determination usually means a tense mind and body which become easy prey to more worry.

It is a proved principle of psychology that worry does not start in a relaxed mind, and, as one's mind relaxes, worry and care are thrown off as poison is expelled from the lungs. The problem, however, is to attain that state of relaxation. It is just here that the suggestion that God take over the night shift has the value. The businessman had evidently found that it worked. He was not using a figure of speech. Rather, he was describing a bit of psychological technique that can be depended upon to work.

If you are one of those persons who lie awake worrying, try turning your responsibilities over to God for the night. If they are interests of which he would approve, or cares in which he has a concern, it should be easy. If they are not, your own life will be richer and sweeter without them.

Surely you can feel secure with your affairs in God's hands. If he

cannot work them out, then it cannot be done. If they are beyond his power, then they are surely beyond yours. Besides, if you are to give them proper attention tomorrow, if you are to deal with them effectively, you must be at your best. This means you must get your rest.

Do not try to dismiss your anxieties with a plea that God take them over. This will only produce tension of mind and spirit. But with a complete calm and confident assurance, offer a prayer of thanksgiving to God for the fact that at last, after a long, hard day, you can lay down the load, leave it in his hands, and slip away to rest. If necessary, repeat over and over the same prayer, "I thank thee for taking over my load." Breathe deeply as though you had just laid down a burden and were sighing with relief. Trust him to take full responsibility. Thank him for the relief that begins to come in upon your spirit. And sooner almost than you realize, he will have taken over the night shift, your own spirit will be relieved, and sleep with its refreshing ministry will be restoring your spirit.

X

Get Out and Get Tired

SHE was a woman just a little short of middle age, and she was employed in a business that kept her pretty steadily at a desk. She had little opportunity to exercise her major muscles. Her daily routine was nerve strain and not muscle strain.

She never stopped to think that her strong body was equipped to do hard physical work and stand great physical strain, and she was not able to understand why she came home at night with nerves taut and tingling, unable to sleep, and unable to concentrate on her reading, her correspondence, or her music. "I guess my work is getting on my nerves," she said, and it was very evident that she was developing an irritable spirit about the home. Everyone blamed it on her "nerves." No one thought to blame it on unused muscles.

Then came a bit of wise counsel from an older friend. "Get out and get tired," was the warning. "Your arms, back, and legs are restless and demanding attention. They are entitled to a little attention during the day. Use them until they are quiet."

The business woman took the advice with a degree of caution. It all seemed so silly. Wasn't she just "tired to death already"? But about an hour after dinner the next evening she experimented.

Getting into clothing adapted to walking, she set out for a brisk hike. It was not one of those easy strolls in which one saunters along, stopping here and there to study a garden or admire some show-window. It was a determined walk with long strides, shoulders back, deep breaths, and head erect.

All the time she hummed a marching tune—an old hymn she sang occasionally at church. She refused to think about the office, in fact, she refused to think at all, so far as that was possible. *She was out to run her body down!*

At the end of thirty minutes she returned, face flushed, pulse pounding, and blood racing gleefully. What an outing she had given her arms, her back, her legs! And they were like some house pet released for an hour. The sheer joy of the physical exercise expressed itself in an entirely new spirit.

Back in the house, she found it

easy to settle down with a book. The major muscles were now singing instead of crying. Her nerves had quieted down. Her mind was calm because it was not tormented by the contradiction between mind and muscle.

Having established a certain balance of powers within her body, she now found it possible to establish a similar balance within her spirit. The irritability was gone. The sharp and caustic comment did not leap to her lips as it had at dinner. She found it easy to be gentle with those who expected gentleness from her. And just before retiring for the night she turned to her New Testament and found it genuinely consoling. It was no longer a duty to be grudgingly done, but a source of welcome help.

Sedentary workers need to remember that they are equipped with bodies that were expected to

live much of the time out of doors. They have muscles that must be exercised, or they will "go sour" and pour their irritation back into the blood stream. It is impossible to keep an alert mind in a sluggish body, and it is equally impossible to keep a calm and poised spirit alive in a body in which the muscles and the nerves are in conflict.

It is so easy to think we are tired, when we are only suffering from the tension that develops when one area of our being is exercised to the exclusion of all others.

Paul talked about "keeping his body under," and it is highly necessary that our physical life shall be brought under control. But it often happens that the best way to bring about such control is by giving it a chance to expend its energy, and draining off that surplus.

XI

Turn Yourself Around

IT has been said that the man who is wrapped up in himself makes a small package, and it can also be said that such a package is all wretchedness.

Nothing destroys spiritual efficiency more surely than the habit of thinking exclusively of ourselves, our wrongs, insults, slights, misfortunes, annoyances, irritations, and grievances.

A certain amount of honest, frank, and courageous thinking about oneself is quite necessary. Unless we give thought to our diet, we are almost certainly destined to suffer grievously. Unless we stand guard over our finances, we are doomed to suffering. Unless we give a decent concern to the impression we make upon other people, we are sure to live lonely lives. But too much thinking about these things is equally ruinous.

It seems to be one of the laws of the spirit that too much thinking about oneself produces super-sensitiveness, self-pity, morbidity, melancholy, and a long succession of other maladies, all of which make spiritual peace and power impossible.

Every Christian can well afford to spend a certain amount of time each day thinking deliberately about other people and forgetting himself. It helps him get himself off his own hands, and no one is able to do his best work until he is able to forget himself.

Miss E— had gone through a terrible hospital experience which had left her incapacitated for months. During that time she was visited by many friends, consoled, and waited upon, until she became accustomed to sitting in the center of every circle and making her "operation" the chief topic of conversation. This attitude of mind was carried over into her convalescence and even into the period of her recovery. Then she discovered one day that she was being avoided by old-time friends, and someone was kind enough to tell her she had become self-centered. As she looked inside her own spirit, she was compelled to admit it was true. Then she realized why she had been the victim of melancholy, why "low spells" overwhelmed her from day to day. Being a sensible woman,

she devised a program of salvation for herself.

She refused to talk about herself in any circle. When the conversation turned upon her own affairs, she shifted it immediately. She even refused to discuss her "operation." Regularly every day she spent some time praying for people who were less fortunate than she had been. She even tried praying for some people she did not like, and found it was sweetening her own life.

Turning her back upon her own desire for sympathy, she began dispensing sympathy, giving away the very thing she had been asking for. She even went out of her way to find people who needed what she thought she had wanted. A few months of this and she confessed to a friend that she had never been so happy in all her life. People began to comment on the fact that she was an unusually

gracious and charming conversationalist. But, more important, she was very evidently living with a new radiance and enthusiasm.

Go back over your day, and make an estimate of the amount of time you have spent thinking about your own woes, consoling yourself, and administering dosages of self-pity. Then consider very honestly and carefully the questions: "Has this self-administered pity and consolation given me any satisfaction? Has it increased my courage and self-reliance, or has it debilitated my spirit?"

If, having thought about yourself for thirty minutes, you are better prepared to meet life's blows, then be thankful. If, on the other hand, such thinking produces melancholy, discouragement, bitterness, and fears, then turn yourself around so that you can see the rest of the world.

XII

Starting a Bad Day Right

FRED was one of those people who allow unfinished tasks to accumulate on their hands. Every morning he awakened with the feeling that he was overwhelmed with work and beaten by confusion. His first spiritual sensation of the day was one of dread. He knew that whole troops of unmet responsibilities surrounded his bed, each one of them pointing at him an accusing finger.

The first five minutes of every morning were usually spent trying to defend himself against his own conscience. He began his day with a retreat.

Then one fateful morning he determined to do something about it. He cannot yet explain how the impulse came about but, confronted by at least a dozen clamorous demands, he leaped out of bed, went directly to his desk, and wrote a letter which was long overdue. Contrary to his usual careless way of doing things, he *completed* the letter before laying it aside. Then he addressed an envelope, stamped it, and as soon as he was dressed went out to the corner mailbox and deposited the letter. Returning to the house he

said, "*There! I have that finished!*"

Down at the office that morning he followed the same line. There were a good many times during the day when he was tempted away, and once or twice he succumbed. But when evening had come he was able to view his desk with more satisfaction than he had known in six months.

He arrived at home in a merry mood. His inner knowledge of having accomplished something—of having at least seven things out of the way *forever*—made him such a dinner companion as the family had not known for weeks.

The next morning when he awakened, the line of accusers was somewhat shorter, but in addition he had the memory of having routed them successfully the day before, and by repeating the process he made a success of his second day. Soon the family began to notice that he had "changed."

Even his employer discerned a difference. Fred walked with confidence and sureness now. He passed decisions accurately and swiftly.

And while others wondered, he

knew that he was a spiritual victor. He had learned to summon himself to meet his responsibilities. The satisfaction that came with *completing* that dreaded letter that first morning had started him on his way. He was feeding his inner spirit now on the satisfactions of *finished* tasks.

Perhaps the psychologist has an explanation for Fred's new attitudes, but, if so, that does not detract from the truth that Fred had found one simple principle of psychology by which life works, and working on that principle he has found himself living with an entirely new spirit.

Psychological laws are the paths down which spiritual powers flow into our lives. When we discover some way of doing our work well, reducing the friction of life, and achieving these small personal satisfactions to which we are entitled, we begin tapping new

sources of spiritual power. Anything that improves the spirit in which we live *is* spiritual.

If you are suffering from a sense of defeat or frustration, then turn immediately and *complete something that is waiting to be done*. Phone your friend and get the matter settled. Finish that book you started. Put the stamp on the letter and get it going on its way. Clean out that last closet. Wash the top half of that window which was left over.

Finishing something will start something within your spirit. A new sense of self-respect will grow up within you. A feeling of relief will come over you. A deep inner satisfaction will compensate you for any effort you may have made. And all of this is the spiritual reimbursement God sends for duties done. Then, be sure to thank him for them.

XIII

We Learn by Acting

IT frequently happens that we make our greatest spiritual growth during those periods when we are acting, rather than during those times when we are sitting at the feet of some great teacher of spiritual truths.

It is important, of course, that we have instruction in spiritual principles and laws. But once we have been taught the meaning of a law, our growth begins when we set out to put that law into effect in our own lives.

The central purpose of every service of worship that is intelligently planned and carefully conducted is to prepare the worshipers for action. The best sermon any man ever heard on "How to Pray" will be of no value to him unless he deliberately *undertakes to pray*. The most inspiring sermon on social justice will be of small avail unless the people who listen to the sermon leave the church with a deep purpose in their hearts *to be just*.

Once our own judgment has been reached, it then becomes necessary for us to act, and it is in the action that we discover

whether or not our judgment is correct.

A great many people go to church every Sunday. They probably approve, in large measure, of the things they hear from the choir and the preacher. Their minds are in agreement, but nothing happens because their wills do not rise to action.

If one could judge the Christian forces of America by the number of people who conduct some kind of daily worship, it would probably be possible to say that we were a very devout people. Literally millions of people spend some time every day in some form of private devotions.

But the value of those "quiet times" does not lie in the fact that millions of people learn the way of life. Rather, the value of these private devotions must be calculated in terms of the difference they make in our actions.

Probably most of us are convinced, by logic and by the advice of spiritual teachers, that we should forgive our enemies. But to forgive someone who has wronged us, as a sequel to our period of devotional exercise, is

an altogether different matter.

For instance, it is a common thing for people to say, "It is more blessed to give than to receive," and probably most people who quote the text are intellectually convinced that it is true. But how often do we rise from our knees to go out and give something to some cause, knowing we will receive nothing in return?

Let us state the situation, then, with complete frankness: *we do not need any more personal devotions that do not result in action. If we are to grow, we must act on what we know.*

Suppose, for example, that you determine right now, even as you are reading these lines, that as soon as the article is finished you will *arise and do something*. You will call a friend who has been injured, and offer an apology. You will drop down upon your knees and forgive someone who has wronged you and begin plotting some kindness toward him immediately. Within your own soul

you will plan some holy conspiracy by which you will show him some real favor!

Or, perhaps as you are praying for the "unconverted," you suddenly leave off all generalities and pray definitely for the conversion of some particular person. Then, as you pray for him, you also begin planning for him. You study his attitudes to determine, if possible, what approach may be most effective, and you lay out a plan of action by which you will lay siege to his soul until you have won him.

If every day's devotions issue in some such resolute purpose to act, it will be amazing how quickly the "quiet time" will become one of the most rewarding periods of the entire day.

Let such a program be continued through a period of weeks, and you will be surprised to discover, perhaps unsuspectingly, that you have made a phenomenal spiritual growth.

XIV

Do Something You Know You Do Well

DO you sometimes find yourself overcome by a terrible sense of failure, in the midst of your work? Are you overtaken by a spirit of melancholy, so that you become utterly discouraged and feel your whole life is a mishap?

Then turn from the thing you are doing, and do something you know you do well.

It makes no difference how inconsequential or profitless an achievement it may be, do it with all your might, and you will find confidence returning.

There was a certain preacher who was occasionally overtaken by low spiritual moods. At such times he felt that his whole ministry was a failure, that his sermons were insufferably dull, and that he did not deserve even the small audiences that came to listen.

Then one day some wise man gave him the advice offered in this lesson, and he determined to follow it. In his youth he had studied the art of lettering and design. It had never become more than an interesting side-line with him, but interesting it was, and in the course of time he developed

sufficient skill in the art to afford him considerable satisfaction.

The next time he was overtaken by one of his melancholy moods he laid down his books, turned away from his typewriter, and taking up his drawing-board he began laying out the design for an exquisite bit of lettering. As the lines began to fall into place, straight and true, he found himself taking a keen delight in them, and he worked with a zest. Almost before he knew it, his interest was aroused, his confidence returned, and he was working with a will. Then, his spirit being restored, he turned from his drawing back to his books and his typewriter, only to discover that his zest had carried across with him. In ten minutes he was deep in his sermon preparation as if nothing had happened.

There was the physician who in his youth had dreamed of becoming a concert cellist. His years in the medical school had left little time for practice, but he had kept up a casual acquaintanceship with his instrument, and, in the midst of a busy practice, found it a restorer of his soul.

Coming home from an exhausting succession of calls, his spirit sagging under the load of responsibility, he would get out the big brown "fiddle" and begin playing some of the old favorites. It never occurred to him that he was an artist; he sometimes explained to his friends that he "never played except for his own amazement." But he found the ability to lose himself in his music for thirty minutes and come back to his responsibilities a restored soul!

"When I get so worried I can't think, I go to my garden and work among the flowers," said a housewife who carried more than an average burden of responsibility. Something about the garden and the growing things seemed to rest her spirit and restore her confidence in herself. She might not be able to manage the children with wisdom and judgment on all occasions, and she was not always able to preside over the missionary meeting with the grace she envied in other women. *But she could make flowers grow, and when she was in her lowest moods she went out into the garden and did it!*

Perhaps this was something of the spiritual technique Jesus was

trying to teach when he said, "Consider the lilies of the field." He was trying to get our minds off the chaotic and onto the orderly, off the confused and onto the sure, off the frenzied and onto the serene.

The most serious loss any man ever sustains is the loss of confidence in himself. Once we begin to doubt our own spiritual security, our insecurity overwhelms us. It does no good in such a moment to lecture ourselves, or lash ourselves to a terrifying task. Rather we need to turn to some task that we know we do so well that the doing of it restores our confidence in ourselves.

It is not merely a psychological device, without meaning or spiritual significance, but a worthy and legitimate technique by which the channels of the soul are opened up for the inflowing of divine power.

"When ye pray, believe that ye have received," was the way the Master phrased it on one occasion.

When you are in the midst of your low mood, do the thing you know you do well, and in the doing of it you will rescue your own spirit.

No Man Can Afford to Refuse God

EDWARD H—— was a prosperous young businessman who had been reared in the church. In his personal life he was altogether without fault—clean and honorable, just and highminded. It was predicted quite freely among the older people that some day he would be recognized as “the leading layman” of the church.

One morning Edward listened as his pastor preached an earnest and rather convincing sermon on the subject of tithing. Perhaps the thing that made the sermon strike so deeply into the young man’s conscience was the fact that he had received a raise in pay that week, and he was elated over his increase, the third within a year.

As Edward listened he calculated. It came to him with something of a shock that his pledge to the church was no more than a tithe of the increase he had just received. He had never given much thought to the question of his contributions. He was one of the younger men of the church, and whenever money was to be raised he always had the feeling, perhaps an unconscious one, that

the old dependables would somehow manage to pay it. He never seemed to think he was rapidly developing into one of the dependables.

As he listened to the sermon on tithing and calculated, he began to grow a bit resentful. Ten per cent, he assured himself, was a pretty heavy demand on a young man. His business was not yet established; his family called for considerable expenditure; he had a social position to maintain, and it cost him heavily. “No,” he finally said, “I can’t do it. It is unreasonable to expect any such giving from me.”

And still the sermon went on. The very logic with which the preacher presented his case was maddening. The longer Edward listened, the more determined he became. Then his anger began to mount. By the time the service was concluded, he was definitely upset and made no effort to conceal his feelings as he greeted the pastor.

There was a meeting of the official board on Monday night, and in a group of the younger men Edward exploded. He found some

sympathy among two or three which solidified him in his decision not to tithe. In the meantime news of his ire had reached his pastor, and after the meeting that good man called him to one side for a conference of conciliation. By this time the young layman, emboldened and cocksure, said, "Doctor, it's impossible for me to give a tithe. I'm not a rich man, and it's unreasonable to ask me."

"I am not asking you to tithe, Edward," the white-haired man replied. "I am only explaining the Scripture. If you do not like the doctrine you have no quarrel with me. It is with your Bible."

"But even if you could prove to me from the Bible that God expected me to give a tenth, I wouldn't do it. My income is already so large that I can't afford to give a tenth." And Edward's face was flushed with an inner heat.

"It is a dangerous thing to deliberately refuse God anything, Edward," the old man replied. "No man can do it without committing spiritual suicide. Perhaps you'd better think this matter over pretty carefully, and let God have his way. Remember, you are not dealing with me, but with your

God. Your controversy is not with your pastor, but with the Most High God."

But Edward was unable to relent. He arrived in church the next Sunday morning rebellious and critical. He did not join in the singing of the hymns, but stood alongside his wife, holding the book and glaring down with unseeing eyes. A terrible thing had happened to him during the week. All the joy had gone out of his Christian experience.

Whenever he tried to pray the question of tithing arose before his mind. When he contemplated some duty about the church that tithing matter confronted him.

Wretchedness and grief pursued him day and night. Again and again he consoled himself with the old arguments—unreasonable, legalistic, outrageous, unfair, impossible, pagan, Old Testament, Judaism, under grace not under the law—and all the time he kept coming back face to face with the original and basic question. "You have no quarrel with me. It is something you must settle with your God."

Edward H—— was learning that no man can refuse God and continue spiritually strong.

XVI

She Poisoned Her Own Soul

MRS. T—— was one of the leaders in her church, among the women. She was one who had served effectively and sacrificially on many boards and committees. Concerning her ability and graces no questions could be raised; concerning her faithfulness she was equally above criticism. But she suffered from a poisoning of the soul which caused her to become, in time, one of the most hopeless cases any pastor ever had to deal with.

One day, in a committee meeting, one of her proposals was voted down, the speech of opposition being made by a woman who had long been an intimate friend. The reasons for the opposition seemed logical to the people in the meeting, but Mrs. T—— convinced herself, after the adjournment of the meeting, that they were inspired by some personal malice.

On the next Sunday Mrs. T—— changed her seat so she would not be under the necessity of looking at her "enemy" when she glanced toward the pulpit. After church she sought out two or three particular friends and unburdened to them her tale of distress.

Throughout the dinner hour she repeated for the benefit of her family the long story of her trouble, and in doing so recalled several long-forgotten incidents which were now "explained." By evening she was able to convince herself that she was the victim of a deliberate plot.

From that time on she introduced the subject of her grievance into every conversation that offered the slightest opportunity. She began to judge other women of the church on the basis of whether or not they were "for" or "against" her. Whereas she had once been effective in public prayer, she now ceased all such participation in public meetings.

In time, her grievance became almost a madness with her. She never entered a room without glancing furtively about to see whether or not her "enemy" were present. She always chose her seat in any meeting with reference to where the other woman sat. Soon it became known that she would not serve on any committee of which both were expected to be members, and this cost her some extremely unhappy experiences.

Her friends, frequently called upon to exercise great tact in avoiding clashes on the subject of her "peeve," began to avoid her. In the process she lost some very interesting invitations to luncheons and teas and other social affairs. Mrs. T—— was becoming a source of spiritual infection.

Before the unhappy incident she had been a merry sort of creature, but all her good humor vanished when she decided to accept the martyr's role. Even her family began to dread her outbursts.

She probably never admitted it, but her own prayer life suffered seriously. True, she continued repeating many of the old phrases and she held to the form of private devotions, but the zest and confidence had gone out of her spiritual life. One day she caught herself in a highly dangerous phrase—"Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us." The implications of those words were like salt in a wound. Thereafter she merely mumbled meaningless sounds when she came to that point in the Lord's Prayer.

One afternoon she undertook to

reopen the original subject in a woman's meeting, in order to secure, if possible, a "vote of vindication." But other members of the society had become so alarmed over her angry speeches and bitter attitudes, that they refused to review the case lest it become an open scandal. When it became apparent that they did not share her hatred, she turned against them all, canceled all her subscriptions, and withdrew her membership.

Among a small group of friends who contrived to save some part of her good will she was known as "the most unhappy woman in town." And it was true. She had allowed her grudge to shut out the sun; she had nursed her grievance until it sapped all her spiritual powers; she had filled her mind with hateful thoughts so completely that all the sources of her joy were polluted.

It is possible that she was wronged in the first place, but the most bitter rival she ever had could never have robbed her of as much happiness as she had spoiled for herself. *She had literally poisoned her own soul unto death.*

XVII

Make No Decisions at Midnight

THE late William Henry Eustis, one-time mayor of Minneapolis, philanthropist, and capitalist, was stricken by infantile paralysis at the age of twelve years, and for four years thereafter lay a helpless cripple. By indomitable will and almost superhuman effort, the little fellow managed to educate himself while in bed, and at the age of seventeen, hobble across country on crutches and secure a position teaching school.

At the age of nineteen he applied for entrance in a small college and was admitted on trial. Only a week later one of his instructors told him, at the close of a class session, that he was incapable of carrying college work, and advised him to leave school immediately.

Throughout the night the boy fought the issue through. His discouragement was something terrible. Sometime after midnight he determined to commit suicide, and managed to contrive a noose by which he proposed to hang himself. By an accident he was never able to explain, his rope broke and he was foiled in the effort. By the

time morning came he had conquered his mood and determined to prove to all doubters that he could graduate from college. Ultimately he did, with a history-making record.

But the point of the story is the sound conclusion the youth drew from his experience—*never make an important decision late at night, when the mind is tired and the emotions are spent. Reserve the big issues for the morning hours when you are fresh.*

A very great many people, tired to the point of exhaustion, carry their most difficult problems to bed with them and try to solve them at a time when their spirits are low and their mental energies well spent. It is almost inevitable that judgments reached under such conditions are faulty.

To make life work and produce the largest possible results, one must learn to take advantage of the best times for doing things. There are mental tasks to which one can assign himself for the late hours of the day, and there are other mental tasks which should be reserved for the best hours of the day, when the physical forces

are at high tide, when the mind is alert, and when the spirit is hopeful.

Even unskilled laborers learn how to handle a shovel so that the strain is reduced to a minimum. It then behooves us to learn how to manage our spiritual energies so that they may be applied to the responsibilities of the day under the best possible circumstances.

This is the philosophy which underlay Mr. Eustis's determination never to reach an important decision late at night when his mind was tired and his spirit low.

Decisions reached at midnight are very apt to be the least hopeful ones of the day, for then we are least conscious of strength, and when one feels weak he is incapable of making a decision that calls for the investment of great energy.

It is one of the strange facts of experience that a night's sleep will usually dissolve the terror out of many a situation and leave it appearing far less formidable than it did the night before. To decide on action when the situation is filled with fear means that we take the least courageous course. But to decide upon action when the fears have been drained off by

a good night's sleep means that we are able to summon our best to meet the worst.

There is something that can be done late at night, however, which will prove of positive benefit, and which will contribute largely to the success of the day that is to follow.

Let the last waking moments be spent in prayers of thankfulness in which we offer gratitude to God for the improvement that is going to take place in our affairs during the night. Let our prayers be expressions of appreciation for the way in which we know God will straighten matters out for us while we sleep.

The prayer of confidence always produces a state of poise and serenity within the soul. Let the last prayers of the night be of that sort, then, and not the frantic petitions for help which so often pass for prayers. The psychologists may tell you that it is nothing more than a process of mental deception or self-hypnosis, but the spiritual expert knows that life can be made to produce results in that way, and so he uses the technique with gladness in his heart.

XVIII

Unanswered Questions Are Not Fatal

LARGE numbers of Christian people are greatly troubled over the fact that their Christian beliefs do not explain to them some of the most perplexing problems of life.

They believe in God, in Jesus as the Son of God, in the forgiving mercy of God, and, in general, in "all those things" in which a Christian should believe. Yet they are greatly troubled over the problems of pain and suffering which confront them everywhere.

Just at present there is considerable confusion over the fact that millions of people have prayed for peace and there is no peace; that millions more are praying that their sons shall be spared from death and wounds, and yet every day thousands are being slain and more thousands are suffering indescribable agonies.

Many such people find great difficulty in believing in God at such times, just because they are not able to find satisfactory explanations for life's most tragic mysteries.

But it is not the primary function of religion to provide explanations. Jesus did not describe

himself as "the explanation," but as "the way." He seemed to be very confident that if we walked in the way he walked we would find our way through life's tangles, and, once we are through, explanations are not so important after all.

To those who have difficulty in believing because their prayers for explanations have not been answered as they hoped, we offer a simple reminder. *Jesus himself died with an unanswered question on his lips.*

Hanging there upon the cross, with his life's energies ebbing away and an angry mob peering up at him, he cried out, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Never did more tragic words come from his lips in all the years he walked among men. It is the only time he ever expressed concern for himself.

In all the New Testament record there is no hint that his question was ever answered. No letters of fire appeared in the sky, no angel voices whispered explanations in his ear.

An explanation of the reasoning behind his death would not

have provided the way out.

Instead, we find him uttering one more cry from the cross. It was a glad, confident, triumphant, serene cry: "Into thy hands I commend my spirit."

Jesus trusted in the absence of explanations and came through on the basis of his trust.

There is more than a hint in that experience. If trust would carry our Master through from the Crucifixion to the Resurrection, it has power to carry us through from doubt to certainty.

"I don't know how I got through. I guess I just 'faithed' my way through," is the way a young woman explained the very great victory she had won over a terrible succession of difficulties.

Paul had something of the same thing in mind, apparently, when he exhorted those early Christians, "having done all, *to stand*."

There are times in life when we make our greatest progress by merely standing still and asserting our faith. We do not go reaching out into the unknown for reasons; instead we stand still, lift up our eyes unto the hills from whence help always comes, and assert our confidence in God.

Said the old blind woman, living in the shabby basement apartment, "When things begin goin' bad, I just stops and says, 'Speak, Lord, for thy servant 'eareth,' and the answers just keep a-comin' and keep a-comin'."

It usually happens that some indication of the way out of trouble is worth far more to us than any explanation of the cause of that trouble would be. It is precisely at that point that Jesus is worth most to us, for he points the way.

Sometimes the way out is the second mile; sometimes it is the Jericho road; sometimes it is the way that leads through Samaria. But there is always a way out, and he will help us find it.

Upon his cross, with the forces of evil leagued against him in a deadly alliance, he found *the way out was trust*. If faith under such circumstances will work in the case of Jesus, it will work in any case involving us.

Once that a man can be sure that his attitudes toward God are right, he then has all the powers of heaven at his disposal to be put to work by faith. That's always better than an explanation.

XIX

Make Your Troubles Show Their Credentials

HARRY EMERSON FOSDICK says in his most recent book, *On Being a Real Person*, "Many translate into terms of moral trouble disorders whose real genesis lies in another area entirely."

A woman appealed to her pastor to help her overcome a terrible melancholy which seemed to possess her completely at times. When these moods of depression seized her, she was rendered altogether incapable of meeting her routine responsibilities. She was harried by the thought that she was a great sinner, though just what the sin might be she was never quite sure. "But it seems to me I ought to be able to rise above this thing if I were right with God," she moaned.

A little questioning convinced the pastor that there was a physical difficulty of some kind which needed attention, and he strongly urged the woman to consult her physician. That good man discovered a glandular condition which was producing a physical disorder. A period of treatment saw her restored to physical health, and the melancholy disappeared.

It frequently happens that low spiritual moods are due to extreme weariness of body or mind. Once we have given ourselves a decent opportunity to rest, we find our spiritual tides flowing strong and vital. It may happen, therefore, that the first question to ask when we find it difficult to realize that God is near will be, "Am I tired to death?"

"I am a dreadful sinner," exclaimed an elderly woman whose saintly life was an inspiration to all who knew her. But at the moment she was completely exhausted spiritually because she was thoroughly tired physically. She was blaming her condition on her lack of faith when it was really due to a lack of strength for her work.

Before we assure ourselves, then, that we have committed some terrible sin, or that we have "sinned away the Holy Spirit," or that we have "lost our touch on God," let us make sure that we have not been making unreasonable demands of our bodies, or that we are not suffering from mental weariness.

Here is an intimate reason why so many people get so little out of the morning worship service at church. They have used Saturday night for a lodge meeting, dinner party, or some other form of entertainment. They have remained up until an unusually late hour, and have gone to bed exhausted. They awaken on the Sabbath morning tired and spent, with little energy available to the tasks that are clamoring for attention. Then, when they take their place in church, they are so incapable of mental effort or spiritual response that they say: "I didn't get much out of the sermon this morning. Our preacher does not seem to deal with our real problems."

The first thing to do, then, when these low moods begin to take possession of us, is to identify their source. If it is an actual physical disturbance which will yield to medical treatment, then by all means let us consult our physicians. If it is a faulty program of life in which we misinvest life's energies, let us rearrange that program so that we realize the most possible from our expenditures of physical and mental energies. If it is no more than weariness, let us stop and rest.

Prayer, under such circumstances, must take a direction entirely different from that praying which we do when our spirits are free and the tides of life are running full.

"When I find myself slipping into one of these low moods," said a wise woman, "I begin assuring myself and God that things are all right even though I cannot feel the same. I keep reminding myself that mine is not a spiritual difficulty but a physical upheaval. I refuse to allow my spirit to become upset because my stomach is. I will not let my heart ache because my head does."

She had found the secret of much spiritual serenity. Knowing the real origin of her distress, she did not waste time falsely accusing herself of sin or spiritual carelessness. Instead, she required her troubles to show their credentials, and then accepted those troubles for exactly what they were.

It will be a serious matter if we grow callous to conscience and miss the benefits of its warnings, but, on the other hand, it will be equally serious if we chastise our spirits for the weaknesses of our bodies or our minds.

XX

Be Still and Know

HER taut nerves and inner tensions were evident in every move she made, and the confusion of her mind was apparent before she had spoken four sentences. It was easy to see she was wasting enough spiritual energy in a single day to suffice for the normal requirements of life for an entire week.

In the course of the conversation she offered evidence to prove that she had abundant reason for anxiety. It was useless to say to her, "Stop worrying." She had braced her mind determinedly every morning for a week, struggling with all her powers against her fears; but her very efforts to face her troubles accentuated them.

She was religious, too. At least she declared she believed in God. Her theology was reasonably sound; her orthodoxy could not well be questioned. But she was unable to make her religion work, because she had never learned how to exercise faith.

As a first prescription, she was advised to spend half an hour each day in quiet. That was not easy, for she lived in the midst of a busy household, with two small

children clamoring for attention, and it was easy to see how her distraction and high, shrill voice increased the nervousness from which the children suffered.

There was not so much as five minutes throughout the hours of wakefulness during which any members of the family enjoyed the relief and release of relaxation of body and mind. As a result, "everybody got on everybody's nerves."

It was to cure this situation that she was advised to spend one thirty-minute period daily doing nothing.

She was directed rather explicitly in the whole matter. She was to slip away to some quiet spot in the house or garden and settle herself in such a way that there would be no muscular strain or tension. Then she was to dismiss every thought of her day's work—do it deliberately, as if she had been relieved of all responsibility. If one of the old anxieties came crowding up she was to say to it: "I'm busy now. I'll be through with this in thirty minutes, and then I'll be ready to go back to my worrying, but just now I haven't

the time. I have some other things I must think about."

She was not to say: "I've got to quit worrying. I won't! I won't! I won't worry!" This was sure to increase the tension, and make matters worse.

Instead, she was to relax and say, "This is the time to think about something else. I'll get around to the worries a little later, but not now."

Then she was to take up an aggressive mental attitude and deliberately think about something else. It was precisely at that point that her religion was to come to the rescue. It was to supply the things to think about.

For her first lesson in relaxation she was to think about the amazing love of God—of the variety of ways in which he had made provision for her physical needs. Slowly and quietly she reviewed the long list of pleasant tastes, odors, sights, and sounds she had enjoyed. Then she was to review all the pleasant experiences of childhood she was able to recall. As the lists lengthened, she was to phrase the most beautiful and grateful prayer of thanks of which she was capable. Lovely lines from great poems that came trooping

up out of her memory were to be repeated over and over—slowly, deliberately, quietly, meditatively.

It wasn't easy at first. Pampered nerves, like pampered children, demand attention and grow very peevish if they do not get it. But, little by little, she learned the art. More and more frequently she found herself dropping off into the mood of relaxation for short periods of time in between tasks. Then she began to discover that when she returned to her work she was in a better condition to cope with it; her energies were under control, and her mind could be focused on the job in hand.

It was in these hours that she began to pray most effectively, addressing words of gratitude to her Heavenly Father, rather than storming the gates of heaven with importunate pleas for help. As she asserted her faith instead of pleading her case, she discovered a spirit of calm stealing in upon her.

Relief did not come all at once. But she had the good sense to persist—gaining a little each day, until at last she declared, with a radiant joy, "I have learned what it means to be still, and know that God is near."

XXI

Just Worried Sick

THEY were sitting in the first seat behind us, and it was quite impossible to escape their conversation. Said one of them—a woman with a tense, strident voice—"I tell you, I'm just worried sick." And when we arose to alight from the car four squares down the street, we caught one glimpse of her face, and that fleeting glance confirmed her statement in every detail—*she was sick, and worry had made her ill. She was literally poisoned by fear!*

Every human being is created with an amazing physical and mental equipment, designed to meet the burdens and emergencies of life. Rightly used, our bodies and minds will serve us well. Wrongly used, they inflict terrible punishment upon us, and the poisoning that follows worry is a part of the toll of wrong-thinking.

A rabbit, feeding by the side of the road, is suddenly frightened by a swift-moving automobile or a dog. The fear sets up a series of nervous reactions which start a little gland working furiously, pumping into the blood stream of the rabbit a powerful stimulant which enables it to run at an amaz-

ing speed. Without that strange secretion in the blood the little creature would never get away so fast. Once the rabbit has reached a place of safety, the animal dismisses the matter, the gland settles back to its normal state, and after recovering its breath, the rabbit goes about its feeding again with reckless, blithesome unconcern.

Within the human body there is a gland which performs for the human being much the same function. That is why, under the impulse of a great fear, we are able to perform prodigious feats, such as lifting huge loads, leaping great distances to avoid danger, or exerting unaccustomed strength in other ways.

When we become frightened the gland pumps the stimulant into the blood stream, but when we recover from our fright the gland ceases to function, and we settle back to normal. But if we are not able to dismiss the fear, and if we go on worrying after the first spasm of fear is past, the little gland continues to be stimulated and pumps this strange secretion into the blood stream, causing nervous

strain and tension which is reflected in the rigid muscles of the face.

Worry is continuing or recurrent fear, and the effect on the little gland is the same. We need not experience the initial fear again; if our imagination is stirred and we relive the experience, the effect upon the gland is the same. Continued worry means that the blood stream is overcrowded with the secretion, and if we do not get relief the poison accumulates and works havoc throughout the system.

The most frequent result is ulcers of the stomach, though sometimes a painful rash breaks out on the body, and the patient is said to be suffering from "nerves." Some physicians declare that as high as eighty per cent of such cases are a direct result of worry poisoning.

It is just here that good religion proves its worth. The man or woman who maintains a confident faith in God will not fear, and if he does not fear he will not worry. "Perfect love casteth out fear." This explains why Jesus reiterated his advice about "taking no thought" for the morrow—not worrying about tomorrow.

Let there be no misunderstanding—there is a legitimate place for fear in life. Good, healthy fears have saved us many times from serious injury. But worry is the fear that continues after the danger is past, or the fear that arises before the danger has arrived. It feeds on imagination, and unless mastered by faith, it will assume control over life and proceed with its poisoning process.

There is a sense in which worry is as serious a sin as profanity, for while profanity is a lack of respect for God, worry is a lack of faith in God.

When we find ourselves worrying, we must begin praying aggressively, not pleading with God for deliverance from our fears, but calmly and positively asserting our faith in God as *one who has always delivered us*. To beg and implore God for help only increases the strain, excites the little gland, and makes tense the whole system. To declare our confidence, to reassure ourselves of God's loving care, and to insist upon the fact of his solicitude on our behalf is to quiet the nerves, restore the little gland to normalcy, and to find life developing calm and poise.

Discolorations of the Spirit

ALONGSIDE of the front entrances of two lovely Los Angeles cottages stand huge hydrangea bushes. In the blooming season their giant clusters of flowers are so magnificent that passers-by frequently stop to admire them.

Aside from their unusual size, the interesting thing about the two bushes is the fact that upon one the flowers are snowy white, and on the other the flowers are a brilliant blue. They are of the same species; the growing conditions are identical, and their care is the same—but their colors are different.

The reason for the discoloration of the blue flowers is very simple, and very significant. Two years ago the houseowner of the one buried a quantity of rusty nails about the roots of the bush and sprinkled the surface with iron rust, watering it down thoroughly.

Something about the iron rust in the soil about the roots of the bush has had the effect of changing the color of the flowers until they look entirely different from their neighbors.

In those hydrangea bushes there

is a parable of the spiritual life of ordinary people.

It is possible, for instance, to so bury a prejudice within the soul that it discolors all our thinking, biases all our judgments, and thoroughly corrupts our consciences.

There was an employer on the official board of one church who had suffered a serious injustice at the hands of some labor organizers. That he had a just cause for indignation could not be disputed: he had been grossly imposed upon. But he steadily refused to be drawn into any organization that was set up to "fight labor," because, as he said, "If I get into a fight like that I will begin to hate all men and that will spoil my own life. I would rather be the victim of the injustices of those organizers than to be the victim of my own bitter prejudices and unyielding animosities."

There was a woman who had been the victim of a serious automobile accident which had sent her to the hospital for a term of weeks, and doomed her to suffering for many months thereafter. Instead of rising above her pains, she

buried them deep about the roots of her life, and for years thereafter they colored all her conversations and actually distorted all her judgments.

Two women in another church became involved in a controversy over some inconsequential matter. Each was entirely sincere and each had a measure of justice on her side, but in the process of the controversy each became embittered to the point that they could not think in any other terms. They split every organization of which they became a part. They injected their personal quarrel into Sunday school classes, women's groups, and even into private dinner parties. It finally became necessary for hostesses to have two dinners if they expected to invite both women, for there was no peace in any gathering where both were present.

No man can bury a grudge or grievance at the roots of his life without it discoloring all his thought and action. Old hatreds, feuds, quarrels, and controversies have altered the fashion of some churches out of all similarity to that of a religious organization.

There have been some such quarrels which have done the cause of Christ more damage than any open and blatant atheism could do. And the damage that is done to the spirit of the man whose soul feeds on such soil is beyond estimate.

In one city there was a preacher of very pronounced theological convictions. No one questioned his ability, and few questioned his sincerity, but a great host of honest people were grieved on account of the bitter speech with which he assailed those who differed with him in matters of doctrine. One of his most devoted friends said of him, "I wish he would not say such harsh things about other honest men. As he says them he begins to believe them, and as he believes them something evil distills into his own soul and discolors all his ministry."

Growing a soul, pure in its purpose and unsullied in its motives, is one of the greatest of all spiritual achievements. To bury envy, prejudice, malice, grudges, bitterness, or contentiousness about the roots of life is to discolor all our spiritual life.

XXIII

Faith and Unanswered Questions

LIFE is beset by puzzling questions! Why do evil men seem to prosper and righteous men seem to suffer misfortune? Why do good people suffer and immoral people escape all pain? Why do the wicked seem to get the best of everything?

These and similar questions rise up to tempt the Christian almost every day, and many times there are no answers. It is all very well to say that the unrighteous only *seem* to prosper and that the wicked suffer distress of which we know nothing. The inequities of life are a constant embarrassment to the one who preaches the doctrine that goodness pays.

At this point it may be well to remind ourselves that religious faith is not designed to save us from trouble, but to provide us with the means by which difficulties may be surmounted. In a world where every individual represents a free personality there is certain to be a clash of interests and a resulting conflict. In a universe packed with power that is within the reach and subject to the control of such free personalities, all men walk in daily danger. No

man can hope to be safe from the misfortunes that follow other men's mistakes. But the Christian has at his disposal divine powers which will provide him with survival powers if he takes advantage of them.

Even Jesus himself, having lived the most righteous life ever lived on earth, suffered physical pain and even mental anguish. On the cross the torture became so exquisite that he cried out in agony of spirit, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" The terrible pressure of the crucifixion experience wrung from him the same cry that has issued from the lips of thousands of other righteous men.

And if that cry from the cross had been our Lord's last word there would never have been any Christian faith or Christian religion. But it was not. Instead, there was one more word. In his last moments and with his last breath he murmured, "Into thy hands I commend my spirit."

He trusted the one who had not answered his question!

Between those two cries upon the cross there was no answering

shout from heaven, no letters of fire against the sky, no comforting angel presence hovering over him with whispered assurances in his ear. So far as the Scripture record goes (and it is very much like life) that awful cry from the cross was *answered by silence*. And yet he went on believing.

It would be of the greatest help to some of us to know by what process of reasoning, or by what technique of prayer, Jesus made his way across from that "Why, why?" to that "Into thy hands I commend my spirit." But the Scripture gives us no hint. It is sufficient to say that the Master made the journey and, spiritually speaking, it is a long one.

The earnest and intelligent Christian, intent upon making his religion work in times of crisis, will study that period of silence upon the cross with very great care. In it, somewhere, there lies the secret of faith's triumph.

We know that Jesus went into the Father's presence with an unanswered question upon his lips. God's silence did not discourage him. He believed in spite of the fact that his problem went unexplained.

It may help us to be reminded that, in our present state of knowl-

edge and inexperience, there are some things that even God cannot make plain to us. No parent, for instance, is ever able to explain intricate problems of finance, social procedure, or even family discipline, to a three-year-old child. This is not due to any lack of love on the part of the parent, but it is due to the lack of capacity to understand on the part of the child. In similar fashion, there must be uncounted explanations God cannot offer us, for we have no wisdom or experience with which to judge them.

When we cannot understand God we can trust him.

One who has manifested his love for us in so many ways, making us capable of so much achievement, eligible to so much joy, and susceptible of so much growth, can be trusted.

One who has loved us so persistently that "he gave his only begotten Son" that we might, from him, learn the way, can be trusted.

If faith in God could carry Jesus through the terrible experience of the cross, then faith in God can carry us through any experience.

And faith, at its best, is a willingness to trust God through the silence.

XXIV

The King Works Also

NO people have shown greater capacity for hard work in an emergency than the British. Competent newspaper correspondents tell of the transformation that came over the life of the nation following the terrible experience of Dunkirk, in which the complacent English ways were abandoned overnight, including weekends, holidays, short working days, and trips to the country.

But no greater thrill has gone down through the nation than that which was occasioned by the news that the king himself was working in a defense plant. Without fanfare, and actuated solely by his honest desire to share the hard lot of his people, Britain's monarch "clocks in" regularly at six o'clock each evening. He wears overalls and takes his place at the workbench. Something about the thought of His Majesty sharing their toil has given the people new courage and faith.

There is no feeling more disheartening than that of loneliness. Men who feel deserted are only half men.

It often happens that Christians grow discouraged, thinking that

their efforts have been wasted, their struggles unobserved, their labors unrequited. The cry of Jesus on the cross, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" has been echoed in the hearts of millions. "I could go on indefinitely if I thought God was watching," said a young woman who was making an heroic struggle against heavy odds.

It is to just such people that Jesus spoke a word of hope. "My Father worketh hitherto, and I work," he said. By this he meant to assure us that we are not alone; God is also in the struggle with us.

This is a part of the good news which Christians have to tell the world—*our God and King is working with us.*

If we ever grow discouraged about the slow way in which justice is being accomplished, let us reassure ourselves with Jesus' words. God has not given up; he is still in the situation, working at the task of bringing justice to pass.

If the load of pain and suffering is more than we can bear, let us remember that God is as near as the next breath. We have

come through thus far on the power he has supplied. We do not have to endure one minute's suffering before that minute arrives. And when it does come, God will be in it also with help for us.

If the opposition we have to meet seems mountain high, let us be assured that every difficulty we have ever overcome has been mastered with the help which God has given us, and that there is no obstacle ahead of us greater than his concern for us.

It frequently happens that we miss God because we are looking for him in the miraculous when, as a matter of fact, he comes disguised in the commonplace. We expect him to talk to us in letters of fire, when he is actually speaking in the prompting of the still small voice of conscience. We picture him as moving mountains by some spectacular display of power, whereas he really achieves his wonders by leading us to the heights by the quiet voice of duty.

If you ever feel insecure or uncertain concerning the fact that God is working with you, just stop and feel your pulse for a minute or two. Remind yourself that you are not responsible for its beating,

neither can you control it beyond very narrow limits. It operates by a power entirely outside yourself, and *that* power is God's power. Every pulse-beat is a reminder that God is at his workbench, doing his work.

It is the power of God that keeps your body functioning day in and day out, that maintains the chemical processes in their orderly way, that regulates your breathing, that transforms food material into vital energy.

And if God is working in the intricate and complicated laboratory of your body, it is safe to assume that he is also working in the weird ways of your mind, in the promptings of your conscience, in the deep longings of your spirit—the hungering and thirsting after righteousness.

If you are shamed by your sin, remorseful as a result of your wrongdoing, strong in the sense of being right, persistent in your devotion to duty in spite of discouragement, then all that is evidence that God is working in your spirit.

Take heart. Faint not. Do not grow discouraged. "Our Father is also working with us."

XXV

Thy Will Be Done

ONE of Jesus' most virile words has been misinterpreted many times by devout people, sincerely intent on doing the will of God, with the consequence that a vigorous, aggressive, determined assertion has been weakened down to become an expression of blind surrender devoid of faith.

Confronted by the prospect of crucifixion, and bearing upon his heart the burden of the world's desperate guilt and need, Jesus prayed in Gethsemane. So oppressive had the awful fact of sin become that the Gospel record uses the strongest language to describe the Master's agony. As the climax of his experience it is reported that he prayed, "Nevertheless, not my will, but thine, be done."

To multitudes of Christians this means nothing more than a hopeless surrender to the inevitable. Having exhausted every effort to avoid the circumstances that await them, and having importuned God to relieve them of the painful, or disagreeable, without result, they pray despairingly, "Thy will be done."

Such a prayer is utterly without

faith. It is an admission of helplessness, an acceptance of that which cannot be avoided. But Jesus prayed in no such mood, and Christians who so pray are not following their Master's example.

Those simple words on the lips of Jesus were a resolute expression of a determination to do the will of God with all his might in the belief that God's will is always superior to man's preferences.

Read the record of Jesus' conduct during the few hours of his life that followed the praying of that prayer. Nowhere is there any intimation that he was weakly and passively accepting his fate as something with which he could not agree, but which must be endured because it was imposed by the superior power and mind of the Father. Instead, the New Testament portrays for us One who goes out aggressively and purposefully to meet the worst, in the full confidence that he has all the forces of God at his back.

It was this confidence and aggressive faith which carried Jesus through the horrors of the trial and crucifixion. A spiritless bowing of the head and a supine sur-

render to the fates would never have supported him through those awful hours, but the basic belief that he was working in harmony with the divine will gave him a sureness that ended in the calm certainty with which he uttered his last words upon the cross—"Into thy hands I commend my spirit."

Beset by anxieties, uncertainties, and dire threats, the modern Christian is often bewildered to the point of sheer desperation. Nothing he can do seems to be sufficient to save him from tragedy and failure. In such a moment he may be tempted to settle down in despair and pray wearily, "Thy will be done!" But that is not the purpose for which Jesus designed the prayer.

Rather, the Master looked squarely into the face of death and the tragic culmination of his lifework and, watching it going down to seeming defeat, settled his soul back on his faith in God and said, fully believing that God was still his Father, "Thy will be done, and I will do it with all the powers at my command."

Our Christian faith was never designed to save us *from* trouble, but to save us *in* trouble. Chris-

tians, like other people, must go through deep waters and fight against powerful adversaries. But unlike other people, they have access to a power which will turn defeat into victory and crosses into triumphs.

The man of faith is not one who shuts his eyes to the facts and goes on blindly, submissive to the will of God. He is one who opens his eyes wide to the facts, and in doing so sees beyond them to one more fact, greater than any other—the fact of God.

In the poised and unshaken confidence that the will of God is best, that the judgment of God is better than his own, and in the certainty that loyal and enthusiastic doing of the will of God is the one hope of his deliverance, he throws in all the powers of his being and *does* the will of God to the best of his knowledge. "Thy will be done" becomes an oath of loyalty, a pledge of obedience, an assertion of faith in the integrity and judgment of God.

No small part of Jesus' success in prayer was due to the aggressive attitude he took in praying.

"Thy will be done, and I will do it with all my might!"

XXVI

The Voices of God

MANY sincere Christians miss the guidance of God in the practical matters of life because they do not recognize the voices of God in the commonplace experiences of life.

The whole question of God's communications with man has been so surrounded with mystery and magic that multitudes of people are utterly confused, and are missing the great inspiration of feeling themselves in contact with the divine.

There have been those who have declared that they saw letters of fire in the sky, or heard supernatural voices which communicated sublime messages to them from heavenly sources. These experiences have been recited in such detail and with such apparent honesty that many have gained the impression that God always speaks in such ways. This would suggest that he communicates only with a favored few and then only on rare occasions.

The fact is that God is making an effort to reveal himself to all men, but only those who recognize his voices hear him speak, for he speaks in many voices.

It sometimes happens that, under the inspiration of great music, or a moving sermon, we feel ourselves stirred to our depths by a great longing to be better than we are. Our pettiness, envy, jealousy, and smallness suddenly seem loathsome to us beyond all description, and we find ourselves reaching out wistfully for something fine and splendid. What does it mean? The Scripture writer spoke of "deep calling unto deep," and that is just what it is. God has spoken, and our own souls have answered.

It sometimes happens also, when we are reading in our New Testament, or perhaps even in some other bit of sublime literature, that a single phrase or sentence will leap out at us from the page as though it were the only thing on that page. In such a moment it seems that we find in it the answer to some question with which we have wrestled, or the word of counsel or encouragement for which we have sought. We may be tempted to think that it is only a coincidence, or that it is a bit of fancy; and with a trace of sad-

ness we crowd it back down as if to say, "No, it cannot be. I am only deluding myself." And all the time it was God's voice, seeking to shed light upon the way.

Frequently God speaks to us, not in words, but in a great possessive mood that settles down upon our spirits. Perhaps we are resting in an easy chair and, as we relax the tired and aching muscles of our bodies, a great sense of ease and relief comes over us. At first we simply assure ourselves that it is a physiological release from fatigue, but then we discover that no fear or anxieties come trooping up to haunt us, and no devil of despair possesses us. Instead, we are at peace. Very well, let us give thanks to God, for in such a moment he is probably very near, restoring our soul!

Some of us, busy about the day's work, find ourselves humming over and over the lilting melody of some great hymn. On and on it goes, with no apparent reason, its gracious words providing counsel, faith, warning, rebuke, or inspiration. Perhaps we try to stifle it as if it were some vagrant voice without meaning or message. But before we do so, let us examine it a bit. Perhaps it is the very word

we need for the day, or the moment. It may be the voice of God.

It is so easy to miss a glorious experience at such times by thinking we are dealing with some strange mental vagary. Instead of entering into a solemn communion with the deep longing, the living text, the mood of peace, or the haunting hymn, we brush it carelessly aside and turn to some "practical matter," dismissing God thereby.

At evening time when all is quiet and we are at last at liberty to review the events and the experiences of the day, let us sort them out and fix our minds on that one which represented the highest level to which we have attained. Let us recall every detail of that moment when we were the tallest during the whole day. Let us re-live it, re-feel it, and re-think it, devoutly reminding ourselves that it was at that moment we saw the Lord most clearly. Make it a habit to so review each day, and continue it throughout a period of weeks, and you will discover that the recurring moments of exaltation will grow continuously more splendid and ecstatic.

For these sacred experiences let us give thanks and listen.

XXVII

Faith Works That Way

THE field was dry and parched, and the growing things were sadly in need of water about their roots. Up in the foothills there was a reservoir, full to the brim with clear, invigorating water, brought down from the mountains by a cheerful stream waiting to provide life.

The owner of the ranch, seeing the condition of his field, drove up to the reservoir and opened a water-gate. Instantly a flood of life poured down the irrigation ditch, racing along to bring help and strength to the wilting plants. Within an hour we saw "their souls restored" and the field rejoicing.

Now the power that revived the growing things was not in the reservoir, the water-gate, or the irrigation ditch. It was not even in the rancher's hand that opened the water-gate, or in his mind which recognized the need. The power was in the water, and when it reached the parched field, life came back to the plants. In this there is a parable.

There was a soul that was parched and dry with the thirst that comes with a great sense of

defeat. Life had become almost unendurable, and great was the bitterness with which each new day was greeted.

But God never intended that life should become a burden and a torture. Rather, he intended that it should be full of joy like the beauty of a rose, and that it should bear much fruit like an over-burdened apple tree. And he had provided an abundance of power so that the stricken soul might have been shouting in victory, but the power was not getting into the life of that one who was overcome with bitterness.

Now there was a wise pastor near at hand who, seeing the spirit of wretchedness in which that soul lived, spoke to him and pointed out a simple device by which he might gain help. "But that is just a psychological trick," wailed the sick soul, "and I will not be guilty of administering mental 'dope' to myself."

"Yes," said the wise pastor, "it is a psychological trick, but it is also the way God works. Just as the ditch conveyed the water from the reservoir to the parched field that the growing things might be

revived, so this 'psychological trick' will convey the power of God from his limitless stores to your famished spirit."

And by faith the rancher opened the water-gate, and the water obeyed the laws of God and raced away with health and strength for the withered plants.

And by faith the stricken soul declared its conviction of belief in God, and healing began to flow in upon its spirit—a mere trickle at first, but as the assertion of conviction became stronger the stream increased until he was revived, his soul refreshed, and his spirit made strong again.

Now the power which restored the soul of the defeated one was neither in the psychological trick nor in the faith of the struggler, but in the vast reservoirs of God. And when it reached the dry wastes of defeat and despair, life came back more abundantly.

But faith opened the gate so that God's power could come in upon the soul. Faith works that way, as the Christian's experience always shows.

Call it what you will—auto-suggestion, "mental dope," controlled energy, prayer, mental therapeutics, aggressive faith, or self-hypnosis—the beneficial re-

sults are in no wise altered by the name, for the restoring power is from God, and he stands ready to pour himself into any life when faith opens the gate.

Try asserting your faith the very last moment before sleep comes at nightfall. Saturate your mind with the great confessions of confidence; repeat the strongest passages of Scripture with which you are familiar, use the fleeting lines of great hymns that come across your mind. Do not plead with God, but let your prayer be one of praise. Count up the blessings of the day and give thanks. Ignore your defeats and rejoice in your victories. Recount the joys of the day and postpone consideration of your anxieties until the morrow.

As you deliberately call up the blessings, mercies, joys, victories, and happy memories of the day, you will find a sense of peace and satisfaction stealing in upon you, for *that is the way faith works*. It may be that it is a psychological law operating, but the psychological law is only the irrigation ditch down which the power is flowing from the reservoirs of God. And his strength, available to you, is equal to any emergency.

XXVIII

Trust Your High Moments

THERE come moments in the lives of all of us when we find ourselves aspiring to great heights, when the low and the lewd within us move us to remorse and shame, when we long with all the powers of our soul for holiness of life and cleanness of mind.

Sometimes these great moments come when we are listening to great music. Occasionally they come when we are reading great poetry. Once in a while some people experience them when viewing some majestic mountain, glorious sunset, or rich valley spread out below them. Perhaps for the average person the great moments come more frequently under the spell of some wistful and winsome preacher as he describes the love of God.

However varied the circumstances may be that produce the mood, the impressive fact is that all men, at one time or another, have the experience.

Unfortunately for most of us, there is a disposition to dismiss these high and holy moments as something too beautiful and rarefied to last. "I had a hunch once that I could be a great Christian,"

said a steely-eyed businessman, "but I got over it." And that was just the pity!

"I used to think I'd like to be a preacher." How many times the good pastor has heard those words from the lips of some layman, indicating that there was a time when the good man had dreamed dreams and seen visions that had never been realized. Not every man can occupy a pulpit, of course, but that wistful confession from the lips of the layman is usually a sign that he had some divine impulse struggling up within him which was never given an opportunity.

The great mistake made by many people is in thinking that these holy urges are of themselves—that they are the product of wishful thinking, a meaningless impulse that has no moral significance or spiritual implication.

But such is not the case. On the contrary, they are a sure evidence of the fact that the Holy Spirit of God has been tugging at the heart of a man in an attempt to induce him to arise to better ways, more holy living.

One of the strangest things in

life is the fact that we seem to be, on so many occasions, ashamed of these high moments. We do not trust them. We seem to feel that they do not belong to us, that they are the outcropping of something false and unreal. The fact that they beckon us on to something so far in advance of the thing we are, is taken as proof that they are not really dependable.

Instead, the wise way is to trust them. Lincoln, incensed at the sight of a Negro girl sold at auction, experienced one of those high moments and never allowed it to fade from his soul. John Wesley, touched that night in the little meeting on Aldersgate Street, never recovered from the effect. Indeed, he preserved the memory as one of his most precious experiences.

The Apostle Paul, struck down on the Damascus way, in describing his experience years afterward said, "Wherefore, O King Agrippa, I was not disobedient unto the heavenly vision." Peter, on the Mount of Transfiguration, sensing that he was in the presence of a spiritual miracle, wanted to preserve the experience and proposed that they build on the spot "three tabernacles."

When you find one of these great longings after righteousness welling up in your life, give thanks unto God, for it is a holy thing that has come to life within you.

When you are overcome with shame at the thought of some foul and evil thing within your life, then also give thanks unto God, for it is he who has provoked the remorse.

When you find your spirit lifting as if on wings, and you are thinking holy thoughts and exulting in the glory of some spiritual ecstasy, do not treat the experience as something foreign to life, but rejoice in the fact that the Holy Spirit of the living God has moved upon your heart.

Cultivate these high and beautiful moments. Seek to prolong them. Relive their memories.

Jacob's pillow of stone and his strange dream represented the holy impulse that redeemed his life.

In the presence of these holy moments we become the tallest souls we ever are. Thank God for them. Be grateful, for they are but faint indications of what life may eventually become, by the grace of God.

You Have a Right to Believe in Yourself

NOTHING is more fatal to the spiritual life of any person than the loss of self-respect. The man who cannot believe in himself cannot believe in anything else.

The basis of all integrity and character is whatever faith we have in our own integrity. To lose confidence in our own divinity is the next thing to losing that divinity itself.

Any man who maintains a fine sense of confidence in his own individuality, his own convictions, his own worth, must stand on constant guard against the world that is all about him, for he is assailed on every side every day by those who would assure him that he is of no consequence.

"I want to feel that I am useful to someone," said an elderly man whose family was all gone, and who lived in a great city among strangers. The desperate efforts the dear old gentleman made to keep himself convinced of his own usefulness were eloquent testimony to the importance of the sense of self-respect as the basis of life's enduring values.

Life seems to be organized about principles that are utterly

indifferent to the worth of individuals. We seem so helpless in combating entrenched wrong. We feel so inadequate when we go to the polls and simply put a little pencil mark down inside a square. It seems such a little thing to do, and we seem so small when we do it. It seems to make so little difference.

Against all this pressure there is but one adequate protection. Let a man keep always in mind the estimate of his worth which has been placed upon him by the living God!

In the first verses of Genesis it is recorded, "And God said, Let us make man in our image."

All through the New Testament it appears—Christ died for us, and gave his life for us.

Let any soul get a vision of the price that God has paid for his salvation, and never again will he be able to think lightly of himself, or even of his fellow man.

The Protestant Church will never believe that any magic exists in a crucifix, but while it is disclaiming such a belief there is a danger that we shall forget the deep and transforming merit in

the thought that man is worth so much that God was willing to die for him.

The man who begins to hold himself in contempt begins immediately to lose spiritual power. The man who begins to respect himself as one for whom Christ died begins immediately to feel a new sense of inner power welling up within him.

Down through the centuries of persecution and pogroms, the Jew has been kept alive and preserved by his belief that he is one of the "Chosen People." Under the heaviest burdens of persecution he has assured himself that he is made in the image of God, and that there is something within him that swords and fires cannot destroy.

To the Christian there has been given the promise that he is one of God's redeemed—that he has been bought with a price, that he has

been granted a standing through the death of Christ that can never be taken away from him. This is the confidence that has sent martyrs to their graves and the missionaries to their far-flung fields.

"I don't amount to much in this town," said an aged man whose life had seldom been called "successful," "but I do amount to something with God. He gave his Son for me, and that has made me great. I can forget what these people think about me when I remember what God thinks about me."

In the hour of your deepest gloom, begin assuring yourself of the very high estimate God placed on your worth when he gave his only begotten Son "that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life."

Strength Will Be Waiting

ONE of the most serious spiritual wastes to which the average Christian is subject is the worrying he does about duties, experiences, temptations, or difficulties before their arrival.

Knowing that we must face some severe test, we begin pleading with God for strength; and the more anxious our prayers, the greater the drain upon our spiritual resources. Instead of preparing us for the experience, our praying only exhausts us, so that we are more unprepared than we would have been if we had not prayed.

This does not mean, of course, that one should not pray under such circumstances. It only means that frantic petitions which beg for advance assistance are not the kind of prayers that ought to be offered.

The late Rev. John H. Jowett, the beloved Presbyterian preacher, told of his worrying in advance of a certain Friday on which he was expected to make a decision of great importance.

Confessing his utter confusion to a trusted friend, he said, "What would you do if you were in my

place?" to which the friend made reply, "I don't know, Jowett, for I am not and I can never be in your place. But one thing I do know—you do not have to do anything until Friday. This is only Tuesday. But if you will possess your soul in serenity and trust your heavenly Father confidently, on Friday it will be plain."

Seizing upon his friend's advice, the famous preacher immediately offered up a prayer of gratitude *for the wisdom that was to be his on Friday*. Then he went on about Tuesday's work as if no Friday were coming.

On Wednesday he had no more light on his problem than on Tuesday; but he went on trusting. On Thursday the solution of the problem seemed to be as far away as ever. On Friday morning he was still in the dark, and at noon the decision had to be rendered. But still he trusted God and held firm to the faith that he would know the answer when needed.

And just thirty minutes before twelve he received the information he needed, upon the basis of which he was able to make an intelligent decision.

Of one thing the Christian can be assured. He will have whatever strength he needs to do the work God expects him to do, *by the time he has to do the work*. But there is an element of presumption in demanding of God that he send strength in advance of the need.

Many Christians make the mistake of judging themselves by results, instead of measuring themselves in terms of the sincerity of purpose and percentage of strength expended.

God never called any person to be a success. He only calls us to do our best, to use all our strength, and to do all that "best" makes possible.

No preacher was ever called to "convert" seven souls with one sermon, but every preacher has been called to preach the best sermon he can, if he has been called at all.

No layman was ever called to do another man's work, but he is called to do that work which no one but he can do, and he has been called to do it to the best of his ability.

In either case, a Christian may be absolutely sure that the needed power will be waiting for him, ready at hand when it is needed!

There is good psychology, as well as a proved spiritual technique, in such an attitude. Anxious, tense, frantic praying closes the soul against the entrance of the Holy Spirit; confident assertions to one's self, expressive of a deep and basic faith, have the effect of opening the soul to the Holy Spirit.

The Christian who maintains a calm and poised attitude of faith in God will approach the most difficult task with all his native powers and resources fully mastered, disciplined, and mustered for the test. He who comes up to his trial anxious and exhausted from worryful praying has defeated his own prayers in advance.

Do not anxiously scan the days ahead to make sure you will be equal to the demands that will be made upon you. If those demands are of God, then his power will await you in sufficient force to supply any deficit there may be. If the demands are not of God, then they do not have to be met!

Begin each day with a prayer of thanks—"For the strength that will be awaiting me alongside of every load I must carry this day, I give Thee thanks in advance, O God, my Father."

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