

OVERCOMING OBSTACLES TO CHRISTIAN GROWTH

Ron Christian, Compiler

“Growing A Godly Life” - Devotional Series

Book 6- “Growth”

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‘GROWING A GODLY LIFE’ - Series (13 Books)

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INTRODUCTION TO BOOK SIX

**By
Ron Christian**

"Christ receiveth sinful men, even me with all my sins" - great words from a great song that describe God's great grace! But while it is true that Christ can and does transform sinners in a moment of time (when a sinner truly repents and turns in humble faith to the Savior), it is also unfortunately true that 'saved' persons often carry 'sinful attitudes' with them long after their initial spiritual conversion. This 'sinful spiritual baggage' can weigh down a Christian, causing great spiritual damage and even eventual spiritual destruction. 'Sinful spiritual baggage' like prejudice, judgmentalism, resentments, alienation in human relationships, unforgiveness, repressed anger and bitterness (which can cause 'depression'), unresolved grief. In this book(i.e. Book Six of the 13 Booklet Series on 'Growing A Godly Life') we will look at each of these above-mentioned serious problems which debilitate and threaten to destroy the life of a Christian. All of these constitute 'sinful spiritual baggage' which must be gotten rid of if one is to experience spiritual and mental and emotional health and well-being. Left to fester and to poison the life of a believer, eventually these sinful attitudes will snuff out all spiritual life!

Much could be said about each of the above-mentioned sins (which too often are left undealt with in the life of a believer) but let us in this Introduction seriously 'focus' on one of the many obstacles which threatens to undo many Christians - the problem of Prejudice. Thomas Duckworth, whose excellent article on Prejudice (the first devotional in this booklet) describes prejudice as judging a person by his appearance and concluding that you do not want to have anything to do with him. It is turning away from a person before you know anything about him. Prejudice is an ugly sin, too often tolerated in the life of a "professing Christian".

I have sadly discovered it in my own life, and perhaps you too have uncovered this ugly sin in your life. Christians need to rid themselves, not only of prejudice, but of all other 'sinful baggage' which is the cause of spiritual defeat. James wrote the following words to Christians: "*Get rid of all that is wrong in your life, both inside and outside, and humbly be glad for the wonderful message we have received, for it is able to save our souls as it takes hold of our hearts.*" (James 1: 21, Living Bible)

Prejudice - that widespread sin among 'professing Christians'- comes in many different 'forms'. There is racial prejudice, economic prejudice, educational prejudice, class prejudice, ethnic prejudice, gender prejudice, religious prejudice, and a variety of other prejudices. James exposed the ugliness of this sin, and he called upon Christians everywhere to cleanse themselves from this destructive problem. "*Dear brothers, how can you claim that you belong to the Lord Jesus Christ, the Lord of glory, if you show favoritism to rich people and look down on poor people? If a man comes into your church*

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dressed in expensive clothes and with valuable gold rings on his fingers, and at that same moment another man comes in who is poor and dressed in threadbare clothes, and you make a lot of fuss over the rich man and give him the best seat in the house and say to the poor man, 'You can stand over there if you like, or else sit on the floor' - well, judging a man by his wealth shows that you are guided by wrong motives. Listen to me, dear brothers: God has chosen poor people to be rich in faith, and the Kingdom of Heaven is theirs, for that is the gift God promised to all those who love him. And yet, of the two strangers, you have despised the poor man. Don't you realize that it is usually the rich men who pick on you and drag you into court? And all too often they are the ones who laugh at Jesus Christ whose noble name you bear.” (James 2: 1-7, Living Bible)

There is not only prejudice against the "poor" (or, strangely, sometimes against the "rich", which is "inverted snobbery"), but there is also widespread racial prejudice - even among so-called 'Christians'. It has only been in recent years (since the assassination of Martin Luther King, Jr.) that some all-white "fundamentalist churches" (in the 'Bible Belt' of American South) have 'allowed' the presence of 'Blacks' (African-Americans) into their sanctuaries. The prejudice of the 'Whites' (including 'Christians') against the 'Blacks' (including 'Christians') in the American South (and in some other places) has long been 'deep' and 'bitter'! Needless to say, such 'racial prejudice' is completely contrary to the 'spirit of Christ' (which is the spirit of acceptance and love). It was Martin Luther King, Jr. who had 'a dream' that the day would finally come in America when Black and White children would freely play together with no consciousness ("sensitivity") to the 'color' of their skin, that persons would not be judged (evaluated) by the 'color' of their skin but by the 'character' of their person! No 'professing Christian' has any 'business' ('right') to discrimination against any person for arbitrary reasons, like race, culture, economic status, education, religion. One form of racial prejudice is expressed by 'professing Christians' who are strongly opposed to interracial marriages. There is no solid Biblical or theological rationale for such opposition (did not Moses the Jew marry a 'black' Ethiopian?), but, nevertheless, there are many 'white, conservative, evangelicals' who continue to oppose "a black man marrying a white woman". One of the most pathetic (inexcusable) forms of racial prejudice is expressed by some religious folks who claim that, because Ham (the son of Noah) was 'cursed' (Genesis 9: 18-25), all 'Black People are cursed' (to be subservient and inferior)! There could not be any worse form of Biblical misinterpretation and racial prejudice (performed in the 'name of religion')!

When my grandchildren were very young (verily able to talk), I taught them the following 'little verse':

**"Jesus loves the little children,
All the children of the world,
Red and yellow, black and white,
They are precious in His sight,
Jesus loves the little children of the world."**

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And Jesus loves the ‘Brown’ (Hispanic) children too - a rather large ‘portion’ of the American population! Jesus has ‘no favorites’, and there is ‘no superior race’. All are created with ‘equal significance’ to the Lord God, and all are ‘equally loved’ by the Heavenly Father! There is ‘no room’ for racial prejudice among sincere Christians!

Another ‘form’ of prejudice which Christians must avoid at all costs is ‘educational prejudice’. This kind of prejudice can express itself in two different directions. There are some Christians who are strongly prejudiced against highly educated persons (including highly educated pastors and seminary professors). Some Christians appear to believe that ‘ignorance is bliss’ (a ‘virtue’), and that if a minister has a PhD behind his name, he must be ‘less spiritual’. I have heard several ‘well-meaning’ older believers belittle (‘make fun of’) ministers who had a “seminary education”. One older minister whom I recently met (with whom I greatly enjoyed visiting and who ‘appeared’ to me to be ‘a saint’) talked jokingly (but nevertheless ‘seriously’) about ‘seminary’ really being a ‘cemetery’ (which ‘ruined’ most young men who were training for the ministry). It can’t be denied that ‘seminary training’ has tragically been instrumental in the ‘ruination’ of many young men who were training for the pastoral ministry (because of the ‘skeptical’ and ‘liberal’ and ‘anti-Biblical’ attitudes of far too many seminary professors). But, to categorically ‘condemn’ (or ‘belittle’) all seminaries (and call them ‘cemeteries’) is foolish and naive and judgmental (a form of ‘intellectual prejudice’).

On the other hand, there are some ‘elitist-type’ Christians, whose intellectual conceit and contempt for the less educated Christians (including ministers who don’t have seminary training), makes them equally unattractive and insensitive and unapproachable. These highly educated Christians find it difficult to accept the fact that God has often chosen persons with an average (or ‘below average’) ‘formal education’ to do some of His greatest work in His Kingdom! Those with a strong ‘bias’ against the uneducated ought to take another look at Jesus’ Twelve Disciples, none of whom went to any college (and certainly not to any theological seminary). The Christian Movement, from the beginning, was a ‘lay movement’! God is glad to use brilliant minds and highly educated persons, but God is able also to use an Amos (“an herdsman, and a gatherer of sycamore fruit” - Amos 7: 14) or any other commonly-educated persons. As far as I know, my own grandmother (a very ‘saintly’ and intelligent lady) ‘graduated’ only from 8th grade, and yet she was a ‘student of the Word’, and one who regularly read many ‘Christian books’, and one who taught adult Sunday School classes for several decades! A ‘deep and seasoned’ Christian, a wise and discerning counselor, a mighty prayer warrior, a fruitful and loving soul-winner! Whether highly educated (like the Apostle Paul) or uneducated (like Jesus’ disciples Peter and John), persons can only be effective in their life if they spend much time in communion with Jesus Christ. *“When the Council (Jewish Sanhedren) saw the boldness of Peter and John, and could see that they were obviously uneducated non-professionals, they were amazed and realized what being with Jesus had done for them!”* (Acts 4: 13, Living Bible)

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No amount of formal theological education can take the place of a deep heart commitment to Jesus! Tragically, there have been far too many seminary-educated ministers who depended too much on their formal education and too little on the daily ‘anointing’ of the Holy Spirit! When the ‘going got rough’ in the pastorate, many of these ‘heady seminarians’ (who were ‘proud’ of their theological expertise) decided to ‘throw in the towel’ and ‘call it quits’ (as far as the pastoral ministry was concerned)! Even John Wesley, whose theological brilliance was unmatched and whose ‘taste’ for proper ecclesiastical form was intense, had a difficult time accepting the fact that God could ‘call’ and ‘use’ unordained and commonly-educated laymen to preach and to evangelize. It was only after Suzanna Wesley (John’s mother) ‘confronted’ him about this issue (of lay persons preaching) did John Wesley see the wisdom of allowing laymen to preach. It was then that John Wesley laid aside his ‘prejudice’, and championed the cause of lay persons preaching the Gospel. God raised up hundreds of ‘lay minsters’ (unordained and ill-educated) to spread the Good News of Christ throughout England and other Lands!

“Intellectual prejudice” expressed in ‘either direction’ (i.e., taking ‘pride’ in intellectualism or ‘scorning’ intellectualism) should have no place in the life of a true Christian. All such prejudice must be expunged from the Christian!

Another form of ‘prejudice’ among Christians is “religious prejudice”. There are too many Christians who believe that they have a special ‘edge on God’s truth’, that they are the most enlightened and spiritually informed, that their church (or denomination) is ‘more favored’ by God than any other church. Such a ‘sectarian’ attitude is evidence of spiritual pride - the kind of pride which dishonors an all-loving God and engenders divisions and misunderstandings among Christians. Even though I personally cherish my Anglican Heritage (as a ‘fifth generation’ Free Methodist), I have always found it hurtful to listen to some of my fellow evangelical (conservative) Protestant ministers speak disrespectfully (and sarcastically) regarding Roman Catholics or Pentecostals or some other ‘Branch’ of the Christian Church (Body of Christ). Christ alone is ‘the Way, the Truth, and the Life’, but I believe that there are many ‘ways’ to God (but only ‘through’ Christ), and that there are many honorable ways to worship the Living God! Certainly God is too ‘big’ to be ‘boxed’ into any one denomination or church!

Personally, I appreciate the large variety of ways in which my several relatives (and friends) love and adore the Precious Savior. One of my grandmothers was a devout Roman Catholic, and the other grandmother was a devout Free Methodist (as well as my mother and my wife and myself). My two sisters (and some of their family) are Presbyterians. My brother belongs to the Seventh-Day Adventist Church. My oldest daughter and her husband (and their children) experience devout worship in the Eastern Orthodox Church. One of my sons-in-law was raised in the Episcopal Church, and he and his wife (my youngest daughter) have often worshiped in this liturgical church. I have one niece who married a Jewish man who has accepted Jesus as his Messiah. My

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niece and her husband, who joyously worship in a Messianic Jewish synagogue (church) each Saturday, have helped me to appreciate the "Jewish roots" of the Christian Faith. Both my aunt and her daughter (my cousin) were ordained Pentecostal preachers. Several of my friends (including fellow pastors) are Calvinist-oriented Baptists. One of the faithful 'donors' to my interdenominational organization (called "Christian Living Ministries") is a long-time devout Lutheran. For the last several years, my wife and I have attended a large evangelical (Protestant) church - the Evangelical Free Church. I have a rather large number of friends who attend the Assemblies of God Church.

A person who follows the loving and accepting and tolerant Christ has no just reason to be intolerant, close-minded, narrow, exclusive, sectarian, bigoted, prejudiced against a fellow Christian who chooses to worship differently and to think differently than he does. Notes William Barclay: "The conviction that our beliefs and our methods alone are correct has been the cause of more tragedy and distress in the Church than almost any other thing. There are many ways to God. God has His own secret stairway into every heart. God fulfills Himself in many ways, and no man and no Church has a monopoly of the truth of God." (Daily Study Bible; Luke; pg. 131-132)

Barclay notes that of all the greatest religious leaders none was such a pattern of tolerance as John Wesley (1703-1791). Said Wesley, "I have no more right to object to a man for holding a different opinion from mine than I have to differ with a man because he wears a wig and I wear my own hair: but if he takes his wig off and shakes the powder in my face, I shall consider it my duty to get quit of him as soon as possible. The thing which I resolved to use every possible method of preventing was a narrowness of spirit, a party zeal - that miserable bigotry which makes many so unready to believe that there is any work of God but among themselves. 'We think and we let think'. When his nephew, Samuel, the son of his brother Charles, entered the Roman Catholic Church, John Wesley wrote to him, 'Whether in this Church or that I care not. One may be saved in either or damned in either, but I fear you are not born again.'" (pg. 131)

God is much 'bigger' than any system of theology, or any one 'type' of religious experience, or any one 'branch' of God's Church (Orthodox, Catholic, Protestant), or any one 'way' of worship. Notes William Barclay, "There is room in the Empire of the Kingdom for a wide variety of beliefs. No man and no church has a monopoly of all truth. To think ourselves right and everyone else wrong can lead to nothing but trouble and bitterness and strife. So long as all these beliefs are stemmed in Christ they are all facets of God's truth. There is room in the Empire of the Kingdom for a wide variety of experiences. We do infinite harm when we try to standardize Christian experience, and when we insist that all men must come to Christ in the same way. One man may have a sudden shattering experience and may be able to point to the day and the hour, and the very minute, when God invaded his life. Another man's heart may open to Christ normally and naturally, and without crisis, as the petal of the lint-bell opens to the sun. Both experiences come from God and both men belong to God. There is room

in the Empire of the Kingdom for a wide variety of ways of worship. One man finds touch with God in an elaborate ritual and in a splendid liturgy; and another finds God in the bare simplicities. There is no right or wrong here. It is the glory of the church that within its fellowship somewhere a man will find the worship that brings him to God. Let him find it, but let him not think this way the only way and let him not criticize another's way.” (Daily Study Bible; William Barclay; Luke; pages 184, 185)

Ridding one's self of all 'religious prejudice' is important, to help assure continuing healthy and dynamic growth in the Christian life.

Some mistakenly believe that a life which is free of all prejudice is a life that is free of all Intolerance. But such reasoning is erroneous. A Christian should rid himself of all racial and religious prejudice, and a variety of other destructive prejudices, but a Christian, at the same time, should never compromise with sin in the 'name' of 'tolerance'. A Christian, who seeks to be 'free' from the sin of prejudice, must also 'champion' the cause of righteousness, holy living, and moral purity. It is NOT a sign of 'prejudice' to stand against moral evil in society. To rid yourself (as a believer) of hurtful 'prejudice' is NOT to become indifferent to widespread evil in society (such as pornography, adultery, homosexuality, etc.). To speak against the sin of homosexuality does NOT make you a 'prejudiced' person or a 'hater of mankind'. One can be, at one and the same time, a 'lover of mankind' and a 'hater of sinful acts of perversion'. Laura Drewer's article in 'Week 24' entitled "Indifference Puts Blinders On Our Eyes" speaks well to this issue.

It is NOT a sign of 'wrongful intolerance' or of 'evil prejudice' for a Christian to have a high regard for justice, righteousness, and holy living. In our age of 'moral relativism', where moral distinctives are blurred, there is a need for a declaration of 'moral absolutes'. In an age of 'easy toleration', there is a need for strong convictions and a rejection of the 'false'. In our age where so many are doing that which is 'right in their own eyes', there is need for the prophetic voice which declares "Thus saith the Lord!" When men turn all the 'blacks' and 'whites' into 'pale grays', there is need for clear thinking regarding the 'morally good' and 'morally bad' (as taught by the Holy Bible and as generally recognized throughout the history of mankind). The believer must never deny the legitimate existence of some 'moral relatives', personal convictions, individual preferences, and cultural tastes, but neither must the believer deny the fact of 'moral absolutes' and 'universal principles' which apply to all persons, in all societies, in all ages. Adultery and homosexuality and murder are just as wrong today as they were when the Ten Commandments were first given! The fact that one is 'intolerant' towards evil (i.e., the violation of God's Absolute Moral Laws) does not make one a person who is full of 'prejudice' against lawbreakers (sinners). To say that you are 'intolerant' towards the sin of murder, is not to say that you are 'prejudiced' against the murderer. It is a misapplication of the idea of 'prejudice' to say that the 'unprejudiced

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person' is 'tolerant' of all behavior, regardless of how 'evil' or 'perverted' that behavior might be!

However, the Christian who is rightly opposed to 'moral evil' must not be hostile or hateful toward the 'man of evil'. When one of my daughters was very young, she learned to make this important distinction. She said, "Daddy, God hates robbery, but He loves the robber!" It is all-important that the believer has an intense hatred for sin and, at the same time, an intense love for the sinner! Unfortunately, some 'professing Christians', while they are championing the cause of moral righteousness, have turned against the sinners whose sins they so intensely hate. It is 'right' to boldly speak against the horror of abortion, but it is not right to hate the women who choose to abort their babies, and it is never right to plot the murder of abortionist doctors.

It is possible to be morally good and yet to lack loveliness, attractiveness, and graciousness in the expression of moral righteousness. It is possible to speak out prophetically against adultery and homosexuality and drunkenness, for instance, and yet in the process lack tenderness and love for the 'fallen one'. It is possible to be practically and morally 'good' and yet not to be aesthetically 'good'. To be 'aesthetically good' is to be attractive, winsome, and lovely in one's actions of good. The goodness of justice and righteousness seeks to destroy personal and institutional evil (like homosexuality and adultery). The goodness of kindness and mercy, on the other hand, attracts the sinner (the lesbian or prostitute, etc.) away from her sin and 'perversion' to the beauty and purity of the altogether lovely Christ! The true Christian must never allow the 'warm love' in his heart to be 'chilled' by the rigor and coldness of his moral codes. He must never be 'tolerant' toward sin, and he, at the same time, must never be 'prejudiced' against the sinner! While (properly) upholding strict moral and biblical principles, the Christian must always remain tender and responsive and loving towards people who are morally broken by sin. To reject sinners in their 'moral predicament' is to be guilty of the greatest 'crime' and 'prejudice' of all! The Christian must always be able to shed a sympathizing tear for sinners (who are in 'slavery' to their sins), without holding any sympathy in his heart for sin! The greater his love for the sinner, the greater his hatred for the sins which are in the process of totally destroying the sinner! 'Intolerant' towards sin, and 'unprejudiced' towards the sinner!

Why have I spent so much time and expended so much effort in writing about the 'sin of prejudice' (in its various forms and manifestations)? Basically for two reasons. First, because it is rather obvious, from my personal experience and from observation of the 'Christian Movement' in general, that "Prejudice" is a widespread 'problem' which is too often unrecognized and unchallenged. Great healing would happen in the lives of countless Christians (and in the "Christian Movement" as a whole) if there was a widespread recognition of this 'great evil', and if there was a deep repentance and an honest expunging of 'prejudice' from the individual and corporate life of Christians.

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The second reason why I have spent so much time and effort writing about 'prejudice' in this Introduction is to illustrate the fact that each of the many 'problems' ('obstacles') which are discussed briefly in Booklet Six, could be dealt with in much greater 'depth' than what was possible in this 'general treatment' regarding Christian Growth in this Daily Devotional Series. Each one of the various 'obstacles to Christian Growth' could have been 'analyzed' with at least as much 'interest' and 'application' as was the subject of 'prejudice' (but 'space' does not permit such analysis).

'Prejudice' is only one of the variety of problems which Christians must face and seek, by God's grace and through diligent human effort, to overcome. Besides the several 'problems' which were named at the beginning of this Introduction there are many others: living by 'feelings' instead of by 'faith'; inadequacy for life's tasks and God's assignments; discontentment with where one finds himself in life and failure to "bloom where you are planted"; loss of confidence in one's self or in one's Lord; discouragement; failure to maintain faith and 'high expectations' in God's miracle power; 'hurtful habits' and failure to exercise discipline to form 'new habits'; worry; negativism; loneliness; failure to forgive one's self for past mistakes and sins; self imposed 'bondage' to daily routine with a failure to take time to relish God's gifts of beauty and pleasure and recreation; a sense of personal insignificance and 'worthlessness' (low self-esteem); failure to guard one's mind from exposure to 'evil thoughts'. These are some of the many 'obstacles' which keep persons from growing dynamically in their Christian lives.

Another 'obstacle' which must be overcome is 'narrowness of outlook' - a failure to see 'reality' from God's broad perspective. Some Christians get too preoccupied with their own 'little world' and with their self-centered concerns, rather than seeing the 'big picture' from God's viewpoint. Christians need to be 'world citizens', not merely 'local citizens' who are preoccupied with their own 'agenda', their own small community, their own local and neighborhood issues. John Wesley, the great 18th century Anglican Preacher, Evangelist, and Moral Crusader, had a 'vision' from God to reach lost people, far and near. He said that 'the world was his parish'!

Another serious 'obstacle' which every sincere Christian must seek to 'overcome' is looking back to the past (with its many regrets) rather than looking ahead to the future (with its possibilities and opportunities). Christians need to follow the example of the Apostle Paul who wrote: *"Dear brothers, I am still not all I should be but I am bringing all my energies to bear on this one thing. Forgetting the past and looking forward to what lies ahead I strain to reach the end of the race and receive the prize for which God is calling us up to heaven because of what Christ Jesus did for us"* (Philippians 3: 13-14, Living Bible) Paul, whose past life was deeply marred by his many sins - religious bigotry and cruel persecution of Christ's followers - could have lived in 'constant regret' regarding his 'dark past'. But instead Paul chose to accept God's grace and forgiveness and to live in peace (with God and with himself), and to live with excitement and

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anticipation of heaven’s future joys! A Christian is called to be ‘forward-moving’ and progressive in attitudes, rather than ‘backward-looking’ and defeatist in mentality! For a Christian, ‘the best is yet to be’ as he anticipates the ‘new horizons’ of tomorrow and the ultimate rewards of heaven!

HIGHER GROUND

**I’m pressing on the upward way,
New heights I’m gaining every day;
Still praying as I onward bound,
“Lord, plant my feet on higher ground.”**

**My heart has no desire to stay
Where doubts arise and fears dismay;
Tho’ some may dwell where these abound,
My prayer, my aim, is higher ground.**

**I want to live above the world,
Tho’ Satan’s darts at me are hurled;
For faith has caught the joyful sound,
The song of saints on higher ground.**

**I want to scale the utmost height,
And catch a gleam of glory bright;
But still I’ll pray till heaven I’ve found,
“Lord, lead me on to higher ground.”**

CHORUS:

**Lord, lift me up and let me stand,
By faith, on heaven’s table-land,
A higher plane than I have found;
Lord, plant my feet on higher ground.**

Johnson Oatman, Jr. (1856-1926)

CHAPTER ONE

FORGIVE OTHERS QUICKLY

James 2: 1-13

RIDDING YOURSELF OF PREJUDICE

I saw him before he turned the corner. He was on foot...a professional looking man wearing a white shirt and tie. In his hands were leaflets. Pulling into our driveway I could see him turn the corner. He rapidly marched up the path to the first house on our street. While I was pulling grocery sacks out of the trunk of the car and fumbling to find my house key, I concluded that, if I hurried, I could reach the door before he turned up my walkway.

My mission was successful. I was in the kitchen with two sacks before he reached the door. My mission: to avoid talking with whom I had determined was another politician. Like nearly everyone else, I was ready for the election to conclude. It is so exhausting listening to speeches and ads and accusations and propaganda that I just wanted it to be over.

Satisfied with my ability to outmaneuver this supposed politician, I returned to my car to pick up another load of filled plastic bags. Yes. I was certain I was right. Sitting on the porch chair was a bright blue sheet of paper with a photograph of the man I just avoided, and written in large print the word, “VOTE.” “Yes, I’ll vote,” I thought, “but perhaps not for you.”

After several trips between the trunk of the car and our kitchen, my curiosity peaked. I just had to see who this man was and what he stood for. With Superman-like speed I glanced over the leaflet to see what political affiliation he was, but I could see nothing. Not quite as quickly, I scanned the paper again to see what issues he was promoting. Again, nothing registered. So, at my normal slow pace, I read the pamphlet. What a surprise!

He was not a politician. He was a local businessman, a real estate broker who was using the momentum of the coming election to promote his company. I felt about an inch tall. It’s not that I would have wanted to discuss the sale of my home with him. It is the fact that I judged him by his appearance and concluded that I did not want to have anything to do with him. I turned away from him before I knew anything about him. Others call it prejudice. I call it ignorance. My mother would have called it rude.

He is in good company though. It is said of Jesus, “He was despised and rejected by men.” I guess we do that a lot.

“Lord, I am sorry for the way I have mistreated others who are not like me. Forgive me for the sins of hatred and prejudice. Please expose the ugliness within me, and soften my heart so I will learn to see others as You do - as one loved by You. In Jesus’ name. Amen.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: God changes hearts and attitudes. The end of prejudice begins with me.

- Thomas Duckworth -

NOTES:

Matthew 7: 1-5

MY AIM WAS TO ‘HIT AND RUN’

Many years ago in a foreign country, I was traveling late one night. Although it was very dark, I saw a man jump in front of the jeep I was driving. He wanted me to stop. Instead, I pushed the accelerator harder, determined to hit him if he didn’t move. When he realized I was not going to stop, he leaped out of the way. Upon completion of my tour of duty, in the United States Army, I intended to enroll as a ministerial student. You may wonder how a Christian could deliberately hit a person. Wait before you *judge me!* We often make ourselves judges without knowing the details. Jesus says this is a no no.

Several weeks before my intent to “hit and run”, another soldier had a person step in front of him as he was driving down the road. He stopped his jeep to keep from hitting the man. The driver was shot and killed. Since I was in the same situation, I decided to keep driving, hoping he would move. If he didn’t, and I did hit him, I would go straight to the military police and tell them what happened. Thank God he jumped out of the way.

You may have been judgmental at first, but I am sure you changed your mind after finishing the story. Is it possible we get our exercise by jumping to conclusions? Perhaps you don’t, but my answer would be affirmative. As I grow older, I believe I hold my judgment longer than I use to. At least I try to!

“God himself, sir, does not propose to judge man until the end of his days,” said the wise Samuel Johnson.

It may have been someone by the name ‘anonymous’ who said “judging is actually an ego trip; we judge to make ourselves look better.” If we are honest, we would say, we really cannot afford an ego trip.

Romans 2: 11 *“You therefore have no excuse, you who pass judgment on someone else, for at whatever point you judge the other, you are condemning yourself, because you who pass judgment do the same thing”*. OUCH!

“Dear Jesus, it is so human and so easy to judge. Please help me to refrain from judging others. Help me to wait upon You in prayer and Bible reading each day.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: With God’s help, I will endeavor to listen and to evaluate, but I will leave the judgment to God, who is the only all-knowing Judge.

- Lowell Weller -

Philippians 3:12-14

I Thessalonians 5: 21-22

HOLD ON TO THE GOOD - LET GO OF THE SKUNKS

Several years ago, a man called and asked if he might come for some counseling. He informed me that he was a plant supervisor and, because he was upset with the people working under him, he was treating them unfairly. I listened to him talk, and discovered the man was harboring bitterness and unforgiveness. As we continued talking, I asked him some questions. "Do your employees know how you feel about them"? He answered "No". I then asked, "Which of you are suffering the most? You or them"? After giving thought to this question, he replied, "Me". He was hurting himself and destroying his marriage. I trust he let go of the skunks that were causing an unpleasant odor, for his attitude was "life stinks".

I recall the story of a mother, who was watching her children in the backyard, as she washed dishes. They were happily playing with little black kittens. She noticed each kitten had a white strip down it's back. What they thought were kittens were actually skunks. If the children got sprayed, she would have to throw away their clothing. Frantically she opened the window, and yelled, "Run, run, run." To her surprise, each child reached down and picked up a skunk and ran.

Paul gave wise counsel when he wrote "Follow peace with all men. .. lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled" (Hebrew 12:14 & 15) I would put it this way: "Let go of the skunks". There are good things to hold on to. Good memories, good friends, good messages, and good Christian music. "Hold on to the good". Paul was determined to forget the past and reach for those things before him. (Philippians 3:13) Verse 14 says, "*I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus.*"

"My dear heavenly Father, I want to thank You for inspiring your writer, the Apostle Paul, to give me challenging Scriptures in Philippians and 1 Thessalonians. Please help me to live by those great truths written in your Holy Word".

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: I do not have yesterday, I may not have tomorrow, but I do have today! I am determined to hold on to the good and to let go of the skunks.

- Lowell Weller -

Romans 6: 23; I John 1: 9

EXPRESS YOUR LOVE, REKINDLE A RELATIONSHIP

Valentine's Day is probably the holiday that allows expression of feelings far more than any other. School kids exchange messages that most of them probably do not even understand: "You're out of this world! You're a blast! You're my cup of tea! I'm bananas over you" or made up words: "You're swingingest!"

Grown-up cards are far more sentimental with pictures of beautiful red roses and poems of endearment. They are used by young lovers as well as old married folks. Perhaps they even put S.W.A.K. on the envelope.

Many times a person will ask, "How much do you love me?" and the lover will naturally stretch out his arms, replying, "This much," then embrace his sweetheart.

If we ask Jesus how much He loves us, He too, would stretch out his arms, revealing his nail pierced hands and tell us that he loves us so much that he died on the cross for us. The shadow of Him standing before us with outstretched arms forms a cross. A friend lays down his life for his friend. The wages of sin is death and Jesus, the spotless Son of God, who knew no sin, became sin for us that we might become sons of God. God loved us so much that He sent His only Son to take our punishment.

Have you ever gotten a valentine that you cannot forget? I remember a homemade valentine from my best friend in third grade. We had quarreled over something and I didn't expect a card from her. In fact, it looked like Humpty Dumpty after his fall. Inside was her message: "This heart is broken, it is sad but true. But it can be mended; it's all up to you." That message was loud and clear! It put the responsibility of restored relationship right in my lap!

Most of us can remember a person who was one time a close friend but something happened between us. It may have been an unkind word, a misunderstanding, or an action that should not have happened. Broken relationships can be restored, but it takes tremendous humility. Scripture says if one has offended you, go to him. Don't wait for your friend to come and apologize, admitting he was wrong. Go and express your love and seek forgiveness yourself, even if you feel it was not your fault.

Some people have even stopped going to church because they had a falling-out with another member or the pastor. Sometimes they say that the church is full of hypocrites. Paul warned, "Forsake not the assembling of yourselves together." All Christians are sinners saved by grace. Our righteousness is as filthy rags but God imputes His righteousness to us. He sees us through the shed blood of his own Son, Jesus. Part of the

communion service admonishes us to examine ourselves, to make things right with a brother or sister.

As Christians, our relationship with our Savior is sometimes broken because of sin. I John 1: 9 was written for believers: *“If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness.”* Why do we walk away in sorrow when a simple prayer of confession can restore a beautiful relationship? Who can explain God’s grace? God looks on our hearts and accepts us without question when we return to him!

“Father, forgive me if I have offended my friend, and give me the humility to restore our relationship.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: A restored relationship is twice as strong.

- Laura Drew -

NOTES:

Exodus 32: 19-35; Deuteronomy: 9: 7

John 8: 1-11; Matthew 6: 14-15

FREEDOM COMES WITH FORGIVENESS

The Statue of Liberty stands in New York Harbor, holding a torch aloft as a symbol of the new life and liberties available in the United States of America. The tablet in her left hand bears the date of July 4, 1776. Inscribed on a plate are some of the words from Emma Lazarus' poem "Give me your tired, your poor, your huddled masses yearning to be free."

Mankind has always yearned to be free. The book of Exodus depicts the sorrow experienced by God's people as slaves in Egypt for four hundred years. Several films including "Prince of Egypt" and "The Ten Commandments" have been produced which show Israel's anguish under slavery. When Moses informed Pharaoh that God says, "Let my people go," his reaction was rebellion. Both films depict the terrible plagues that God brought upon the Egyptians, but I am sure that the real experience was far worse. Can you imagine frogs under your feet, in your bed, even in your oven?

However, the film scenes that portray what the children of Israel did after they were led out of Egypt, through the Red Sea, are totally unbelievable. We want to believe that after four hundred years of slavery, the freed people rejoiced and worshiped God and lived holy lives. Reading the Bible account will verify that they did not. The book is always better than the film.

What is far more amazing is that God forgave these people. God set them free, not only from their past slavery, but from their sin. The Bible says that Aaron formed the calf as an idol of worship, although he lied to Moses, saying he threw the gold in the fire and the calf appeared. God forgave Aaron and set him over the house of the Levites, the religious leaders of Israel. What a perfect picture of God's grace!

Both of these films do an excellent job relating the story of the Exodus of the Children of Israel from Egypt. Nevertheless, no film can really show the greatness of God. Forgiveness is such a miracle that can come only from God.

Yet God has given this gift of forgiveness to his children. In Ephesians 4: 32, we are instructed to *"Be kind to one another, tenderhearted, forgiving one another, even as God for Christ's sake has forgiven you."* God gives us the power and the grace to forgive one another.

In the Lord's Prayer, we repeat, "Forgive us our sins as we have forgiven those who sin against us." Do we really want God to forgive us in the same manner that we forgive those who sin against us? Or do we demand the right, "I will forgive but I will not

forget.” God’s forgiveness wipes the slate clean, and we ought also to do that for one another. Forgiveness also frees us from painfully carrying the burden and sorrow of past sin against us.

Jesus said in John 8: *“If you continue in my words, then you are my disciples indeed; you shall know the truth and the truth shall make you free.”* Christians who can stand with the Bible uplifted, and sincerely cry out, “Come, find forgiveness, find freedom, find life” will experience these gifts from God himself. Real freedom comes with forgiveness.

“Father, help me daily to forgive others as you have forgiven me. Help me show others what you are really like as you live through me.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: The gift of forgiveness gives us liberty.

- Laura Drewery -

NOTES:

**Mark 11: 24-25; Colossians 3: 12-17;
Matthew 5: 23-24; Ephesians 4: 25-32**

DANGER! POISON!

It happened at a Bible study one November. My friend disagreed, and a barrage of pain and resentment rocketed forth from her mouth in volleys of angry criticism. It was as if a bottle had been uncorked and everyone had been splattered with the acid of her inner thoughts.

I left feeling defeated and frightened. Young Christians had been there, and I was supposed to be in charge. My defeat and fear soon focused into anger, but I resolved to keep my distance, forget my feelings, and go on. As an afterthought, I realized I must also forgive her.

I went about my business, making sure I stayed out of her way. Swallowing and denying my feelings, I was unable to admit my own wrath. Slowly, the "poison" I had swallowed did its work on me. Within a few weeks I began to experience muscle spasms in my lower back. The spasms came and went without warning; the pain was harsh as a searing knife. My repressed anger and resentment kept trying to surface like a festering sore working to extrude a foreign object in the flesh.

I was unaware of the connection between the Bible-study event, the repression of my anger, and the spasms of pain which became more frequent and disabling. The pain amplified into strange tingling sensations down my left leg. One afternoon I stepped on a stool to get something from a high cupboard. The tingling pain attacked, my leg crumpled beneath me, and I found myself on the floor in a frightened heap.

The hospital bed offered ample time to reflect, search the Scriptures, and listen to God's voice. The message was clear: 'Your resentment and angry judgment of another, swallowed to stifle conscious guilt, is making you sick! Go to her, confess, and ask her forgiveness.'

Three weeks later I sat in the living room of my friend telling her of my experience, sharing my deep hurt and asking her forgiveness. To my amazement, she scarcely remembered the incident. The relief of venting frustration had blinded her to the effects of her outburst. We wept in mutual awareness. She recognized her need for constructive ways to discharge frustration, and I realized my need to deal with my feelings before they turn sour and poisonous.

Since then, I have not, to my knowledge, let the sun go down upon my wrath or hurt. Neither have I had a back problem since that time. When shoved down and left to rot into resentment, anger is a "sick-maker."

“Loving Heavenly Father, for Jesus’ sake and to avoid its hurtful consequences, I purpose never to deny nor swallow my anger, but to confess my bitterness and resentment. Enable me to quickly forgive those who transgress against me, that I may also be forgiven and live in peace and health.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: God being my Helper, I resolve never to allow the sun to go down with me still angry or resentful towards any fellow human being.

- Kay Kline -

NOTES:

Psalm 55: 22; Matthew 11: 28-30

Ephesians 4: 31-32; James 5: 16

CAST YOUR BURDEN

"Every change is perceived as loss, and every loss is grieved" states a respected Christian psychiatrist who ought to know. Furthermore, grief which is not acknowledged and worked through, stagnates into emotional garbage. The garbage may rot into resentment or explode in unexpected outbursts. More likely, it will be carried around as a handicapping load which prevents or inhibits further growth and places a cap on effective prayer.

One January several years ago, we visited the Holy Land. Many places evoked deep emotion for me, but most significant of all was the empty tomb because of what happen while I was there.

In the tour group, there was a delightful friendly woman with whom I had developed a friendship. I enjoyed her wit, her sense of humor, and her determination to experience this trip to the full. She had been baptized the day before in the Jordan River, a meaningful experience for her. But this day she seemed more quiet than usual. As we walked into Joseph's Garden and, further along, into the empty tomb itself, we stood together reflecting on its meaning. I sensed a gathering of emotion in her, but I was certainly not prepared for the great, heaving sobs which welled up and spilled out. I stood, not speaking, with my arm around her, feeling the wracking waves of emotion sweep through her.

When it was over, she turned to me and said, "I've just unloaded three years of anger here. I've been an angry old lady. Oh, I've tried to teach Sunday School and do all the right things, but I've been so full of anger." She told me about the death of her husband three years before and how she had refused to let herself grieve or even to accept her loss. Instead, she blamed God and carried the load of unexpressed grief and anger deep within herself. She had been holding a grudge, and grudges are dangerous baggage.

Some people hold grudges against themselves; some carry grudges toward other people. Still others, like this woman, are angry at God, feeling that He has let them down or been unfair to them.

I believe that any grudge or hard feeling towards oneself, another person, or towards God, is a crippling, unnecessary handicap. The price a grudge holder pays in human relationships and in access to God is enormous.

"Loving Heavenly Father, give me courage and honesty to acknowledge my long-held grudges against myself, against others, and even against You. Unthaw my frozen heart,

and enable me to feel the grief which accompanies great losses in my life. I surrender my hurt and disappointments and resentments to you, and I humbly accept your healing for my broken heart. I believe and now with grateful trust receive your healing power! Thank you”!

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: God is able to take the greatest losses of my life and turn them into the greatest gains of my life!

- Kay Kline -

NOTES:

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1. Have you ever judged another person by his appearance, and quickly (prematurely) concluded that you did not want to have anything to do with him? Do you think that most ‘prejudice’ is the result of ignorance? Why or why not? Is it ever ‘right’ for a Christian to ignore another person (i.e, to be impolite and rude to another individual)? What steps have you (as a believer) personally taken to rid yourself of Prejudice? Are you learning to see other people through the ‘eyes of Jesus’? (Note James 2: 1-9; 4: 11-12)**
- 2. If it is true, according to the wise Samuel Johnson, that God Almighty does not propose to judge a man (human) until the end of his days, why is it so ‘easy’ for Christians to judge their fellow men so quickly and insensitively? (Note Matthew 7: 1; Romans 2:1)**
- 3. Tell why you agree (or disagree) with the following statement: “Judging is actually an ego trip; we judge to make ourselves look better.”**
- 4. As you consider your many different past relationships (with all of the resultant joys and sorrows, harmony and hurtful misunderstandings) have you deliberately chosen to “hold on to the good” and “let go of the skunks”? (Note Philippians 1: 12-20; 3: 12-14; Romans 12:17-21)**
- 5. Do you have any memory of a person who was one time a close friend to you but, because of a serious misunderstanding, you became alienated from that person? Tell if you agree (or disagree) with the following statements: “Broken relationships can be restored, but it takes tremendous humility. Don’t wait for your friend to come and apologize, admitting he was wrong. Go and express your love and seek forgiveness yourself; even if you feel it was not your fault.”**
- 6. Do you believe that God gives the grace and the power for a believer to forgive another person who has deeply hurt him? According to Ephesians 4: 32, what are believers instructed to do, and whose example are Christians to model in obeying these instructions? When a Christian forgives the offenses of one who has deeply hurt him, is he (as a believer) required to “condone” the behavior of the offending person? Is a forgiving believer required to become a “close friend” to the offending person to whom he has granted forgiveness? Why or why not?**
- 7. According to Matthew 6:14-15, what consequences incur to the person (believer) who refuses to forgive another person who has offended him?**
- 8. Share your personal response (or reaction) to the following statement: “God’s forgiveness wipes the slate clean, and we ought also to do that for one another.”**

- 9. Physiologically, psychologically, socially, and spiritually, what are some of the possible consequences when a person represses his anger and bitterness against another person? (Note Hebrews 12: 14-15; Matthew 6: 14-15) What are some constructive ways to discharge one’s frustration and anger (before these feelings turn “sour and poisonous”)? How would you distinguish between “carnal anger” and “righteous indignation”? (Note Ephesians 4: 26)**

- 10. What consequences incur to a person who refuses to accept losses (like the death of a friend or a loved one), and who fails to properly ‘process’ his deep grief? Why is the holding of a grudge against another person, or the blaming of God for losses, such a dangerous and destructive reaction? How can one’s surrender of his broken heart and his confused mind to a God of perfect love and wisdom and power, enable him to discover healing and wholeness?**

- 11. Do you honestly believe that God is able to take the greatest losses of your life and turn them into the greatest gains of your life?**

CHAPTER TWO

SERVE GOD ENTHUSIASTICALLY

Hebrews 10:35 - 11:6

"FAITH OR FEELINGS?"

How many times have you allowed your feelings to dictate your life rather than allowing faith to do so? The tendency is always there to allow feelings to take over when faith should really reign.

While serving as a missionary in Alaska, I had the opportunity to fly to my destination in an airplane called a Pilatus-Porter which was designed for short takeoffs and landings to fit the Alaskan Bush. It was a cold and blustery day when we began our flight. After reaching our flying altitude, we suddenly ran into a fog that was so thick you could hardly see the end of the wings on the plane. It was a blinding effect. As we flew along, I suddenly felt the airplane tip to the right and begin a sweeping turn. I sensed that we made a total 180 degree turn and was going the opposite direction. However, I was also watching the instruments by which the pilot was flying that plane. The instruments told me we were flying perfectly straight, and perfectly level all the time. Had I been piloting that plane and trusting my feelings rather than the instruments, I would not be telling this story today. Our feelings will play tricks on us at such a time as this. Technically, it is called "vertigo" where you lose your sense of balance and direction because there is no horizon by which to judge where you are.

Faith, according to the Hebrew writer, is a product of being sure and certain of what we cannot and do not see. My faith must be properly placed in order to assure me of my safety and my destination. The fact that the pilot placed faith in those instruments literally saved my life.

Often when we are trying to follow the Lord Jesus Christ, there are times when we do not "feel" like we are making progress. We do not always "feel" elated and happy. We do not even "feel" joy at times. However, knowing that our faith is firmly fixed in Christ and his Word, we can be certain that what we hope for will be accomplished. On the other hand, if we fall victim to following the dictates of our feelings, we will experience continual discouragement, failures, and disappointments.

Thank God for the tremendous descriptions of faith that are recorded for us and for the saints who have demonstrated this faith and have accomplished great things for God.

Perhaps today you are feeling discouraged or distressed. Why not exercise your faith in the promises of God and begin to trust Him to use you and bring fulfillment in your

Christian life in spite of your feelings. He is able to do so.

“Dear Lord, help me to be certain that my feelings do not interfere with my faith in you today. By faith, I give this day to you and believe all things will be under your control regardless of how I feel! Amen!”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Faith, not feelings, will bring me victory in every area of my life.

- Edward Rickman -

NOTES:

John 17: 6-17

“MY INADEQUACY - HIS ADEQUACY”

Most all of us have experiences where we feel very inadequate for the task that is before us.

One of the most traumatic experiences of my life occurred when I decided to volunteer as a missionary to Alaska. My response was an emotional response to a need that had been created by the death of another missionary who had started a number of construction projects which needed completing. Definitely my initial response was made without the benefit of many of the facts.

It was only after I was accepted that the facts began to surface. I started getting blueprints in the mail, material lists from suppliers, and letters from supervisors on the field. I began to feel the overwhelming sense of inadequacy. There were so many details that were far beyond my experience and knowledge. I must admit that I struggled desperately with the temptation to totally withdraw from the appointment. Actually the only reason I didn't was the fact that alongside these feelings of inadequacy was the overwhelming support of those who believed in me and had the faith that I could perform the job. What a difference that encouragement made! In fact, it was that external support which helped me to overcome the internal sense of inadequacy.

That experience has been repeated many times in my life. The assignments of ministry have always seemed overwhelming and I have always sensed an inadequacy.

I believe we can identify with the feelings which must have been gripping the disciples as Jesus related His plans for the future. Jesus had chosen just twelve men as disciples and had spent three years with them in training them for the task that was ahead. Now the training was done. The end was near. They could begin to sense the weight of responsibility that was being left to them. The task was overwhelming. But in the midst of their feelings of inadequacy, here was Jesus praying a prayer for them in a manner that defied pessimism. It was almost as if He were saying, “I have absolute confidence in these ordinary men and through them I will change the world.”

It is very important that we face squarely the fact that we are often inadequate. However, we dare not allow our feelings of inadequacy to cripple us either emotionally

or spiritually. Inadequacy can also be an excuse for not performing any particular task. On the other hand, the positive side of inadequacy is the fact that we are driven to trust the adequacy of God’s help in order to succeed.

It must have been a tremendous encouragement for the disciples to hear the prayer of Jesus which basically says, “I believe in you, you can do it.” What should also be encouraging to you and me is to know that He prayed that same prayer for us. God has chosen us to do certain tasks, not because we are adequate in ourselves, but that we might exercise faith in Him to provide the power, the strength, and the encouragement where we are inadequate in ourselves.

One of the greatest encouragements we can receive is the understanding that we are not alone. Even our inadequacies never stand alone. We are in partnership with God through Jesus Christ. His adequacy can overcome any shortcoming in our own lives.

“Dear Lord, you know all of my inadequacies today, but I do want to succeed for your honor and glory. Make me a stronger person today because of the adequacy of your presence. Amen.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: There are only two things I can do with my inadequacies in the light of Jesus’ prayer: (1) I can struggle with them, or (2) I can struggle against them by placing my faith in Jesus Christ. He desires that I succeed!

- Edward Rickman -

NOTES:

Romans 12:19-21

FOR A WHILE I THOUGHT LYING WAS A PRIVILEGE

I met the man, who lived many miles from me, over the telephone while working out the purchase of a home. He gave the impression that Christian faith was an important part of his life and eventually told me about his church. I knew it to be an excellent Bible teaching church because I had attended there several times while visiting friends in the city.

Soon after, this man who had identified himself as a brother in God's family, lied to me. The consequences of his lie created no financial gain or advantage for him, but made very costly problems for me. From the circumstances it was clear that his lie was deliberate and told with full awareness that it would create substantial problems for me. Then he "disappeared" from our transaction and assigned other people to finish the project.

Was I angry? Of course! Especially because it appeared that the lie had no purpose other than petty meanness, and that the frustrations it created for me would continue, if not increase. But the disruptions that came directly from his lie were not nearly as damaging to me as the torment created inside myself by the way I reacted to what he had done.

Here is what I found myself thinking: He lied to me. And now, instead of being punished, or at least stopped, he gets to continue to have his way, manipulate my life, and damage me.

As if it is a privilege to lie!

Then God let me see the corruption in my heart. What a nasty attitude I had toward that man! My response to his behavior was a murky, rancid, mix of spiritual arrogance ("I'm better than that") vengeance ("Hanging's too good for him") and envy ("Hey, how come he gets to lie and I have to tell the truth?").

Who was messed up? Perhaps both of us, but certainly my sins were plentiful!

I needed to learn where my frustration came from : Sure, some was from what he did or yet could do, but the real damage was from (1) my own sins of spitefulness and self-pity, and (2) my limited vision of God’s care over me.

A few months later I got a letter from the man’s former employer. He had been dismissed, the letter said, and they regretted that I had been hurt by his improper actions. “We are sorry that you were harmed and inconvenienced. Please accept our apologies and this check for \$500.”

It is integrity, not lying that is a privilege. The Lord hates lying (Proverbs 6: 16-19) but loves righteousness (Psalms 11). The Ten Commandments are not obstacles that we must work to get over or around, they are fences to protect us from plunging into trouble when sinful impulses seek to control us. When, with patience and self-control, we let God guide us in paths of righteousness, we most surely come to that time and place at God’s table and our cup will overflow (Psalms 23).

“Dear God, forgive my quickness to anger and vengeance, and my slowness to follow the patient and merciful ways in which you treat me when I am petty and dishonest in my relationship with you or with your people. Forgive my failure to be a doer of your word that I have been privileged to hear. Give me charity toward others as you have been charitable toward me in the many times I have been dishonest with you. In the name of Jesus, Amen.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: When I seek to take God’s job into my hands, I can only hurt myself.

- Richard Walters -

NOTES:

Philippians 4: 11; 1 Timothy 6: 6

ANYWHERE BUT HERE

He stood beside the 1-80 entrance near Green River, Wyoming, pack at side, with uplifted hand, and a sign that read ANYWHERE BUT HERE. He even smiled as we drove by in our heavy-laden vacation car. With the hundreds of travelers stopping at 'Little America' for food, fuel, and souvenirs, perhaps he soon found a ride to "anywhere."

As our car cruised westward and on into Utah and Nevada, I often thought of that sign - ANYWHERE BUT HERE.

Why "anywhere but here?" The desert-likeness, the strangeness even amidst many people, would indicate that "here" is not really my piece of apple pie. Of course, "here" was OK for the visitor like myself, or those employed in the vast complex of businesses in that area.

Paul had this "heres"! "*I have learned to be content, whatever the circumstances may be*"(Philippians 4: 11, Phillips). "*There is great gain in godliness with contentment*". (1 Timothy 6: 6)

I remarked to my brother Don, now retired after 23 years in the USAF, about his choosing to live in northern California. Part of his answer included the thought that wherever he was in the world - Louisiana, Texas, England, Georgia, or Vietnam - he tried to content himself, and make good in the situation where he was.

Back to the sign - ANYWHERE BUT HERE. Yet, there is an inner restlessness in all of us, in spite of the contentedness of where we live and what we do. Often in the writings of Paul we note this restlessness even when contented. He tells of his future plans to the Romans: "*I have so often been hindered from coming to you. But now, since I no longer have any room for work in these regions, and since I have longed for many years to come to you, I hope to see you in passing as I go to Spain, and to be sped on my journey there by you, once I have enjoyed your company for a little. At present, however, I am going to Jerusalem with aid for the saints*" (Romans 15: 22-25)

As Christians, we would not use the cardboard written sign - ANYWHERE BUT HERE - as our eternal destiny. Hell is certainly not the place, though many people choose this as their eternal abode. The follower of Christ is overbuilt for this world, and even for

the City of God. Heaven will be the eternal headquarters for Christ’s followers with opened doors into the vast regions of God’s universe. My eternal “anywhere” will become my “here” by the grace of God!

Yet, as a Christian makes his/her way from “here” (earth) to “there” (Heaven), “anywhere” with Christ will be a blessing. The hymnist has said: “Anywhere with Jesus will be home sweet home.” The “anywhere” can be a “here.” Here is where God wants me. Here is where I will serve the Lord. Here is my place of influence. Here is where by God’s grace I will serve, - contentedly.

“Dear Jesus, as I examine my life, I note the many villages you visited, the people you touched, the busyness of the days. Yet there always seemed to be a contentedness, for you came to do your Father’s will. Amen.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: If I believe that I am in the place where God has planned for me to be, then I can be content.

- Floyd Cooper -

NOTES:

Hebrews 10: 35-39

"HOLD ON TO YOUR CONFIDENCE"

Confidence is one of the most important virtues of our lives. I recall when I was learning to fly an airplane that there was a long period of learning which served to build up my confidence. There was always the underlying confidence that the instructor was sitting beside me in case I failed, but the day finally came when he got out and I had to prove my own confidence. But the greatest test came when I had gained some degree of confidence after having done several hours of solo work, and then the instructor was with me again to start a new process. We started doing crosswind landings. After a couple of crosswind landings where I received some help from the instructor, he said "This one you can do all by yourself." Unfortunately I did everything wrong. After bouncing the plane on the runway, I held too much right rudder and applied the right brake resulting in my veering off to the right of the runway where I stopped. My confidence was absolutely shattered! Stupid mistakes I never should have made. I was ready to quit. I wanted to hang it up.

One of the best things that could have happened to me was the insistence of the instructor: "No, let's go around again." We did and I succeeded in making a near perfect landing. Now there are many of us who go through experiences just like that, quite often in our lives. Many of those experiences cause us to cast aside our spiritual confidence instead of holding on to it. And the consequences of that can be a very frustrated Christian life. Sometimes it even leads to our giving up or being tempted to do so. There are many things that cause us to lose confidence. There are personal failures, temptation, and circumstances beyond our control. However, the primary cause of our losing confidence is the fact that we dwell on our failures rather than dwelling on our ability to overcome the circumstances of our lives. At those times, we remember that Jesus was tempted in all points like as we are yet without sin. He never lost confidence in the fact that He could be victorious. The word translated here as confidence is translated "boldness" in several other verses in Hebrews. Note Hebrews 4: 15: "For we have not an High Priest which cannot be touched with the feeling of our infirmities, but was in all points tempted like as we are yet without sin. Let us therefore come boldly or (with confidence) unto the throne of grace." Jesus Christ sympathizes with us when we are going through these temptations to give up or to turn loose. Don't do it. Jesus can help you to hold on to your confidence!

"Dear Lord, help me today to keep my confidence in you and not in my own abilities. Amen!"

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: There is always an escape from every temptation, and a way to overcome every obstacle that would tempt me to lose my confidence.

- Edward Rickman -

NOTES:

Deuteronomy 31: 1-8

OVERCOMING DISCOURAGEMENT THROUGH POSITIVE FAITH

I'm a suburban farmer. I enjoy slaving in the hot sun as I plow and plant and weed the field. It's just that my field or "back forty" is a plot of ground six feet wide by twenty some feet long. I had a lousy crop this summer. The peas never grew because something kept eating the leaves. We harvested three carrots, no cucumbers or beets, and the attempt at growing popcorn may have succeeded had we not had the early snow which broke the stalks. We did enjoy a few beans, onions, and tomatoes. There were at least one hundred tomatoes left on the vine when the freeze killed them. It was a discouraging year but thankful that my livelihood does not depend on my gardening skills.

Last weekend, as the sun showered its warm rays on my head, I pulled out the remaining weeds and dead plants and put some peat moss over the ground to prepare it for the next growing season. Even though I was discouraged with this year's crop, I have high expectations for next year. I guess I am an optimist.

It seems so easy to get discouraged. Discouragement produces despair and despair results in our failure to hold on to any hope. Discouragement and despair even creep into the garden of life. When that happens, we need to stand guard over our thoughts.

I finished a wonderful book this week: The Positive Power of Jesus Christ, by Dr. Norman Vincent Peale. Of this matter he said, "The mind, when in a downward spiral into negativism, tends to fight back against any attempt to reverse the process into a positive attitude. But always faith, if persevered in, proves stronger than doubt, greater than weakness."

Faith always is victorious. This is why I get excited about a garden for next year. I have faith that it will produce an abundance of vegetables. Why? Because God put the potential of growth into every single seed that is planted. Each individual seed has the power within itself to grow a plant that will produce to its maximum potential.

I also hold that faith for my life and for yours. God has placed within each of us the potential to live life to our fullest, despite setbacks and discouragements. With God, there is always another chance. Through Jesus, there is always hope for our future. The reason for our hope: faith! "With God, all things are possible." (Matthew 18: 26)

“Sometimes I get discouraged, Lord. Lift my head and show me that I can overcome all things by faith. Since nothing is impossible for You, Lord, I place my trust in You. Together we can get through anything. Jesus, I thank You for restoring my hope. In Your name, I pray. Amen.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: God is the God of second changes. We can always begin again!

- Thomas Duckworth -

NOTES:

Mark 10: 46-52

EXPECTATIONS

White with red lettering, the bumper sticker had been placed waist high on the door that led out of the Fellowship Hall. It had been bright and shiny when first placed there by some dreamer in the church. Over the years it had become worn and faded. For ten months I wondered about it. Who put it there? When was it put there? Why was it put there? Does anyone see it anymore? In the beginning it must have brought a spark of hope to the hearts of those who saw it. It seemed no one ever noticed it anymore as they brushed through the door, coming and going, forgetting or ignoring the vision that once captivated that church family. (Time has a way of doing that ... dulling the luster of a vision.)

The bumper sticker in question had three red-letter words on it EXPECT A MIRACLE! It was an inspiration to the life of faith, a challenge to the walk of faith. It was a reminder to raise the level of expectations, a testimony to the possibilities that exist whenever the believer's expectation and God's resources come together.

God welcomes the expectations of miracles. He does not consider such expectations foolish or presumptuous. He rewards them. It was a miracle the woman expected when she touched Jesus's robe (Mark 5). It was a miracle Bartimaeus expected when he cried out to Jesus in Jericho (Mark 10). It was a miracle the Centurion expected when his servant was ill (Matthew 8). It was a miracle the lepers expected when they appealed to Jesus for mercy (Luke 17). It was a miracle Peter expected when he stepped out of his boat and onto the water (John 6). On and on we could go and add the regarded expectations of ourselves and others.

Life is lived at the level of our expectations. We make investments of time, energy, and resources with certain expectations in mind. To live without expectations is to live without purpose; to live without expectations is to live without hope. For the most part our expectations are tepid, as though we are afraid to push the boundary of ordinary expectations. In *Through A Looking Glass*, Lewis Carroll has this brief exchange between Alice and the queen:

"There's no use trying", said Alice. "One can't believe impossible things."

"I daresay you haven't had much practice," said the queen.

"When I was your age I always did it for half an hour a day. Why, sometimes I've believed as many as six impossible things before breakfast."

How many impossible things have you believed lately? God specializes in things thought impossible. There is no “OUT OF BUSINESS” sign over His miracle work shop. He is open for business and ready to take your order.

“Dear God, assist me to see the things believed impossible through the lens of persistent faith.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: “A man’s reach should exceed his grasp or what’s a heaven for.” (Robert Browning)

- William Jenkins -

NOTES:

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1. Have you ever experienced a time when you allowed your "feelings" to dictate your life rather than allowing "faith" to do so? What are the consequences which one incurs when he falls victim to following the dictates of his "feelings"? If living by faith rather than by feelings is the "key" to a victorious Christian life, share what you have done to "develop faith" rather than to "surrender to your strong feelings" which challenge your life of faith. Share your personal response and interpretation of the following 'verse':**

**"Three men were walking on a wall,
FEELING, FAITH and FACT.
Feeling got an awful fall,
And Faith was taken back.
Faith was so close to feeling,
He fell too,
BUT FACT REMAINED and pulled Faith up,
And that brought Feeling too.
I feel just as good when I don't feel good,
as I do when I do feel good,
for I don't run on Feeling after all!"**

- 2. When accepting an "assignment" (appointment) to a "ministry responsibility", have you ever felt very inadequate (unprepared and untrained and inexperienced)? What did you do to deal with your feelings of inadequacy?**
- 3. What "compliment" did Jesus give to His disciples when He gave them "The Great Commission" (Matthew 28:19-20), just before Jesus returned to Heaven? How did Jesus plan to prepare His disciples (who felt so inadequate) for their overwhelming responsibility? (Note Acts 1: 4-8; 2: 1-4)**
- 4. Share a time (occasion) in your experience (as a follower of Christ) when you felt that you were empowered by the indwelling Holy Spirit to accomplish a task (i.e., a ministry "assignment") which you realized that, through your own strength and "natural abilities", you would not be able to accomplish.**
- 5. When a "fellow human being" (or even a "professing Christian") has greatly disappointed you by "betraying your trust" how have you reacted or responded? What steps have you taken to restore confidence and trust in your "fellow human beings" and particularly in a "Christian Brother" who has hurt or betrayed you?**

- 6. Tell with what degree of conviction you agree (or disagree) with the following statement: "The Ten Commandments are not obstacles that we must work to get over or around; they are fences to protect us from plunging into trouble when sinful impulses seek to control us."**
- 7. Practically speaking, what do you think it means for a Christian to be "content", whatever his circumstances may be? (Note Philippians 4: 11) Give your "interpretation" and "illustration" of the following Scriptural statement: "There is great gain in godliness with contentment" (I Timothy 6: 6).**
- 8. What is the Christian's "secret" to finding "contentment", regardless of where he lives and where he works, and regardless of conditions which surround him? Have you personally learned to "bloom where you are planted"? Is it ever "right" for a Christian to feel inwardly "restless"? If so, when and for what "holy purpose"? (Note Romans 15: 22-26)**
- 9. Do you believe that "confidence" is one of the most important virtues that a Christian can possess? Why or why not? How can you distinguish between "wholesome confidence" and "sinful pride"? When you repeatedly "fail" in your attempts to perform a worthy task or a spiritual ministry, what can you do to "hold on to your confidence" rather than to yield to your discouragement and quit? (Note Hebrews 4: 15; 10: 35-39)**
- 10. While "living life" and "confronting life's challenges", why is it so easy for Christians to become discouraged and to be tempted to "throw in the towel" (quit)? What are some of the destructive consequences of succumbing to discouragement?**
- 11. Tell what you have personally done to reverse your downward spiral into negative thinking, during your times of great discouragement.**
- 12. Tell to what extent you believe (or disbelieve) the following statements: "God has placed within each of us the potential to live life to our fullest, despite setbacks and discouragement. With God, there is always another chance. Through Jesus, there is always hope for our future."**

CHAPTER THREE

TREAT YOURSELF HONESTLY

**Philippians 2: 12-13; Matthew 6: 9-13;
Matthew 11: 28-30**

TIRED OF THE SAME OLD PEANUT-BUTTER SANDWICHES

This morning I needed a roll of duct tape I knew was somewhere in the kitchen or utility room. I scrambled through cupboard after cupboard, drawer after drawer, most of them in a state of general disorganization. I found the tape, but only after considerable frustration and further disorganization. I thought, ‘If I had a place for everything, I’d have saved a lot of time and energy. I could change all of this if I would.’

I remembered the story about two men who brought their lunches to work each day and ate together at noon. One day the first man opened his bag, took out a sandwich, looked at it disgustedly, and said, “Oh! Peanut-butter sandwiches again. I hate them!” His friend commented, “If you don’t like peanut-butter sandwiches, why don’t you have your wife make some other kind for your lunch?” “My wife?” replied the first man, “Why, I make my own lunches!”

I thought of the many areas of my life I’d like to have different - my “peanut-butter sandwiches” - and realized that only I could change them. My habit of sleeping until the last possible moment each morning, my tendency to eat things (sweets and junk food) which give my body a hard time, the correspondence that waits to be answered, the extra pounds I carry. These are all “peanut-butter sandwiches” to me.

God had led me to work at changing some of these into “other kinds of sandwiches.” Habits are strong, but change is possible. Here are steps to help you: (1) Recognize what can be different in your life according to what you believe God wants for you; (2) Decide what you must do to make these changes occur; (3) Make a conscious choice to do what you know is necessary in order to get the kinds of “sandwiches” you want; (4) Set up a way to keep track of whether or not you are doing what is necessary to get those “other kinds of sandwiches.” (Be accountable to someone; prepare a chart or graph to note when you are doing what you have set out to do; regularly evaluate how you’re doing.) (5) Reward yourself, both short and long term, each time you do what you decided to do. Punishing yourself for not doing it is negative and detrimental to your change program. You’ll get along better if you reward your successes and ignore your failures (except to analyze what went wrong); (6) Talk to yourself in encouraging ways. Remember that God loves you and wants what is best for you but that you do, in fact, “make your own sandwiches,” and you can make any kind you choose.

“All powerful God, I thank you for the dignity with which You treat me as a person who is created with a free will, rather than as a robotic creature whom You mechanically control! I am thankful that You will never use Your divine power to force me to change

my ‘bad’ habits, but I ask You, loving Father, to give me the desire to change and the power to change my negative behavior, that I might bring glory to You and benefit to those around me. Thank You! Amen.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: In spite of the ‘pain’ that accompanies behavioral changes, the ultimate joy of becoming more like Jesus in my behavior and my attitudes is the greatest joy known to a human being!

- Kay Kline -

NOTES:

Matthew 6: 25-34

OVERCOMING THE ENEMY OF WORRY

I’m a perpetual worrier. Believe me, there is no happiness in worry. To make matters worse, I once read that it is a sin to worry because, if you worry you are not trusting God. I now worry about being worried. Although I believe God has fully forgiven all of my sins because of my faith in Jesus Christ, I still worry. I trust Him, yet I still worry.

Psychologists may disagree, but I have concluded that worry is a result of a threat to our personal happiness. As long as the conditions surrounding my life are favorable, I am happy. But let one little thing go wrong (something that seems to be out of my ability to control) and I will worry about it.

For example, I could not sleep last night because I was worried about something which had gone wrong in my business. Although I had thought through all of the “possible scenarios” and concluded what my response would be in any given possibility, I still was worried. At three o’clock in the morning, it was beyond my control. Yet after two quick phone calls in the morning and one brief meeting, the issue was resolved. I am happy again!

As long as my happiness is dependent upon my circumstances, I will be a perpetual worrier. I cannot control all of my situations. Inevitably, something is going to go wrong. Worry is never productive; it is always destructive. If I am correct in saying that worry is a result of a threat to my happiness, instead of trying to not worry, I should be concentrating on what truly causes happiness.

Here are a few things which I am discovering produce happiness: 1) Believing in who I am, not in what I ought to be or what I feel others think I ought to be. 2) Knowing that who I am is far greater than what I do. 3) Developing positive relationships instead of striving for personal advancement. 4) Knowing God loves me despite my faults. 5) Accepting God’s unconditional love for me. 6) Passing on that unconditional love to others.

Perhaps it would be best left unsaid, but “don’t worry—be happy!”

“If happiness were determined by me, O what a wreck I would be, Lord. Thank You for being there to hear my every plea. Thank You for understanding every worry that I carry in my heart. Most of all, thank You, Father, for being the solution to every worry. As I seek You, I know I will find You and all that You have planned for me. In Christ’s name. Amen.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: When I can't...GOD can.

- Thomas Duckworth -

NOTES

Matthew 6: 25-34; John 14: 1-7; Philippians 4: 4-7

EYES OF FAITH

Why worry?

Much of my life has been an exercise in perpetual worry. I tend to scan the horizon, checking out every possible turn of events to determine what might go wrong. Then I begin to worry that it will go wrong. This has been such a life pattern that I now catch myself feeling a bit uneasy if I don't have something to worry about. My mind automatically begins to roam: Will there be enough money to go around? Are the kids in good health? Am I? Is my husband? Will the cake fall? The ceiling crack? The car rust? Will it blizzard? Blow? Flood? And, if all else fails, are the plants looking kind of sickly?

Yesterday at lunch I said to my husband, Bruce, "I don't do much worrying anymore, probably not enough!" We began to laugh, for we had just been discussing the negative effects of worry. Somewhere I had picked up the idea that worry is one way of taking care of things.

The concerns which can bloom into worry are often legitimate and have their roots in the sensible acts of looking ahead and making adequate preparation. However, such thinking can turn into negative future expectation. For me, this is a destructive and sinful way of life. Why? Because worry is fear, and fear is inverted faith. It is faith in evil instead of in good and in God (perfect love casts out fear).

Worry visualizes undesirable future events and, by so doing creates an expectation in the mind. As a result of this negative expectation, one begins to act in ways consistent with that result, and, in reality, helps to bring it about by dwelling on it. Some call this the "self-fulfilling prophecy."

In contrast, Jesus says, "Don't be anxious about tomorrow. God will take care of your tomorrow too. Live one day at a time" (Matthew 6: 34, Living Bible). Paul further advises, "Don't fret or worry. Instead of worrying, pray. Let petition and praises shape your worries into prayers, letting God know your concerns. Before you know it, a sense of God's wholeness, everything coming together for good, will come and settle you down. It's wonderful what happens when Christ displaces worry at the center of your life." (Philippians 4: 6-7, Message New Testament)

I am exerting my will to replace worry with faith: positive expectation and visualization rather than negative. I am seeing some things with the eyes of faith. I am believing, expecting, and trusting God through Christ to guide my desires and use my energies -

mental, physical, and spiritual. I am listening to His voice, practicing the sense of His touch and presence. And I’m making progress. How about you?

“Lord, You have everything in this world under Your ‘perfect control’. Without escaping my personal responsibility to work, plan, and organize my life, enable me to ‘cast all my cares on You, knowing that you care for me’. Help me to be positive-minded, faith-filled, trusting, and deeply contented to live one day at a time. Thank you! Amen.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: When I am tempted to worry, I will turn my ‘worry energy’ into ‘prayer energy’.

- Kay Kline -

NOTES:

John 8: 31-32; Psalm 51; 11 Timothy 1: 12-14

SOMATIZING

‘Somatize’ is a word sometimes used by psychotherapists meaning roughly, “To manifest in the body emotions otherwise blocked off from conscious experience.”

In the fall of 1975, the fourth of our five offsprings left for college. It was a happy time, but inside I knew I would miss this daughter and special friend deeply. I did miss her and for several days after he left, I often felt like crying. I went about my work and dismissed my feelings.

One evening, not long after, I walked by her room and noticed its emptiness. A little later I felt a lump in my throat. It was as if I needed to cry but couldn’t get it out. Later when I did cry, the lump still wouldn’t go away. I could feel it; not enough to keep me from swallowing or talking, but it was always there. I began to be afraid.

I told my husband what was happening and he suggested I seek a doctor. Since I felt normal otherwise, I hesitated, hoping it would go away. I gave myself six weeks; if it was still there, I would see the doctor. It was, and I did. Horrible specters of tumors and goiters filled my mind. I was anxious and very fearful about what he would find.

My doctor, a sincere Christian man, examined me carefully and thoroughly. Then he said, “Kay, you don’t have a physical lump in your throat. You have what is medically called ‘hysteria’ or ‘womb in the throat’. What’s been going on in your life?”

I related the events of the past two months including the “emptying nest.” It became clear that my unconscious way of dealing with that change and loss was to Somatize. My body was giving me a message about emotions which could not surface into my conscious mind. The doctor replied that this symptom is not unusual for a “woman of my age.” He said, “It’s the kind of thing people feel embarrassed to talk about, so it doesn’t get discussed much.”

I responded, “Well I’m going to talk about it. I’ll tell anyone I think is interested.” He laughed, offered me a mild tranquilizer (which I refused), and sent me on my way with his good wished.

The lump didn’t go away very soon, but now I knew what it was, and my fear was relieved. I could accept my “Somatizing.” I determined to unblock some of the emotion which had caused the lump. It took some sessions with a therapist to get the process going, for I had been blocking off a lot of my feelings - joyful as well as painful. Somewhere I had learned a common but unhealthy lesson: “Don’t let your feelings out.” Over the years, this had come to mean, “Don’t even feel your feelings.”

“I hereby give all my conscious and unconscious guilt, resentment, fear, and all other negative emotions to You, my Heavenly Father, through Jesus Christ. I thank You for loving, accepting, and forgiving me. I love, accept, and forgive myself in Jesus’ name.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Because I have placed my life within the ‘palm of God’s loving Hand’, I will not be afraid to express my deep feeling of loss and grief to my God.

- Kay Kline -

NOTES

**Ephesians 2: 8-10; Ephesians 4: 22-24;
Luke 6: 36-38; Psalm 103: 1-5**

CHOOSE TO FORGIVE YOURSELF

She sat across from me in the little counseling room looking downcast and troubled. Her story spewed out in pain and regret. She related incident after incident, venting a grief which seemed endless. When tears finally came and the cleansing process was well on its way, I asked her, “Do you believe that God forgives you?” She looked up, surprised and startled, “Yes, but it doesn’t seem to make any difference,” she answered. “It’s awful.”

It was awful. Seeking the tenderness of a father’s love, she had gone to bed with man after man, only to experience disappointment and guilt over and over. She had claimed God’s forgiveness, but was still tormented by her memories.

I asked her one simple question: “You believe that God has forgiven you, but have you forgiven yourself?” Her face reflected a series of fleeting emotions that settled into serious wonder. “No,” she answered. “And I cannot do that.”

“Ah...,” I answered, “You know something God does not know? You have some responsibility to continue punishing yourself when He, your Maker, says you are forgiven? What does this mean?”

“But it’s too awful. I can’t forgive myself.”

“Can’t:” I replied. “Please change the word ‘can’t to ‘don’t choose to’, and repeat that statement.”

Slowly she spoke. “It’s too awful. I don’t...choose...to forgive myself.”

“Then you choose to block God’s forgiveness,” I reminded her. “For His own prayer states, ‘Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive those who trespass against us.’ Remember that since you broke your own rules as well as God’s ...trespassed against yourself, your conscience...you are in need of forgiving yourself. If you don’t choose to forgive yourself, you will only continue to suffer the consequences of misery and guilt which brought you here.”

She began to cry once more, agonized tears of shame and bitterness. But when I invited her to repeat after me, “Because God loves and forgives me through Christ, I forgive myself,” an expression of wonder and joy suffused her face. Her eyes, so full of hurt and hopelessness, took on the glow of realization. This simple act of saying and meaning those words freed God’s Spirit to hear her.

“Heavenly Father, if you are able and willing to forgive me all of my sins because of your Son’s all-sufficient sacrifice on the Cross, then I know it is only ‘right’ and ‘proper’ that I forgive myself. For Jesus’ sake, I gratefully choose to forgive myself! Thank you that your forgiving love enables me to be free from all self-condemnations.

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: God forgive me through Christ; therefore, I forgive myself!

- Kay Kline -

NOTES:

**II Peter 1: 2-9; Galatians 6: 4-5;
Romans 5: 18-21; 6: 22-23**

GIVE YOURSELF PERMISSION

Five ministers’ wives came for coffee one Tuesday afternoon. Their husbands were in town for a three-week continuing-education seminar. The women had driven in to spend the weekend and then accompany their husbands back home.

One of the wives mentioned that she had never before left their two daughters and gone away with her husband. She admitted she had felt very uncertain about leaving for the weekend and had carefully considered the matter before making arrangements to be gone.

“How do you feel about it now?” I asked her.

“Oh, I’m just having a wonderful time,” she replied. “I know everything is all right, and I don’t feel a bit guilty for leaving them.”

The woman sitting next to her had been listening intently and now began to bubble and exclaim, “You gave yourself permission! You gave yourself permission!”

Then she added, “If you hadn’t given yourself permission, you’d be anxious and worried about whether things are okay. You’d probably feel guilt, too, and ruin it for your husband.”

I think she was right. It’s just like forgiveness. God forgives me through Christ, but I tend to forget that I must also forgive myself. God gives me permission to do many things, and His Spirit tries to guide me to do them; but I sometimes fail to give myself permission. If I go ahead without first seeking guidance and appropriating my permission, I’ll feel uneasy, fretful, and I’ll worry about what might happen. If I do not go ahead, I’ll probably sit at home feeling dejected, left out, and sorry for myself.

if I take my courage and His Word, search for His will and then give myself permission to act on it, good things result.

“Loving Heavenly Father, it is my strong desire to allow You to fill the ‘cup’ of my life with Your blessings and an abundance of meaningful life experiences. Help me not to ‘run from life and from people’, but instead to closely follow You. For you are the Fountain of all Life. You have given me ‘all things richly to enjoy’, so please enable me to enjoy all of life’s rich and wonderful experiences. In Jesus’ name. Amen.

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Blessed is the follower of Jesus Christ who does not condemn himself for his involvement with those things that God allows!

- Kay Kline -

Luke 12: 6, 7

THE FIFTH SPARROW

Have you ever had one of those days when you felt totally worthless? Days when you couldn't do anything right and whatever you thought was right wasn't? Perhaps the better question would be when was the last time you had such a day? All of us ride on the roller coaster of self-esteem, going from exhilarating highs to heart-stopping lows. It is at the low place, when we feel totally worthless and completely incompetent that we need some assurance. I recently found such an assurance in the mathematical mix-up between Matthew 10: 29 and Luke 12: 6.

Matthew and Luke are telling the same story from the life of Jesus and quoting his words accurately except that Matthew has Jesus say, “*Are not tow sparrows sold for a penny?*” While Luke has Jesus say, “*Are not five sparrows sold for two pennies?*”

As far as the price at the supermarket is concerned, both are correct. You would expect that if two sold for one, then four would sell for two; however, like the baker's dozen, an extra one is thrown in for free. Sparrows were so cheap and insignificant that the vendor would give a fifth one as a bonus if you bought four. At least the first four had some value attached to them.

It is that fifth sparrow that encourages me in my lowest moments. It was so cheap, so insignificant, so worthless, and amounted to so little. Then follows the glorious transition in both Matthew and Luke, “*And yet...*” (Don't you just love the way the Bible turns things around at what seems the most devastating moment?) *And yet not one is forgotten before God.*” Not the first one, or the second one, or the third one, or the fourth one, or the next-to-nothing, existence of the fifth sparrow is forgotten before God. Even the sparrow that had no value to the world was valuable to God.

Jesus wants us to see and understand that if God cares about the fifth sparrow, how much more does he care about, know about, or fuss over us? Think about that the next time you feel really low.

“Dear God, help me today to claim my worth to You.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: I will not put a smile on Satan's face by diminishing my estimate before God.

- William Jenkins -

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. **Do you have personal "habits" or "practices" in your life, causing you considerable frustration in loss of energy and time and motivation, which you wish you could "change?" What "steps" do you think you will have to take in your life if these "hurtful habits" are going to be "broken?" Do you honestly believe that, although "bad habits" are strong, change is possible for you? Put a check beside the following "guidelines" (which are suggested in helping a person to break "old habits" and to form new patterns of behavior) that you think would be beneficial to you personally:**

_____ a. **Recognize what can be different in your life according to what you believe God wants for you.**

_____ b. **Decide what you must do to make these changes occur.**

_____ c. **Make a conscious choice to do what you know is necessary in order to get the kinds of "changes" in your life that you desire.**

_____ d. **Set up a way to keep track of whether or not you are doing what is necessary to develop "new habits" to replace the "old habits" in your life.**

_____ e. **Reward yourself, both short-term and long-term, each time you do what you decide to do to bring positive change in your life.**

_____ f. **Talk to yourself in encouraging ways to continue to reinforce your self in your ongoing pursuits to build “new” and “helpful habits” in your life.**

2. **Do you believe it is a "sin" to worry? Why or why not? (Note Matthew 6:25-34)**

3. **Do you believe that "worry" is a result of a threat to your personal happiness?**

4. **Put a check beside those following statements which you believe describe "true happiness," defined from a Biblical perspective:**

_____ a. **Believing in who I am, not in what I ought to be or what I feel others think I ought to be.**

_____ b. **"Doing my own thing." when I want to, without the imposition of external restraints from others.**

- _____ c. **Indulging in every "fantasy" through the expenditure of much money on houses and cars and lands and clothes and vacations and food and recreation.**
 - _____ d. **Knowing that who I am is far greater than what I do.**
 - _____ e. **Exercising great talents which bring me the acclaims of society and personal advancement in my profession and career.**
 - _____ f. **Developing positive relationships instead of striving for personal advancement.**
 - _____ g. **Knowing God loves me despite my faults.**
 - _____ h. **Accepting God's unconditional love for me.**
 - _____ i. **Concentrating on making other people happy, by sharing my time and talents and counsel and material resources with others.**
 - _____ j. **Sharing the "Good News" with others that God loves them greatly and that He desires to give them new life and hope through Jesus Christ.**
- 5. Is it possible for one to be "full of worry" and, at the same time, to be "full of love for God and others"? Why or why not?**
 - 6. Is it ever 'beneficial' (constructive) to worry? Why or why not? Why do some people think that worry is "one way of taking care of things"? How can you personally "discern" when you have "crossed the line" from legitimate and responsible "concern" for others (and their 'burdens'), and hurtful "worry" about others?**
 - 7. Tell with what degree of 'conviction' you agree (or disagree) with the following statements: "Worry is fear, and fear is inverted faith. To worry is to put faith in 'evil' instead of in 'good' and in God."**
 - 8. As it relates to the 'dynamics' of Worry, describe what is meant by the "self-fulfilling prophecy".**
 - 9. When you are tempted to be full of worry and anxiety-ridden regarding 'dark external circumstances', what (according to Philippians 4: 6-7) should you do?**

- 10. Are you learning to be deeply contented to “live one day at a time”?**
- 11. Describe what is meant, medically-speaking, by ‘hysteria’ or ‘womb in the throat’.**
- 12. Why is it dangerous for a person to suppress or to deny his “feelings” - joyful feelings or sorrowful feelings?**
- 13. Why is it ‘foolish’ and ‘hurtful’ for a person to continue to punish himself for his own past wrong doings (sins), after he has sincerely confessed his sins in true repentance to God?**
- 14. When God often gives you “permission” to do certain enjoyable things (activities, hobbies, recreation, etc.), why do you sometimes fail to give yourself “permission” to involve yourself in those “activities” and legitimate pursuits? Why do you tend to condemn yourself? If God has given you “all things richly to enjoy” in life, why do you (as a Christian) find it so difficult to fully “embrace” life with all of its joys and laughter and pleasures and happiness?**
- 15. Why is it so easy for Christians (like yourself) to ride the “roller coaster” of self-esteem, going from exhilarating ‘highs’ to heart-stopping ‘lows’? How does Jesus’ parable of the ‘Fifth Sparrow’ (Luke 12: 6-7) encourage you during times when you feel insignificant, incompetent, and even ‘worthless’?**

CHAPTER FOUR
HANDLE LIFE POSITIVELY

Matthew 12: 43-45; Psalm 19: 14; Philippians 4: 8

SET A GUARD AT YOUR MIND’S DOOR

Have you heard a good joke lately? Can you remember the punch line? Down through the years, I have heard many jokes that I cannot remember. However, there is one joke I heard as a teenager that I wish I could forget. I have analyzed why I remember it in every detail. When I heard it, I was very impressionable. It was a very graphic to all my senses.

Down through the years, at the strangest times, in the most unusual circumstances, that joke kept coming to my mind. It was a real battle for me, at such times, not to rehearse its every detail in my mind. However, I would never repeat it aloud to anyone. I hated the loathsome thing. I would never poison another mind with it.

Finally, while reading Matthew 12: 45, the victory came to me. When an evil spirit had been driven out, the unoccupied house had been swept clean and put in order. Then the evil spirit brought in seven other spirits more wicked than itself to live there. I realized that it is not enough to clean my mind of filth, but I needed to fill that emptiness with something clean, refreshing and inspiring. I prayed, “Lord, please give me a substitution to replace those thoughts.”

the words of beautiful hymn flooded my mind, “My Jesus I love thee. I know thou art mine. For thee all the follies of sin I resign.” I claimed those words, as a wonderful gift from God. Now, whenever that joke (because it is still imbedded in my memory), or any other thought I do not want to entertain, invades my mind, I switch over to “My Jesus, I love thee.” Praise God, it works! I highly recommend this method for anyone. Overcoming the evil by replacing it with good, holy, pure thoughts is a key to Christian growth. Find a song or a verse of scripture that becomes part of your tongue, stored in your heart, and imbedded in your mind.

Our thoughts feed on the things that have been hidden in your hearts. Although you may have difficulty remembering all the references, you can no doubt quote word for word many verses that you memorized as a little child. That is a good incentive to teach verses, even whole chapters to our children. Families can memorize not only the words, but the meanings of the verses as they are quoted to one another.

Each of our children earned their way to camp when they were in the Junior Department. First Baptist Church in Cedar Rapids, Iowa, paid their camp tuition for learning one hundred Bible verses, such as the Lord’s Prayer, Psalm 91 and John 3. Philippians 4: 8 exhorts us to think on things that are true, honest, just, pure, lovely, and of good report. We must first plant such thoughts in our minds and hearts. We can control our thoughts, but it is by choice and selection. Set a guard at your mind’s door,

a filter through which stories, jokes, and thoughts must be filtered before they are allowed to become residents.

“Let the words of my mouth and the meditations of my mind be acceptable in your sight, oh Lord. Help me often to utilize the substitution song you have given me.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: I will laugh and rejoice over happy thoughts and songs God gives me. I will set a guard at my mind’s door so unclean thoughts cannot enter, take root and grow.

- Laura Drewer -

NOTES:

II Samuel 12: 11 Chronicles 7: 14

INDIFFERENCE PUTS BLINDERS ON OUR CHRISTIAN EYES

Our nation was in great pain, as a result of a sex scandal involving our President (the last years of the 20th century). The whole world focused on the investigation and detailed real life soap opera. However, whether he was guilty or innocent really was not the greatest issue facing the country. Our ship was struck but the tip of an iceberg.

The shocking reaction from the people reveals the true cancer which is destroying our nation from within. People were either waiting with itching ears for every detail of the dirty laundry or they were displaying an attitude of total indifference. Even Christians were hard to report that everyone else was saying: “Who cares? We need to be tolerant. His sex life is his own business. It is not interfering with his job. It is not illegal. It’s no big deal. It happens all the time. So what? Forget it and let’s get on with more important things.” We are only deceiving ourselves. Red lights should flash and emergency whistles sound. But we ignore it and return to making daisy chains.

How should Bible-believing Christians react to publicly proclaimed defiance of God’s principles? What message is our children receiving when their role models, the leaders of our nation, sin and the people wink at it? Some parents find it difficult to instruct their children in God’s standards because of sexual sins in their own lives. They may have confessed to God and are forgiven, but their past has become an obstacle to their Christian growth and their confidence to teach their own children.

Today, by ignoring God’s plan and exhibiting an attitude of tolerance and indifference toward sinful sexual relationships, we are reaping the tragic results which plague every community: sexually active teenagers, abortions, unmarried girls giving birth, school dropouts, children raising children, poverty, child abuse, pornography, prostitution, battered women, divorce, adultery, homosexual relationships, rape and on, and on.

The Bible is full of stories of sexual sin. However, unlike the indifferent spirit of today, people then reacted with intolerance. The law was very clear that a man and woman should be stoned. However, when a woman caught in the very act was brought to Jesus, He forgave her and said, “*Go and sin no more.*” His counsel was positive.

Love, counsel, and forgiveness have to start at home. If your past has become an obstacle in your path to serving God, repent and receive His free forgiveness. Then rise up and teach your family God’s principles. Reach out in our community and see what you can do to prevent tolerance of sexual sins.

The million men with the ‘Promise Keepers’ movement who met in Washington D.C., in 1998, repenting of their own sins, and crying out in prayer to God for their nation,

now need to rise up as one man, standing in the gap and say, “We care! Adultery is wrong!” They need to form a group called Men Against Sexual Sins. When a man and a woman are joined in marriage before God and many witnesses, a promise is given, a vow is taken, and a contract is signed “Forsaking all others, I will keep myself for you alone as long as we both shall live.” Sex belongs in marriage alone. Period. Sex is God’s wedding present to that couple and it is beautiful.

“Father, please forgive our indifference to the instructions you have given us in the Bible. Restore our nation to obedience to you. Heal our land.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: America will again be known as a Christian nation because Christians will rise up and stand against the wrong by speaking out for the right.

- Laura Drewer -

NOTES:

Genesis 15: 1-6

THE LARGER OUTLOOK

Three times before that day in the tent, God had spoken to Abram about descendants (Genesis 12: 2, 7; 13: 15-16). They would be as numerous as "the dust of the earth." There in the tent, limited in vision, physically and in faith, with childlessness as the focal point of Abram's thoughts, God comes the fourth time to him and promises: "I am your shield; your reward shall be great." Most of us would have accepted that statement and would have gone merrily on our way. Not Abram. He was interested in something more tangible and visual of what God had promised. "Remember, God, the promises about descendants!" His was a maturing faith.

Knowing that an object lesson rather than a myriad of words would be more effective "He (God) brought him (Abram) outside and said, 'Look toward heaven, and number the stars if you are able to number them ... So shall your descendants be.'"

Tents are rather confining, limited in vision and movement. Our family had a tent in the camping experiences in the Black Hills (SD); Jackson Hole country (WY); and other places. But oh, how the horizons expanded, and sight stretched away into infinity when we stepped OUTSIDE.

OUTSIDE the tent that night Abram looked into the heavens. How long he stood and pondered, we know not. Even though he did not understand everything, he would trust God. He folded the tent of unbelief, laid it aside, and lived in the "OUTSIDE".

We need the tent from time to time. Those segments of confinement and inside-ness, closeted. The closet is needful. Difficulties tend to limit our vision; they become the focal point and burden of our thinking, shutting out the total view of life. So God comes and speaks: "Let's go OUTSIDE!" We do, and there hand in hand with God as we silently view the picture in its totality, the difficulties of life come into proper focus.

The unknown presses on every side, limiting our vision. The 'what if?' questions come from the corners of our crowded mind; - but then, the realization of our commitment to God that He does all things well, enables the vision to clear.

Our work, so burdensome and intense at times, gives rise to a heaviness settling upon our spirits. Then OUTSIDE in the total context, we recognize this particular issue is a part of the whole.

Problems press the soul. Questions come. What? Why? How? Why? Once OUTSIDE in light of the larger outlook, we recognize that God gives enabling grace.

At the point of our test vision God reveals Himself, faith is strengthened. All things come into proper perspective when OUTSIDE, by faith we look up. A tent limits vision; OUTSIDE, the enlarged vision gives hope and clarity.

“So often, our Father, the cares and frustrations of life press us down, even into a corner. But you come and invite us to go OUTSIDE. What a change! Amen.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: God enabling me, I will not allow life’s burdens to limit my vision. Instead, I will place all things in the context of God’s will, and trust.

- Floyd Cooper -

NOTES:

Philippians 4: 4-9

THE IMPORTANCE OF THINKING AND ACTING POSITIVELY

Everyone who reads has their favorite authors and subjects. Currently, Max Lacado is my preferred writer. As for favorite subjects, anything on the grace of God, or any uplifting, positive books grab my attention.

I am presently reading one of the ‘positive thinking’ books which a friend recommended to me. It is very good and more realistic than many of the other similar type books I have read. This particular author emphasizes the importance of focusing on the positive in any given circumstance. Regardless how terrible the situation may be.

While reading this book at the car repair shop (because I had lost some radiator fluid in my Honda) I had the opportunity to put the author’s words into practice. “Oh, my,” the mechanic said. He has known me for quite some time, so I knew something serious was happening. “I’m afraid you have a crack in your radiator.”

“O.K., Tom,” I thought, “now’s your chance to put this positive focusing into effect.” Taking a quick assessment of my situation I became thankful that the car had not broken down and the highway. It was a beautiful day. There was fine music playing in the background and I had a good book in my hands. I was ready for the next step.

Calmly, I inquired about the expense of replacing the radiator. “Let’s see,” he responded, as he opened a notebook to look up the answer. After stepping over to his calculator he declared, “that’ll be \$350.00!” Think fast, Tom” a voice said in my head. The only thing that came to mind were the words of a friend who often declares, “It could be worse!” Again I focused on the positive. It could have cost a lot more. I trust the mechanic’s judgment and his work. It is only a main or setback and I would get a new radiator.

After we negotiated the price I headed home and they made the necessary repairs. I felt very good about the situation and myself. Perhaps that is why the Apostle Paul wrote, “*Whatever is true...noble...right...pure...lovely...admirable - if anything is excellent or praiseworthy - think about such things*” (Philippians 4: 8). Focusing on the positive is God’s way for us to deal with personal trials. It keeps us from feeling defeated, and gives us courage and hope. Despite the cost, I feel pretty good about this problem. Beside, since I have now written about the experience, it has become a \$300 tax write-off! Praise the Lord! There is always a positive side!

“You are so good to me, God. How I love You! Keep my mind and my heart set on You and I will always trust You. No matter what challenge or difficult decision I face today, I will do so with confidence, for You are with me. Thank You, Jesus! Amen.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: With God, all things are possible.

- Thomas Duckworth -

NOTES:

Philippians 3: 12-14

THE UPWARD CALL

An artist once drew a picture of a busy street filled with fast-moving vehicles and eager faced men and women all going toward the sun rising - all save one. One lone man, stooped in form and despairing in attitude, was going in the opposite direction. Under the picture of the lonely man were the words, "Looking For Yesterday." The upward call was lost to him.

Not so with Paul of the New Testament. From a Roman prison he writes: "I press on toward the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Christ Jesus." Pressing on? For a prize? While in jail? Paul recognized that the spirit of man could not be bound though his body may be shackled to two guards. He could still soar by the wings of faith and imagination beyond the man-made limitations to God-beckoning horizons. God was calling him on and upward.

John A.T. Borinson in The End God, says that God is "the One who comes to us 'from the end,' that is, from ahead of us in history, beckoning us onward at the moving edges of growth and commitment. 'He is not here ... He is going before you.'" Do you catch those significant words - "going before you"?

A picture: There is a path leading upward being traversed by a father and his young son. The boy is tired, ready to give up, but struggles onward, anyway. But the father lovingly and encouragingly says: "Come on, you can make it; you can! You can!" and then takes him by the hand. Thus God patiently speaks to us.

C. William Fisher in the preface to Don't Park Here! speaks in a way about the horizontal plane of life: "Life is a way, a road, a thoroughfare - not a parking lot. Life is a gym - not a rest home. Life is a school - not a cemetery. Life is an arena - not a bleacher seat. Life is for movement, for development, for struggle, for growth" (p. 9).

Writing of God's initial call to leave a life of sin, A.W. Tozer in Man: The Dwelling Place of God, writes: "He (Christ) calls us to leave the old life and to begin the new. There must never be any vacuum, never any place of neutrality, where the world cannot identify us". (p. 14)

But beyond life's horizontal moment, and the initial call and response to leave the life of self and sin, there is the underlying, upward call of God to the one desiring God's will and way in his/her life. God's call is on an ascending plane. Indeed, the valleys of service and sacrifice are present in following the call of God. Even in these and the "down times" of life, there is the "upward call of God." "Away from the mire, and away from the clay, God leads His dear children along" (G.A. Young).

Translations and paraphrases of Philippians 3: 14 speak of this call as an “upward call”, or “a heavenward call.” The direction is always upward.

I believe Paul would have vigorously sung all four verses and the chorus each time of Higher Ground (Johnson Oatman, Jr.). “I’m pressing on the upward way, New heights I’m gaining every day:...I want to live above the world...I want to scale the utmost height, and catch a gleam of glory bright; But still I’ll pray till heaven I’ve found, ‘Lord, lead me on to higher ground.’”

“Dear Lord, please keep calling and beckoning me onward and upward. Amen!”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: I will not become so encumbered by even the good things of life today, that the upward call of God in Christ Jesus is lost.

- Floyd Cooper -

NOTES:

2 Timothy 1: 3-14

THE POWER OF POSSIBILITIES THINKING!

I dreamed I was a modern day Robin Hood. No, I was not wearing green tights or carrying a bow and arrows. Please don't even try to picture me like that! In fact, I wasn't even stealing from the rich to give to the poor. I was being chased and found certain survival skills beneficial. Soon others were joining me in this adventure. We were an underground movement who were pursuing lofty and honorable goals. The greatest feeling I had in this dream was knowing I was doing what was right.

Perhaps psychologists would analyze the dream differently, but when I have dreams like that and wake up remembering portions of the dreams, I try to interpret what they mean to me. As the alarm clock returned me to reality, instinctively I knew what my subconscious was saying. Pursue your dreams, seek what is right, and do not allow anyone to hinder you from achieving your goals. Perhaps I was more like Don Quixote than Robin Hood in my dream.

Somewhere hidden inside of my psyche is Robin Hood or Don Quixote. Somewhere there is a person within me who truly desires to conquer the bad in order to attain the good. In a dream, my heart and mind can agree.

It is upon waking that I must make a decision. Do I listen to the voice of my subconscious, throw caution to the wind and follow the desire within? Or do I simply get dressed and go about my day in the normal routine to which I have grown accustomed? I would like to be a modern day Robin Hood. In fact, for many years, Don Quixote was my hero. “To dream the impossible dream” was my quest. Whatever happened to that sense of adventure? Whatever became of the knight in shining armor who fought windmills as if they were dragons?

Those who were chasing me in my dream were those who would try to stop me from becoming what God wants me to be and achieving what He wants me to do. These enemies are my fears. They are powerful enemies. But the desire within must be even greater. When the desire to pursue our dreams is stronger than our fears, we are champions.

not only do I believe this dream to be my subconscious speaking. I believe it is also God's way of awakening me to His purpose. He has an adventure in mind for me. He has a dream He wants me to follow. Though my enemies chase me, they will not make me fall. The pursuit of a dream is worthy goal. The pursuit of God's dream cannot be defeated!

“Dear God, You once had a dream for me, but I felt it was too difficult to pursue. The danger and treats were more than I thought I could bear. However, Your dream is still before me. Help me to arise and follow. Remind me that it is better to chase a godly dream than to flee from life’s challenges. I need Your strength to do this, Lord. Help me to not be afraid, but to trust Your power and love. In Jesus’ name. Amen.”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: When the desire to pursue our dreams is stronger than our fears, we are champions!

- Thomas Duckworth -

NOTES:

I Timothy 6: 11

MAY WE BORROW YOUR “YADDER”?

There was a knock at the back door of our parsonage in Fremont. Upon answering it, there stood my little friend, Ken, and his Indian friend. The first year in Fremont I painted the church, and Ken “helped” me by sitting on the bottom rung of the “YADDER,” and visited. Those were enjoyable hours for me and I trust for my friend, Ken, since his home life was not to good.

“May we borrow your ‘YADDER’?” asked my little friend. “Why do you want a ladder?” I asked. Unable to understand their reply I asked them to bring to me what they wanted done, but he said he couldn’t. I told them that I didn’t have a ladder and the one I had used on the church was borrowed. Quick came his reply, “Why don’t you go get it?” We talked further, they left, and I went inside the house.

Within four minutes they were back wanting a saw. Before loaning them this tool, I felt further investigation was in order and went with Ken and his friend to a city park one block away. There in the top of a tree was a kite. To these boys the kite was worth the effort to either climb the tree or cut it down. I believe I explained to them their predicament, and values, and they went merrily on their way.

There are valuable lessons from Ken’s request, “May we borrow your ‘YADDER’?” Determination is certainly written in this want. There is vision - the vision of again flying that kite for which it was made. Vision led to action. Vision - determination - action - are all important ingredients in life! By God’s grace and help, these three can put us up the spiritual road a long way.

Paul exemplified Ken’s request when he wrote to the Roman Christians: “*I have often intended to come to you...*” (Romans 1: 13). To the Corinthian church he said: “*So whether we are at home or away, we make it our aim to please Him...for we aim at what is honorable not only in the Lord’s sight but also in the sight of men*” (2 Corinthians 5: 9; 8: 21). Timothy received this exhortation: “*...aim at righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, gentleness*”. (I Timothy 6: 11)

Oliver G. Wilsom in Boundless Horizons says: “One of Christianity’s richest blessings is that a man never catches up with his horizons. There is always something not yet attained, some goal not yet reached. No greater tragedy can come to a soul than to have no more unreached goals, no unattained ideals. The man filled with the Holy Spirit has discovered the ‘fountain of youth’. Within his soul are songs never yet sung, music never yet penned, poems never yet written. There are aspirations not yet realized that pull him on to the hills of eternal life. Our dreams are the golden ladder by which we climb to higher altitudes of living. They are the lanterns by whose light we pass safely

through the dark valleys. They are the flames that give us drive and energy for the struggle.” (P. 1)

These three: vision, determination, action are important in the church, also.

“Dear Lord, we thank you for the innocence of Ken’s request. May I, in my personal life, ever be on the stretch doing your will. Amen!”

AFFIRMATION FOR THE DAY: Today I will be alert to the horizons (spiritually, mentally) which beckon me onward and upward.

- Floyd Cooper -

NOTES:

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- 1. According to Matthew 12: 43-45, why is it dangerous for a person to do nothing more than ‘cleansed’ himself of evil thoughts, in his battle against sin and wrong?**
- 2. What ‘positive steps’ have you personally taken to substitute evil thoughts with good thoughts in your mind? Why is it ‘futile’ to battle evil thoughts, without, at the same time, replacing evil thoughts with good (loving) thought? Tell what you think the following phrase means: “The expulsive power of a new affection”. (Note Philippians 4: 8)**
- 3. Tell with what degree of ‘conviction’ you agree (or disagree) with the following statement: “Our thoughts feed on the things that have been hidden in our hearts.” (Note Psalm 119: 9-11) Why is it so important to teach children to memorize Bible verses?**
- 4. Have you (as a believer) ‘set a guard’ at your mind’s door, a filter through which stories, jokes, and thoughts must be filtered before they are allowed to become ‘residents’ of your mind? (Note Psalm 19: 14)**
- 5. How should Bible-believing Christians react to publicly proclaimed defiance of God’s moral principles (such as principles regarding sexual morality and the sanctity of life - especially the life of the ‘unborn’)? What message is our children receiving when their role models (the leaders of our Nation) sin and people wink at it?**
- 6. Should Christian parents, whose own past lives are ‘morally stained’ because of their former sinful lifestyle, choose not to speak forthrightly about Biblical morality and righteousness to their own younger children (For ‘fear’ of being thought of as ‘hypocritical’)?**
- 7. Because of a widespread attitude of ‘tolerance’ and ‘indifference’ toward sinful sexual relationships, what are some of the tragic consequences which our society is reaping today? (Note Galatians 6: 7-8)**
- 8. If ‘tolerance’ and ‘indifference’ are both inappropriate (wrong) reactions to widespread sexual perversions in our modern society, what is the appropriate (righteous and God-honoring) reaction towards immoral actions and immoral persons? Is it possible to hate sinful actions without, at the same time, hating the persons who are committing the sinful actions? Why or why not? If Christians are commanded by God to be persons of both ‘justice’ and ‘mercy’ (Micah 6: 8), how should these virtues be applied to individuals who practice a ‘sinful’ and immoral’ lifestyle?**

- 9. Share your personal response (or reaction) to the following statements: “Sex belongs to marriage alone. Period. Sex is God’s wedding present to that couple and it is beautiful.” (Note I Corinthians 6: 15-18; I Thessalonians 4: 3-8; Hebrews 13: 4; Romans 1: 22-28; I Corinthians 7: 1-5; Genesis 2: 21-25)**

- 10. Share from your own ‘life experience’ (or from the ‘life experience’ of someone whom you know well) a ‘concrete example’ which illustrates the truth of the following statement: “Difficulties tend to limit our vision; they become the focal point and burden of our thinking, shutting out the total view of life.” Share ways in which God has enabled you to “change your focus” from the narrow and restrictive view of life to the broader and more expansive view of life? How has this more enlarged (and mature and God-honoring) vision of reality helped you to become a more effective and fruitful ‘Servant of the Lord’?**

- 11. Tell to what extent you agree (or disagree) with the following statements: “Focusing on the positive is God’s way for us to deal with personal trials. It keeps us from feeling defeated, and gives us courage and hope.”**

- 12. Share an illustration of how you (or someone you know and admire) “soared by the wings of faith and imagination beyond the man-made limitations to God-beckoning horizons”. (Note Philippians 3: 12-14)**

- 13. Share your personal response (or reaction) to the following statements which describe one writer’s ‘Philosophy of Life’. Do you believe this is a Biblically accurate attitude towards life and living? “Life is a way, a road, a thoroughfare - not a parking lot. Life is a gym - not a rest home. Life is a school - not a cemetery. Life is an arena - not a bleacher seat. Life is for movement, for development, for struggle, for growth.”**

- 14. Put a check by those following statements with which you ‘agree’ in describing your personal ‘philosophy of living’:**
 - _____ a. Life is a series of calamities, to be dreaded and to be endured until death finally brings relief.**

 - _____ b. Life is filled with mysteries, inequities, and injustices, bringing much heartache to ones heart and much confusion to ones mind.**

 - _____ c. Life is the product of a long evolutionary process, and man is an ‘accident’ in that process.**

- _____ d. Life will soon be terminated forever through physical death, so one should ‘eat, drink and be merry’, as long as he can, until death finally conquers.**
 - _____ e. Life has no objective or intrinsic meaning and worth, so each person must create’ his own value system and discover his own purpose for existence.**
 - _____ f. Life is a ‘gift from God’ to be cherished and enjoyed, and to be used to bring glory to God and benefit to ones fellow men.**
 - _____ g. Life is a ‘training ground’ to develop godly character, patterned after the supreme example of Jesus Christ whose purpose on earth was to do His Father’s will.**
 - _____ h. Life is a pilgrimage, accompanied with both joy and sorrow, but meaningful because of God’s presence and power.**
 - _____ i. Life is an ‘upward vall from God’ to fulfill a meaningful mission of compassion to many hurting persons in a “fallen” world.**
- 15. Is it your daily prayer that God shall lead you "upward" and "onward" to "higher ground" in your spiritual life? If so, what concretely would it actually mean for you to live on "higher ground" (socially, intellectually, physically, maritally, spiritually)?**
- 16. Tell when it is 'right' and when it is 'wrong' for you to pursue your dreams and visions. Do you inwardly possess a 'conquering spirit', a 'risk-taking attitude', a 'visionary mind', an 'indomitable will' - all for the purpose of fulfilling your Father's Will (of bringing the “Good News” of Christ to lost and confused people, and of bringing hope and joy to discouraged Christians)? What "love project" are you currently involved in, or would like to be involved in? As a Christian is it 'right' and 'wholesome' for you "to dream the impossible dream"? Why or why not? Do you believe there is great power in "Possibility Thinking"? How can you distinguish between "dreams and visions" which are the product of your own human ambition and imagination, and the product of God-inspired thoughts?**
- 17. Tell to what extent you agree (or disagree) with the following statement: "When the desire to pursue our dreams is stronger than our fears, we are champions"?**
- 18. Why have you found that your clear 'focus' on goals and dreams is so 'vitaly important' for your continued spiritual growth and your mental and emotional well being?**

- 19. Share a concrete example from your own life (or from the life of a person whom you know well) which demonstrates the truth of the following statements: “Our dreams are the golden ladder by which we climb to higher altitudes of living. They are the lanterns by whose light we pass safely through the dark valleys. They are the flames that give us drive and energy for the struggle.”**