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MASTERING OUR MIDNIGHTS

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MASTERING
OUR
MIDNIGHTS

And Other Sermons

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The High Cost of Low Living

Clouds and Rainbows

Facts We Hate to Face

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D E D I C A T I O N

To my youngest sister

RETTA BERNICE RUNDLETT

who has served God for many years as
the wife of a minister who passed to
his reward recently and very suddenly
I dedicate this volume of sermons with
the prayer that she may be sustained
by God's healing grace.

P R E F A C E

This volume of sermons is sent forth to join *The High Cost of Low Living, Clouds and Rainbows*, and *Facts We Hate to Face*, with the hope that it may bring inspiration and hope to thousands.

The sermons were originally prepared for radio delivery and have been reprinted here in their original form with short sentences and pithy statements for facility and force of expression.

RUSSELL V. DELONG

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MASTERING OUR MIDNIGHTS

For our beautiful theme today, I am indebted to my friend, Dr. Roy S. Nicholson, president of the Wesleyan Methodist church. We were preaching colleagues at the great Lakeland, Florida, camp meeting. One day he said, "I've been thinking of a theme that maybe you could use on 'Showers of Blessing.'" Always eager to receive helpful suggestions, I pressed him for it. He answered, "*Mastering Our Midnights.*"

Midnight in the natural realm is normally the darkest, blackest hour in the twenty-four. It is farthest from sunset and longest from sunrise. It signifies the period most removed from light in either direction.

In the moral and spiritual realms also midnight symbolizes all that is dark, black, distressing, painful, disappointing, and discouraging. It is the period of trial when the lights are all out.

Our midnights can have a very definite effect on us. It all depends on our attitude toward them and our use of them. They can make us stronger or weaker, better or bitter, victims or victors. We must master them or they will master us. So the question—Are you *mastering your midnights* or are your *midnights mastering you*?

Midnight is referred to often in the Bible. It was midnight when the destroying angel went throughout Egypt killing the first-born in every home not having the blood on the lintel of the door. The blood changed midnight into morning; death was avoided and life preserved (Exod. 11:4).

Samson destroyed the city gate at midnight (Judg. 16:3). It was midnight when the cry was made, "Behold,

the bridegroom cometh." For five wise virgins it became everlasting day, but for the five foolish virgins it became night—"outer darkness" forever. It was at midnight that Paul and Silas sang praises to God, although they were suffering from scourged backs and their hands and feet were in stocks. For them morning came with an angel to bring deliverance and usher in the sunrise.

Night is the antithesis of day. In the beginning God created all things, "and the darkness he called Night" (Gen. 1:5). Night has come to mean despair, time of evil, blackness, and terror. The Psalmist spoke of "the terror by night" (Ps. 91:5) and "the pestilence that walketh in darkness" (Ps. 91:6). In the books of Proverbs and Ecclesiastes we find these references: "The way of the wicked is as darkness" (Prov. 4:19), and, "The fool walketh in darkness" (Eccles. 2:14). Isaiah also referred to "the people" as walking "in darkness."

Jesus is called "The Light of the World." He himself said, "I am the light." John said, "God is light, and in him is no darkness" (I John 1:5). Paul declared, "We are not of the night" (I Thess. 5:5).

In this present world it seems conclusive that there is a mixture of light and darkness, good and evil, blessing and cursing, sunshine and rain, roses and thorns. A battle rages between the forces of darkness and the armies of light.

In the future life a separation will be made. In heaven all is light and "there is no night there." (Rev. 21:25; 22:5.) God is the Light and in Him is no darkness at all. Hell is described by Jesus as a place of "outer darkness" (Matt. 8:12). Jude speaks of the abode of sinners as "the blackness of darkness for ever" (Jude 13).

In this life we shall have tribulation and sorrow and pain. But we can have for our spirits and minds the Light. Jesus can dispel the darkness of sin from our

hearts and the blackness of despair from our souls. We can have light within, even though it may be dark without.

In heaven all midnights will be past forever. But here on earth we still have them. The midnight of sin can be dispelled by the light of Christ in the soul, but the midnights of trouble and sorrow and pain remain.

There are three attitudes we can take toward our midnights. We can oppose them bitterly, accept them stoically, or welcome them happily. The last is the Christian's answer to personal midnights. We master them. They become steppingstones to higher levels instead of stumbling blocks to lower living. Someone has said, "Difficulties pull the trigger; what explodes depends on what you are loaded with." If you are filled with light there is an explosion of love. If you are loaded with darkness there is a blast of hatred. Your midnights make or break you.

What enables one to "master his midnights" instead of having his midnights master him?

First—Christ, the Light, within.

Second—Faith in the goodness and power of God.

Third—The inner knowledge that light always follows darkness and morning always follows the evening in God's plan. Read in Genesis—it is always "the evening and the morning," never the reverse. God always leaves us in the light.

An unknown author has penned these beautiful lines.

*I have found a joy in sorrow,
A secret balm for pain,
A beautiful tomorrow
Of sunshine after rain.*

*I have found a branch of healing
Near every bitter spring,
And a whispered promise stealing
Over every broken string.*

Man's last midnight is death. This too can be mastered through Christ, the mighty Conqueror. For without the Saviour death means perpetual and eternal midnight—"outer darkness." But for those who already possess Him, the Light, and He possesses them, death means no more midnights, no more darkness—only light—eternal light in God's eternal day and His perpetual sunrise.

Virgil Brock has written:

**Beyond the sunset, oh, blissful morning,
When with our Saviour heav'n is begun!
Earth's toiling ended, oh, glorious dawning,
Beyond the sunset, when day is done!*

*Beyond the sunset, no clouds will gather,
No storms will threaten, no fears annoy.
Oh, day of gladness, oh, day unending,
Beyond the sunset, eternal joy!*

What an inspiring, glorious hope! Midnights mastered and past forever!

W. C. Poole in a similar vein wrote:

***When I shall come to the end of my way,
When I shall rest at the close of life's day,
When, "Welcome home," I shall hear Jesus say,
Oh, that will be sunrise for me!*

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*Sunrise tomorrow, sunrise tomorrow,
Sunrise in glory is waiting for me;
Sunrise tomorrow, sunrise tomorrow,
Sunrise with Jesus for eternity.*

Midnights mastered here means no midnights over there.

We shall exchange earthly darkness for eternal light, temporal sorrow for everlasting joy, temporary pain here for perpetual health hereafter, midnights now for mid-days then, sunsets for continuous sunrises.

ALL OR NOTHING

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 16:24-27

One of the most popular radio programs is called "Double or Nothing." A contestant is given a number of dollars, then asked a question, and if he gives the correct answer this amount is doubled. But if the answer is wrong, he loses all—so it is double or nothing.

Following Christ is similar but even more daring—it is all or nothing.

As one has aptly put it, "Christ must be Lord of all or He is not Lord at all."

Jesus himself said: "No man can serve two masters: for either he will hate the one, and love the other; or else he will hold to the one, and despise the other. Ye cannot serve God and mammon" (Matt. 6:24).

You must be one thing or the other. It is all or nothing.

Jesus at another time said, "He that is not for me is against me." There is no halfway place. You cannot hold Christ in one hand and the world in the other. It must be one or the other—all or nothing.

True religion, genuine salvation, either means everything to you or it means nothing. It should erase the past, cleanse the present, give perspective for the future.

Jesus in calling His first disciples said some pretty hard but all-important things. Listen!

"He that loveth father or mother more than me is not worthy of me: and he that loveth son or daughter more than me is not worthy of me.

"And he that taketh not his cross, and followeth after me, is not worthy of me" (Matt. 10:37-38).

Jesus spoke to Peter and Andrew, fishermen, and said, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men. And straightway they left their nets, and followed him" (Matt. 4:18-20).

A rich young ruler came to Jesus seeking eternal life. He was educated. He had power. He possessed wealth. He held position. He was moral. He kept all the commandments. The fact is, he was better than most present-day church members. But that was not enough. Jesus said, "One thing thou lackest." In other words, the young man was willing to surrender everything but one. The terms of Jesus were "All or nothing." The surrender to Him must be complete and unconditional. There are no bargain counters and no reduced prices.

Jesus told of the man who sold all that he had to purchase the pearl of great price. If you want real religion, genuine salvation, you must make the supreme gift—yourself. If He has you He will have all you are and all you own. It is all or nothing.

To the rich young ruler He gave this command, "Come, take up the cross, and follow me" (Mark 10:21).

We might well connect this to the call of the disciples when He said, "Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men." Let us put a period after the "you" and let the two passages read, "Come, take, follow, and I will *make* you."

Christ-made men are Christ-surrendered men and Christ-transformed men.

Consider the three verbs—words of action:

1. *Come—A Change of Place*

Come always means leave. Leave the old life, leave the old places, leave the old habits, leave the old companions, leave the old ideals, leave the old pleasures, leave

the old sins. Before one can come one must leave. That is step number one.

2. *Take—A Change of Activity*

Instead of pleasure and comfort take up thy cross. There are duties and responsibilities in the world as well as rights and pleasures. There is a task to be done that requires sacrifice and toil, but with it come the greatest of satisfaction and the thrill of achievement.

3. *Follow—A Change of Allegiance*

Before the call my loyalties are to self and Satan. When Christ taps me on the shoulder and I turn around and follow Him, my loyalties are shifted and my allegiance is given to a new Leader and a new life. One is never the same after that tap on the shoulder. It is life's supreme moment. If one rejects, life becomes miserable. If one accepts, life becomes happy. If one spurns the call of Christ, he becomes disloyal to the truth and murders his own best self. If he responds to the call a new day dawns, a new life comes, a new inspiration thrills.

4. The fourth verb is *make*. "I will make you." Jesus will change you so that your old environment will not be attractive any more.

He'll change you so that your old habits will not control you any more.

He'll change you so that your old companions will not dominate you any more.

He'll change you so that your old ideals will not govern you any more.

He'll change you so that your old loyalties will not bind you any more.

Yes—it is all or nothing—but it is all. You'll be all new when you surrender your all to Him.

The hymn writer expressed the truth of this sermon when she wrote:

All for Jesus! All for Jesus!
All my being's ransomed powers,
All my thoughts and words and doings,
All my days and all my hours!

ALL OR NOTHING

LOVE IN FOUR DIMENSIONS

SCRIPTURE: John 3:16; Ephesians 3:18

Einstein's theory of relativity has given rise to much discussion of the fourth dimension. It is a twentieth century scientific and mathematical discovery.

The fourth dimension is nothing new in Biblical or theological thought. It is as old as God.

The Apostle Paul incorporates it in his Epistle to the Ephesian church. Listen—

That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love,

May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height;

And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.

There is love in four dimensions:

1. Breadth
2. Length
3. Depth
4. Height

These dimensions of love are also wrapped up in the great verse called "The Little Gospel," John 3:16.

For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

Consider the wonderful, limitless, boundless dimensions.

1. Breadth—"so."

God's matchless love was so broad that He included all men of all races, of all tribes, of all nationalities, of all

colors, of all stations, of all levels, of all degrees, of all abilities and attainments. His love is as broad as humanity. It is unlimited, catholic, and universal. It is unrestricted by geography, sex, color, rank, or position. It extends over and beyond every human need. It envelops sorrow, loneliness, poverty, disappointment, tragedy, and sin of every kind. God's love is as broad as human need. It is as boundless as space, as wide as the ocean, as limitless as the sky.

*There's a wideness in God's mercy,
Like the wideness of the sea.*

No matter who you may be or what sin you have committed, the first dimension of God's love includes you—*breadth*.

2. *Length*—"gave"

The second dimension of God's love is length. "He gave." How far did God go? He went the limit—He gave His Son. His love went such lengths that it could stop nowhere short of making the supreme gift, the priceless jewel of the heavenly firmament—He gave His only Son. He went all out. He spared nothing. He provided no cheap sacrifice. His love was long enough to pluck His Son to reveal His love to poor lost man.

*Wonderful story of love!
Tho' you are far away!*

His love is long enough to reach you, no matter how far away you have wandered. God's love is long enough in sacrifice and long enough in outreach to pull you back.

3. *Depth*—"perish"

The third dimension of God's love is *depth*—"might not perish." His love reaches to the very brink of hell. It is deep enough to snatch you from the burning. And

God's love can penetrate your heart deep enough to remove the stain and blackness of sin.

It is as deep as the ocean, more penetrating than sin, and more fathomless than the sea.

**I was sinking deep in sin,
Far from the peaceful shore,
Very deeply stained within,
Sinking to rise no more.*

*But the Master of the sea
Heard my despairing cry,
From the waters lifted me;
Now safe am I.*

*Love lifted me, love lifted me;
When nothing else could help,
Love lifted me.*

4. Height—"everlasting life"

The fourth dimension of God's love is *height*, "everlasting life." His love reaches to the depths to carry us to the heights. He will lift you above the morasses of sin, the fogs of life, the trials of living, the sorrows of earth, up to the heights of His holiness and goodness, where one may live above sin, sorrow, and pain in the celestial ozone of God's eternal city. His topless love will enable you to dwell in Elysian fields on mountain peaks in the city of everlasting day.

*Love divine, all love excelling,
Joy of heav'n to earth come down!*

*Jesus, Thou art all compassion;
Pure, unbounded love Thou art.*

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*Love of Christ so freely given,
Grace of God beyond degree,
Mercy higher than the heavens,
Deeper than the deepest sea.*

Jeremiah, the old prophet, burst forth with these words which he heard God say: "Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love" (Jer. 31:3).

John, the beloved disciple, caught a glimpse of God's great love and cried out, "Behold, what manner of love the Father hath bestowed upon us, that we should be called the sons of God" (I John 3:1).

God's love is four-dimensional. It reaches *out*, and *down*, and *up*, and *in*. It is as *broad* as man's need; it is as *long* as the cost of man's redemption; it is as *deep* as man's sin, and as *high* as heaven.

No wonder the poet wrote—

**The love of God is greater far
Than tongue or pen can ever tell;
It goes beyond the highest star,
And reaches to the lowest hell.*

*Could we with ink the ocean fill,
And were the skies of parchment made;
Were every stalk on earth a quill,
And every man a scribe by trade;*

*To write the love of God above
Would drain the ocean dry.
Nor could the scroll contain the whole,
Though stretched from sky to sky.*

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Such matchless, boundless, limitless love of God demands a wholehearted, complete, unreserved response from man.

St. Paul reached one of the greatest peaks in all of his inspired writings when he attempted to describe the four-dimensional love of God.

That Christ may dwell in your hearts by faith; that ye, being rooted and grounded in love,

May be able to comprehend with all saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height;

And to know the love of Christ, which passeth knowledge, that ye might be filled with all the fulness of God.

Now unto him that is able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that worketh in us,

Unto him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus throughout all ages, world without end. Amen.

HE WHO WALKS TOWARD THE SUN NEVER TRAVELS IN SHADOWS

The first utterance attributed to God is recorded in the story of creation—"In the beginning God created the heaven and the earth. . . . And God said, Let there be light." It is significant that God's first words concerning man and this planet had to do with *light*.

There are various kinds of light—physical, natural, intellectual, moral, and spiritual. Frequently reference is made to physical darkness or intellectual darkness or moral darkness or spiritual darkness. Light is its antithesis, conqueror, and dispeller, irrespective of the field.

The sun is the center and source of all physical and natural light. As long as there is nothing between us and the sun, we have day. Night and darkness come only as our planet revolves so that part of its inhabitants are shut off from the sun by part of the earth. It is good to remember that the sun is always shining somewhere and that there are always people in the light. It is always day someplace. It is only night when we are shut off from the sun.

But even in the daytime one who faces the sun is never in shadows. It is always true that one has to turn his back to the sun before he can see his own shadow. As one walks away, the shadow lengthens and soon blends into darkness and night.

The caption of this sermon is so gloriously true, "He who walks toward the sun never travels in shadows." Dark grays and inky blackness come only as one turns his back to the light.

As we now leave the natural realm and step into the moral and spiritual realms, it is significant that Jesus

is called the Light. He is referred to repeatedly as the Sun of Righteousness. He is the center and home of truth, goodness, beauty, and righteousness. Out from His person radiate moral and spiritual light. Without Him all is darkness. St. John, also referring to creation, declared:

In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God.

The same was in the beginning with God.

All things were made by him; and without him was not any thing made that was made.

In him was life; and the life was the light of men.

And the light shineth in darkness; and the darkness comprehended it not.

There was a man sent from God, whose name was John.

The same came for a witness, to bear witness of the Light, that all men through him might believe.

He was not that Light, but was sent to bear witness of that Light.

That was the true Light, which lighteth every man that cometh into the world (John 1:1-9).

It is also of great significance that only a few verses later St. John declares, "But as many as received him [the Light], to them gave he power to become the sons of God" (John 1:12).

A dozen verses later St. John describes the arrival of Jesus to be baptized by crying out, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world" (John 1:29).

The third chapter of John's Gospel describes the necessity of the new birth as preached by Jesus to Nicodemus. The apex of the sermon is reached when the Master declares, "Except a man be born of water and

of the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God" (John 3:5).

This story becomes the context and background for John 3:16, "The Little Gospel in One Verse."

"For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life" (John 3:16).

Sin is spiritual death and darkness. Christ is Life and Light. He is the Sun radiating spiritual truth and dispelling moral darkness.

To accept Him is to walk in the light. St. John in his First Epistle says, "If we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship one with another, and the blood of Jesus Christ his Son cleanseth us from all sin."

The Psalmist cried out, "The Lord is my light and my salvation (Ps. 27:1).

Jesus proclaimed: "I am the light of the world: he that followeth me shall not walk in darkness, but shall have the light of life" (John 8:12).

Much is said in the Bible about spiritual darkness. It is always connected with sin. The reference is made to people that "sit in darkness" (Ps. 107:10). Isaiah said, "The people that walked in darkness have seen a great light" (Isa. 9:2).

The future abode of sinners is described by Jesus as the place of outer darkness. But heaven is pictured as a city where no night cometh, "for the glory of God did lighten it, and the Lamb is the light thereof" (Rev. 21:23).

Eternal night, "outer darkness," is the penalty for sinful disregard of the Light here.

Face the light, walk in the light, accept the Light, and you will never travel in shadows here nor live in "outer darkness" hereafter.

But if you deliberately turn your back to the Light and willfully walk away from the Sun (Son) of God, the shadows will lengthen, the gloom of night will surround you as a pall, and this condition of apostasy will soon black out into eternal light.

WHAT THEN?

What's your next move? After that, *What then?* Is your life a disconnected series of jerks toward no definite end? Or is your life merely a "merry-go-round," going in circles—going nowhere—just *going?*

You say, "I must be *doing* something."

What?

"Oh, anything. I must be *going places* and *doing things.*"

Whirl is king. *Doing* is more important and attractive than either *thinking* or *being.*

The lives of some people are empty, meaningless, and purposeless. They are just existing. Like animals, they eat, drink, sleep, and move around—going *nowhere* in particular and *doing nothing* on purpose.

Then there are others who are going somewhere and doing some things in order to attain certain goals.

One young man wants to get a job. Why? To earn some money. For what? To buy a car. Why? He likes to speed. So he gets a job, works, gets money, buys a car, and speeds. *What then?*

Another young man goes to high school. Why? So that he can qualify for college. Why? He finishes college so that he might enter law school. Why? That he might pass the bar examinations and become a lawyer. Why? He wants to become district attorney. Why? That he may be elected governor. *What then?* He'll run for senator. And then what? Maybe, President. After that? Retire. What then? Old age. *What then?* Death. *What then?*

Any avenue one takes eventually leads step by step to death.

One makes a million dollars. He meets death and leaves it. *What then?*

One achieves great political power—relinquishes it and faces death. *What then?*

One scales the heights in Hollywood and becomes an idolized star; loses beauty, health, and vitality; fades away into obscurity and dies. *What then?*

One travels to faraway places, sees spectacular phenomena, visits the shrines of antiquity, and mingles with people of all colors, races, and religions. Then weakens and dies. *What then?*

Money, fame, popularity, power, education, and position all reach their peak—then the descent and finally the river of death. *What then?*

This sermon *does* have a pessimistic note. And yet it is important. If death is the end, pessimism is the correct philosophy. We are prisoners, all serving a death sentence. There is no escape.

With immortality life is a pessimistic, if not diabolic, madhouse.

But—if we live beyond the grave, such future life must of necessity give meaning to present living.

If life is of any import, its significance must come from nontemporal sources—God, eternal life, and the Judgment.

Life—*here and now*—must be shot full of meaning by the *there and then*.

How we live *now* must be decided by how we hope to live *then*.

Where we hope to live *hereafter* is determined by how we live *here*.

So, instead of working for money, position, fame, power, or acclaim, it is imperative to ask, Why? Because

we must come to death. Here we are relieved of all we own. What we *have* we *leave*.

What we *have done* is in the record.

What we *are* goes beyond death.

What then?

The Judgment.

What then?

Either the Judge of the Universe says: "Well done, thou good and faithful servant, enter into the joy of thy Lord."

Or else He pronounces: "Cast ye the unprofitable servant into outer darkness; there shall be weeping and gnashing of teeth."

So, the final and ultimate "*What then?*" gets one of two answers: *Heaven* or *Hell*.

Mr. J. W. Green has put the truth of this sermon very pointedly and pertinently in his poem, "What Then?"

WHAT THEN?

*When the great, busy plants of our cities
Shall turn out their last finished work;
When the merchants have sold their last order
And dismissed every last tired clerk;
When our banks have raked in their last dollar
And have paid out their last dividend;
When the Judge of the earth wants a hearing,
And asks for a balance—WHAT THEN?*

*When the choir has sung its last anthem,
And the preacher has voiced his last prayer,
And the people have heard their last sermon,
And the sound has died out in the air;
When the Bible lies closed on the altar
And the pews are all empty of men;
When each one stands facing his record,
And the great Book is opened—WHAT THEN?*

*When the actors have played their last drama,
And the mimic has made his last fun;
When the movie has flashed its last picture,
And the billboard displayed its last run;
When the crowd seeking pleasure has vanished,
And gone out in the darkness again;
When the trumpet of ages has sounded
And we stand before Him—WHAT THEN?*

*When the bugle-call sinks into silence
And the long marching columns stand still;
When the captain repeats his last orders
And they've captured the last fort and hill;
When the flag has been hauled down from the
masthead,
And the wounded afield have checked in,
And the world that rejected its Saviour
Is asked for a reason—WHAT THEN?*

Friend, what's your next move? And after that?
And then what? And finally death. What then?

THE CITADEL OF THE SOUL

SCRIPTURE: Revelation 3:20

A citadel is a fortress or a stronghold. It is a place of security, safety, refuge, and strength. It also may be situated on a high plateau and thus be doubly safe from attack and also a superior spot for vision to spot enemy advances. Sometimes in past wars moats, water-filled trenches, were dug around a castle or citadel in order to increase its safety from attack. In brief, a citadel was a place of safety.

When God created man in His own image He gave him a *citadel*, a place of security and safety. Man is sovereign. He is autonomous, self-directing. Man's will is the guard to his *citadel*. No *person* or *thing* can make man *act*. He alone chooses his course. It is true that sheer physical power can push a man's body about and even throw him into jail. But no power in earth, heaven, or hell can invade man's soul and force his will. His personal citadel is impenetrable. His moral privacy is guaranteed. Man is free to open or close the door of his being.

The old Stoics had a very interesting and true motto which read:

I rest assured that nothing can harm me unless I myself open the door to the enemy.

In essence, this means that neither good nor bad can enter my soul unless I myself open the door and welcome it. With this I agree, and I am convinced that such a truth is sound Biblically, philosophically, psychologically, and morally.

If good or evil can get within me without my will, then I cannot be held accountable and responsible for what I *am* morally and spiritually. I must be the guard, the monitor, the agent, who says, "Come in," or, "Stay out." Otherwise I am not responsible for what I *am*.

I think I can hear somebody murmur, "Do you mean to say that no one can do me any harm or do me any good?" That is just exactly what I mean. But let me add this word of explanation—certainly people can steal my money, blackguard my name, ruin my reputation, and slap my face or throw me into jail. Likewise they can do good things for me. But remember, my name, my reputation, my money, or even my body are not *me*. My attitude toward these external acts and things determines whether they do *me* good or bad, make me better or bitter, richer or poorer, stronger or weaker. "Prison bars do not a prison make." My body may be enslaved but my soul never—unless I enslave myself.

What a sobering, awesome, tremendous truth! I am unique, individual, free, private, sovereign, autonomous. Neither men nor devils can transgress the citadel of my soul.

In the New Testament there are instances of persons possessed of devils. One had seven demons cast out. It would destroy my conception of God's justice and nullify the basic principle of this existence, freedom, if I had to believe that any person could be overrun by either men or devils without consent. No! It could not be.

But on the other hand, *good* cannot enter my self unless I welcome it. And now a step further—and I take it reverently—even God, the Holy Spirit, cannot and will not possess my soul unless I open the door and bid Him enter.

Man is a citadel. He alone decides what comes in or goes out. And he is responsible for both incoming and outgoing traffic, be it good or evil, God or Satan.

I am what I permit to come to me. If I am evil it is because I choose evil and permit it to come into my private citadel. If I am good it is because I permit good and God to come into my soul. I stand at the door. Nothing gets in without my knowledge and personal approval.

What I *am* I *made*. If I am morally good and spiritually righteous, it is because I chose Christ and He came into my citadel and cleansed my heart. If I am evil and corrupt, it is because I chose sin and Satan and kept Christ out.

I am the captain of my soul, the governor of my citadel, the keeper of my heart, the ruler of my spirit.

So the whole import of this sermon is wrapped up in this question: What and whom do you permit entrance to your private citadel?

In closing, listen to this scripture (Rev. 3:20). God says:

“Behold, I stand at the door, and knock: if any man hear my voice, and open the door, I will come in to him, and will sup with him, and he with me.”

My last day in London, on my recent world tour, I went to St. Paul's Cathedral. There I saw Holman Hunt's famous masterpiece, "The Light of the World." I stood awed and thrilled at its gorgeous beauty and colossal meaning. There stands Christ knocking at a door. He is colorfully arrayed in the robes of Prophet, Priest, and King. He wears the white robe, signifying the power of the Spirit; the jeweled robe with breastplate, indicating sacerdotal investiture; and on His head is a crown of soft, growing thorns with leaves for the healing of the nations. He holds a lantern, for it is night when He approaches. The door is large and heavy and fast-barred. It has never been opened. The nails are rusty. Tendrils of ivy climb up, nearly covering it. Christ knocks.

When Holman Hunt first exhibited this masterpiece, the critics studied it carefully and finally one of them exclaimed,

“There is a great omission!”

“What is it?” Mr. Hunt asked.

The critic replied, “You forgot to paint a knob or latch on the door.”

“But,” said Mr. Hunt, “you have missed the great truth of my picture. That door represents the door of the human heart. There is no latch or knob on the outside. If it is ever opened it must be from the inside.”

That's it!

Christ will knock. He will not break the door down. He will not force His way in.

If He comes in, you must lift the latch, open the door, and bid Him enter.

The citadel of your soul is yours. You can welcome Him or reject Him.

THE TAP ON THE SHOULDER

SCRIPTURE: *And Jesus, walking by the sea of Galilee, saw two brethren, Simon called Peter, and Andrew his brother, casting a net into the sea: for they were fishers. And he saith unto them, Follow me, and I will make you fishers of men. And they straightway left their nets, and followed him (Matt. 4:18-20).*

The late Peter Marshall, for years the young, dynamic pastor of the New York Avenue Presbyterian Church, Washington, D.C., and, until his untimely death at forty-six, chaplain of the United States Senate, asked a question which gets at the very heart of my message today:

“If you were walking down the street, and someone came up behind you and tapped you on the shoulder—what would you do?”

Naturally, you would turn around.

Well, that is exactly what happens in the *spiritual* world.

A man walks through life, with the eternal call ringing in his ears but with no response stirring in his heart; and then suddenly, without any warning, *the Spirit taps him on the shoulder.*

What happens? He turns around. The word repentance means “turning around.”

“The tap on the shoulder is the call that brooks no refusal, the call we cannot ignore, the call that brings us to fall adoringly and wonderingly at the feet of Christ.”

All of us hear many calls—calls of money, calls of position, calls of education, calls of lodges, service clubs, fraternities, and sororities. Many voices hail us, bidding for our attention and selection. Some calls are loud and noisy, others soft and sweet.

But the *supreme* call, the one that penetrates deepest—down beneath the physical, the material, the monetary, the mental, and the social—to the very center of our innermost being, the quick of our soul—is the spiritual call from the voice of Christ. It is life's supreme moment.

When Jesus taps you on the shoulder in the midst of life's noise and rush and says, "The Master is come, and calleth for thee," your great hour of decision has arrived.

The tap on the shoulder stops you, His voice calls you, His love draws you, His kingdom challenges you. Now you must make a decision. You cannot be neutral. You must turn around and follow Him, or you deliberately walk on away from Him. Life is never the same after He taps you on the shoulder and speaks to your soul.

Jesus frequently visited Mary, Martha, and Lazarus at Bethany. On the occasion of Lazarus' death, Martha went to meet Him and upon returning to the house called Mary and said, "The Master is come, and calleth for thee."

The greatest moment in life is when Jesus sees something in you that He wants, taps you on the shoulder, and says, "Come, follow Me."

Peter, a rough, uncouth, uneducated fisherman, had his great moment when Jesus said, "Come, follow Me, and I'll make you a fisher of men." He answered the call, and Jesus *made him*.

In 1775 a boy of fourteen living in England, the son of very poor parents, was working as an apprentice to a shoemaker. Jesus tapped him on the shoulder and said, "William, I see something in you I can use in India." In June of 1793 William Carey began his glorious work which gave birth to modern missions.

Another English lad felt the tap on the shoulder and heard the Spirit say, "Robert, I can use you in China." In 1807 Robert Morrison began to write the great story of Christian missions in that dark nation.

A boy named David was working in a factory in England from 6:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m. when he felt the tap on the shoulder and heard the voice saying, "David Livingstone, I have need of thee in Africa." In 1840 he placed his feet on that black continent and for thirty-three years poured out his life, dying on his knees, May 1, 1873, in the heart of that pagan land.

The tap on the shoulder comes to all of us. The voice may not say, "India," or, "China," or, "Africa"; but it always says, "Come, follow Me, and I'll make thee."

If we heed this supreme call, we have peace here and heaven hereafter. But if we walk away, we head into unhappiness here and eternal remorse hereafter.

One is never the same after the tap on the shoulder.

The call comes to every one of us.

It is coming to many today.

Jesus tapped my shoulder when I was a high school sophomore, and the voice said, "Son, I see something in you that I need. I want you to preach the gospel."

Have you felt the tap on the shoulder?

Have you heard His voice?

Yes, He has called often. He will first forgive your sins and then He will cleanse your heart and finally empower your will to do His bidding.

He needs you.

He sees something in you that He can use.

Are you willing to turn around, answer His call, and give yourself and your talents to Him?

If you will, He'll *make you*—yes, make something worth-while out of your life.

An artist had his studio on the second floor of a downtown building. From his window he could see the speeding traffic and rushing multitudes. Every morning a beggar would appear and seek alms from passers-by. His clothes were tattered, torn, and dirty. His beard was

grown and his hair disheveled. With beseeching eyes and pleading voice he would beg for coins. The artist would stand by the window morning after morning and sketch the beggar as he solicited on the sidewalk in front of the studio.

One day the artist opened his window, attracted the attention of the beggar, and invited him to come up to the studio. When he came in, the artist showed him his canvas and the beautiful sketch on it.

The beggar asked, "Who is it?"

The artist said, "That is you."

"Me!" cried the astonished beggar. "Me?"

"Yes," said the artist, "that is what I see in you."

The beggar looked at the master and said, "If that's the kind of man you see in me, that's the kind of man I'm going to be."

What a story and what a truth!

Jesus sees beneath our filthy, unrighteous rags. He sees our hearts, our aspirations, our desires, our talents, our abilities. His gaze penetrates beneath the surface. He sees us—ourselves. There is something in all of us He can use.

So He taps us on the shoulder. He speaks to our souls and says, "Come, follow Me, and I'll make you."

God grant that, as the beggar said to the artist, we may pray,

"O Thou Christ, if You see in me the kind of man You can see, that's the kind of man I'll be."

I am requesting the choir to sing that beautiful hymn—

*Jesus calls us; o'er the tumult
Of our life's wild, restless sea,
Day by day His sweet voice soundeth,
Saying, "Christian, follow Me."*

While they sing, be sensitive to the tap on the shoulder and listen to His voice. Turn around and follow Him.

THE WOUNDS OF CHRIST

Pain is common to all men, old and young, rich and poor, educated and illiterate. The problem of evil is the most baffling of philosophy.

C. S. Lewis, the Oxford don, has written a very interesting and thought-provoking book entitled *the Meaning of Pain*.

It is not my purpose today to discuss the philosophy of pain nor attempt to give a solution to the problem of evil. My thesis for this address is simply this: Jesus in His final hours of passion leading up to His death suffered every known kind of pain: physical, mental, and spiritual. No other could suffer nor has suffered as He did. He paid the supreme painful penalty of all the sins of all the human race. For a few minutes let us analyze His suffering and relate it to man generally.

In the realm of bodily pain there are five types of physical suffering.

1. *Concussion*—caused by being hit violently from without or by internal pressure within.
2. *Laceration*—when the flesh is cut and torn.
3. *Penetration*—when the skin and joints are opened by sharp proddings.
4. *Perforation*—when holes are opened up by the pressure from external objects.
5. *Incision*—when cuts are made into the skin and muscles by sharp instruments.

Jesus suffered all five of these physical wounds.

He was the victim of *concussion*, for He was struck, hit, slapped, and buffeted about by an angry, blood-thirsty, murderous mob.

Jesus was *lacerated* by steel thongs at the end of the scourging whip. This Roman instrument of fiendish design would tear the flesh in a hundred places at every vicious stroke. It would leave the flesh white and quivering, drained of blood.

Jesus suffered the third type of bodily pain produced by *penetration*. A cruel crown of thorns was pushed and pounded into His holy brow. These sharp thorns were two inches long, straight and strong and as sharp as needles. They were pressed into His skin, His temples, and His veins. Blood spurted out and ran down His wonderful face.

Jesus also endured the physical suffering of *perforation*. Great spikes were driven through the tender palms of His clean hands and through the tendons of His guiltless feet.

And finally Jesus suffered the fifth kind of physical pain—*incision*. The sharp spear not only penetrated His side but sliced it open until both water and blood flowed down His body, staining the cross and dripping to the ground.

Do you get the awful picture? There Jesus hangs between two thieves, suffering physically the combined five kinds of bodily anguish—*concussion*, *laceration*, *penetration*, *perforation*, and *incision*. No wonder the poet wrote:

*Five bleeding wounds He bears,
Received on Calvary.
They pour effectual prayers,
They strongly plead for me.
"Forgive him, oh, forgive," they cry,
"Nor let that ransomed sinner die."*

But, strange as it may seem, His bodily, physical suffering was the least painful. It was His mental anguish that shook Jesus to His inner depths.

Psychologists and psychiatrists call mental illnesses traumata. In brief, a trauma is an emotional hurt causing extreme intellectual grief. There are three main kinds resulting from three chief causes:

1. *Loneliness*—to be left to one's self and deprived of social communion with others is one of the main causes of mental distress.

2. *Misunderstanding*—this is acute when related to enemies but becomes unbearably severe when applied to friends.

3. *Rejection*—here is the acme of mental anguish. To be rejected as undesired by others and undesirable by society is the zenith of possible intellectual distress.

Jesus was an acute Sufferer of all these three types of traumata.

He experienced *loneliness*. His friends forsook Him. His disciples fled and even God seemed to leave Him. Hear Him cry out in anguish, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?"

The hymn writer wrote:

**It was alone the Saviour stood
In Pilate's judgment hall.
Alone the crown of thorns He wore,
Forsaken thus by all.*

*Alone, alone, He bore it all alone.
He gave himself to save His own.
He suffered, bled, and died alone, alone.*

Jesus also passed through the second type of trauma, *misunderstanding*. He was a conundrum to His friends and an irrational zealot to His enemies.

But Jesus also suffered the third and worst type of mental distress—He was *rejected*. This kind of suffering

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is terrific. He was *rejected* by His own people, the Jews. He was rejected by society and finally by His friends and even His disciples. Peter even gave up and fled. He denied Him and rejected Him at the court scene—but Jesus gave him that tender, compassionate glance. Jesus was betrayed by Judas, His treasurer and trusted friend. And the form of his treason was a kiss, the highest expression of love—but now a kiss of death. Jesus was *rejected*.

So in the mental realm Jesus suffered all three traumata: *loneliness, misunderstanding, and rejection*—all rolled into one.

But as terrible as were the physical and mental wounds, those of the spirit were worst of all. Jesus carried the combined sins of all men. They pressed in and crushed Him. His spiritual heart was broken and it affected His physical heart so that the elastic sac surrounding this organ was broken and out poured blood and water. In the garden before His crucifixion He sweat great drops of blood. So in His awful passion Jesus' blood was watery and His sweat was bloody.

Yes, "He was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities."

Physically Jesus endured all types of bodily wounds: *concussion, laceration, penetration, perforation, and incision*. He suffered the three mental wounds: *loneliness, misunderstanding, and rejection*. And in addition His soul was distressed by the sins of the race—yours and mine.

Yes. "He was wounded for me, wounded for me; there on the cross He was wounded for me."

THE SEVEN DEADLY SINS

Any sin is deadly unless repented of and forgiven by God.

What is sin?

It is any deliberate act against the known will of God.

The Ten Commandments embody all the basic rules for man's conduct in relation both to God and to other persons. One may sin vertically—in acts against God himself; or horizontally—in his acts against other human beings.

All such acts, however, have more than the two dimensional possibilities; they all have internal effects on the soul.

Man with all of his modern cleverness and mechanical skill—with his flair for new inventions, new methods, new medicines, new adventures—has been unable to invent a new sin. We have today only new sinners committing old sins.

The seven deadly sins one has called "the seven pallbearers of character." They are:

Pride

Avarice

Envy

Lust

Anger

Gluttony

Sloth

Some persons are inclined toward one kind more than another. But each is a spiritual tumor radiating its cancerous tentacles to the depths of the soul until like a

hissing, slimy serpent it crushes and squeezes until life is gone—it is deadly.

1. Pride is the outcome of an overly inflated ego. It thinks more highly of itself than is warranted and demands that others do so also. Pride too breeds jealousy. One becomes proud of what he thinks he has and jealous over what the other person has that he does not have.

Daniel Defoe said, "Pride is the first peer and president of hell." It was pride that caused Lucifer to be cast out of heaven.

Colton made a pertinent and truthful statement when he said: "Pride, like a magnet, constantly points to one object, self; but unlike the magnet, it has no attractive pole, but at all points repels."

Someone else has observed: "The proud never have friends, not in prosperity, for then they know nobody; and not in adversity, for then nobody knows them."

Yes, pride is deadly. It shuts God out and drives people out and away.

The Bible proclaims, "God resisteth the proud, but giveth grace unto the humble" (James 4:6).

2. Avarice is defined as a "passion for riches; covetousness."

Today it hides its black iniquity under such respectable cloaks as "thrift and economic security"; in essence, avarice is an inordinate love of things. It manifests itself in selfishness and resorts to theft, larceny, burglary, and graft. This was the dominant sin of the rich fool to whom Jesus referred whose barns bulged with crop surpluses—so he built larger silos and more spacious elevators while he forgot God (ingratitude) and forgot his soul (irreligion) and thought God had forgotten him (presumption).

Zeno wisely observed: "The avaricious man is like the barren sandy ground of the desert which sucks in all

the rain and dew with greediness, but yields no fruitful herbs or plants for the benefit of others."

The spendthrift wants the benefit of getting for the pleasure of spending, while the miser wants the blessing of getting for the joy of keeping. Both are rotting with the sin of avarice. They live for themselves with no regard for others—or for God.

3. Envy is a sort of passive decomposition of the soul. It is proportionate to desire. The more we want what we do not have, the greater the depths of envy. It can take the form of desiring great office or social prestige or political power. The higher the ambition, the deeper the envy.

Thomson has said, "Base envy withers at another's joy, and hates the excellence it cannot reach."

Envy leads to covetousness. It may result in taking what you want by the use of illegitimate means. To desire something and not be able to get it results in frustration and eventually produces the angry soul. One of the Ten Commandments is, "Thou shalt not covet."

4. Lust is the fourth deadly sin. The three preceding have been sins of the mind or heart, but lust is an inordinate love of the pleasures of the flesh. It wears the modern tag of "self-expression." It is the prostitution of love, the debasing of the finest flower that grows in the garden of man's heart.

Everything today is geared to sex and sense. It is "wine, women, and song." Nothing new—just a new and overaccentuated emphasis. The seventh commandment, "Thou shalt not commit adultery" (Exod. 20:14), is still on God's statute book. It has not been repealed.

5. Anger is the outburst when the pressure of desire or frustration or repression reaches a certain uncontrollable degree. It is dangerous to others but is devas-

tating to one's self. Anger caused Cain to commit the first murder.

Anger makes the mind muddy and irrational; it stirs the heart with the passions of hell and prompts the will to devilish acts. A famous quotation reads, "Whom the gods would destroy they first make angry." Yes, anger leads to destruction; it is deadly.

6. Gluttony is the sixth fatal sin. It is one of the most universal today. The motto of the rich fool, "Eat, drink, and be merry, for tomorrow we die," is the practical slogan of the twentieth century gluttons. Instead of eating to live they live to eat.

Milton said: "Swinish gluttony ne'er looks to heaven amid his gorgeous feast, but with besotted, base ingratitude, crams and blasphemes his feeder."

A glutton is one who exists like an animal, eats like a horse, and dies like a dog. His body is his shrine and his belly his god. The mind is dulled and the spirit choked; the body is king.

7. The seventh deadly sin is sloth. It is defined as "disinclination to exertion," "laziness," and "indolence."

Cato warned, "Flee sloth, for the indolence of the soul is the decay of the body."

One who is inoculated with the sin of sloth is one who has lost the zest for living. His taste for achievement has withered; his appetite for life has faded. He has become eroded, barren, and unproductive. In reality, such a person is a dead man still eking out an existence. Sloth is deadly.

The only hope for persons saturated with sin is the Great Physician. He can first forgive the acts and then cleanse the actor.

Here is the only successful therapy—"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (I John 1:7).

IS LIFE CLOSING IN ON YOU?

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 7:13, 14; Proverbs 4:18; 14:12

One of the most infamous instruments of torture used in the Middle Ages was a box much like a diver's suit. It stood about six feet high, eighteen inches wide, and a foot deep. Protruding from the back and sides were six-inch, sharp spikes spaced about eight inches apart. Also on the inside of the door were similar spikes. The torture victim was forced to stand in this box and then the door was forcibly closed and pressed tight, causing these sharp six-inch spikes from the rear and also from the front to penetrate the body in dozens of places. Such a devilish apparatus was more than a torture device—it caused unbearable, excruciating pain, resulting in a welcomed death. When the door closed the victim was secure and his murder was certain.

Another fiendish practice in a certain medieval penitentiary was consummated in a specially constructed cell. It was about ten feet wide and twenty feet long. The thing that made this cell so different and so devilish was this—the four walls were adjustable. The prisoner was locked in this strange room. Each day the walls moved in an inch, so that the cell became two inches shorter and two inches narrower every twenty-four hours. The helpless prisoner could count mathematically just how many days before the squeeze would be on and death would come. He could push with all his might against the moving walls to no avail. His screams for help went unnoticed. He was caught. As the walls moved in, life shortened up. Day by day the sides of his cell got closer to him. Now the room had shrunk to a width of twelve inches and a

length of two feet. He couldn't lie down or sit down; he had to stand. Twenty-four hours later the walls moved tighter—now ten inches wide, twenty-two inches long—then eight inches by twenty inches—then six by eighteen—then four by sixteen. While the victim twisted and adjusted the walls closed in—bones broke, blood flowed, skull cracked—until all that was left was the bloody pulp of a crushed man.—*Life had closed in on him.*

The spiked cabinet and the adjustable cell are terrible examples of instruments for physical torture. But life for the moral creature has worse consequences than mere bodily pain. Mental anguish and spiritual suffering are more acute. To be a failure, a traitor, a moral derelict, a spiritual apostate is far more agonizing than any form of physical torture.

Every human being grows either bigger and richer and more righteous or smaller and poorer and more corrupt. Habits forge unbreakable chains. If they are good we become fixed and stable as worthy characters. If our habits are bad we become bound as prisoners of our own evil selves. The choice from the beginning is ours.

At the outset life offers two roads—the *right* and the *wrong*.

The *right* is narrow and has a smaller entrance. It appears unattractive, drab, unalluring—but it is *right*.

The *wrong* is attractive, colorful, alluring, and glamorous. It is broad and the entrance is wide. But it is still *wrong*.

Jesus pictured these two roads when He said: "Enter ye in at the strait gate: for wide is the gate, and broad is the way, that leadeth to destruction, and many there be which go in thereat: because strait is the gate, and narrow is the way, which leadeth unto life, and few there be that find it" (Matt. 7: 13, 14).

The *right way* is strait, narrow, unpopular, but it leads to abundant life and eternal happiness.

The *wrong way* is wide, broad, and popular, but it leads to spiritual death and everlasting misery.

We might liken the matter to a cylindrical cone or funnel; one end is very small, the other very wide.

The right road Jesus called narrow—it begins at the small opening of the funnel. To get through one must shed all sinful, worldly, evil practices and habits. The beginning cost is great. The fact is the *best things in life you always pay for in advance*. But when you qualify and get in, from that moment on life becomes bigger and richer—the circumference of the funnel gets greater and greater. It is as the Wise Man proclaimed, "The path of the just is as the shining light, that shineth more and more unto the perfect day" (Prov. 4:18).

The *wrong* road Jesus pictured as wide and broad. It is easy to get in—it is so spacious. But it is the wide end of the funnel; the tragic thing is that it gets smaller and smaller. The further you go, the more life closes in—until the press is on. The Wise Man also declared, "There is a way which seemeth right unto a man, but the end thereof are the ways of death" (Prov. 14:12).

Every person is on one road or the other. Look at people—some more buoyant and radiant with age. They are poised, calm, confident, serene, and happy. They have sowed good seed and are reaping a glorious harvest. They entered Christ's narrow way and have found it expanding and exhilarating. It leads to an unlimited horizon in God's eternal city.

But look at others. They entered the broad way—sold out for pleasure and thrills. They stabbed their better selves, spurned the pleas of parents and friends, and rejected the call of Christ and right. Now look at them—broken in health, cigarette fiends, dope addicts,

drunkards, few friends, irritable, nervous, condemned, burned out. Life has turned to ashes; the glow is gone from the cheek, the spring from the heel, and radiance from living. So they try for more thrills and kicks, but it all is fading. The funnel is getting smaller and smaller. Life is pressing in. Every day the walls come nearer. The horizons, instead of expanding, are contracting. As in the adjustable cell, one is caught, hemmed in, crushed, squeezed into eternal misery and death.

But there is still a ray of hope. Christ is the Saviour. Your life may be ruined but your soul can yet be saved by a forgiving, merciful, compassionate Jesus.

Plead for forgiveness and put your faith in Him before life crushes you and presses your poor soul into eternal night.

YOU CAN'T DIVORCE YOUR SELF

Many apparently impossible tasks have been achieved. Miracles have been wrought when everything seemed hopeless. Feats of amazing skill have been performed. But here is something that neither God nor man can do—separate *you* from *your self*. There is no divorce, in the courts either of God or of man, for a person from himself. I can't divorce *me*. My self and I remain together forever. The ego and my self are inseparable.

One may divorce a nagging, unfaithful wife. One may get rid of a philandering husband. But you cannot sue your self for a divorce. Even separation papers are impossible. In fact, there is no court either divine or human, moral or civil, that has the legal *right* or the metaphysical *power* to sever your self from you.

In view of the absolute impossibility of personal divorce what are the possible solutions people pursue?

Some deny that they exist, which is irrational. *Who* is doing the denying?

Some just endure themselves to the bitter end—"till death do us part." That is ridiculous because it means years of agonizing toleration of a corrupt and tantalizing self, and then death does nothing but divorce our bodies from our spirits. You will still live with your self after death. What a hopeless and distasteful future some people have ahead of them—to live with themselves forever!

The only way to meet the problem is to change the self you do not like so that the impossible divorce is no longer needed or desired.

David Hume, the father of the associationistic school of psychology, said, "I cannot find myself except at the

moment of a sense perception. If my senses were destroyed, I would cease to exist." Someone has pictured Mr. Hume coming out of his house and proceeding to look in the five windows of sense: sight, and then hearing, smell, touch, and taste and, finding nobody home, he reasoned, There is no self. But who was looking in the window?

Immanuel Kant called Hume's self the "*empirical self*"—that which dealt with sense experience. But behind every such a self is always the "*transcendental self*." One may pull a part of his self out and look at it but his transcendental self is always doing the scrutinizing.

One may be dreaming or be the victim of illusions or hallucinations but there is always someone who is doing the dreaming and someone who is having the illusion or hallucination.

Descartes, the great French rationalist, made his first self-evident, certain postulate: "I think, therefore I exist." Personal existence precedes personal experience and personal knowledge. You can't get behind your self. You cannot annihilate your self. And you can't divorce your self. Therefore, it is imperative for your present and eternal happiness that your self be the kind of self that you don't want to divorce. So "be good to your self" by making your self *good*.

The poet expressed the truth of this sermon pertinently when he wrote:

*I have to live with myself and so
I want to be fit for myself to know.
I want to be able as the days go by
Always to look myself in the eye.
I don't want to stand with the setting sun
And hate myself for the deeds I've done.
I want to go out with head erect;
I want to deserve all men's respect.*

*But here in the struggle for fame and pelf,
I want to be able to like myself.
I don't want to look at myself and know
That I'm bluster and bluff and empty show.
I can't hide myself from me.
I can see what others may never see.
I can know what others may never know.
I can't fool myself, and so,
Whatever happens, I want to be
Self-respecting and conscience free.*

James Russell Lowell underscored the same truth when he penned these sobering lines:

*To have no secret place wherein
To stoop unseen to shame or sin;
To be the same when I'm alone
As when my every act is known;
To walk undaunted, unafraid;
To right the errors I have made;
To be without pretense or sham,
Exactly what men think I am.*

Your number one problem is your self. Other people may cause you trouble and "get in your hair," but you cause your self more heartaches and distress than anyone else. You know your self—your deceit, your duplicity, your jealousy, your pride, your hypocrisy, your agony, your condemnation—summed up in your sin.

*If you have lied, you live with a liar.
If you have cheated, you live with a chisler.
If you have stolen, you live with a thief.
If you have killed, you live with a murderer.*

And to live daily and hourly with a liar or a thief or a murderer is very undesirable company.

But you can't divorce your self. But you can divorce that *part* of your self that makes you a liar, a thief, or a murderer.

In brief, and in conclusion, it is sin in your self that makes your self loathsome and undesirable.

God has not made it possible for you to divorce your self but He has made provision whereby internal sin can be divorced from you.

Your past sins which have brought guilt and condemnation to your self can be forgiven.

Your inbred sin, the carnal part of your self, can be purged out of your being. Here is God's promise:

"If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just to forgive us our sins, and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (I John 1:9).

Does your self give you trouble?

If you could, you would divorce your self.

But you can't—it is impossible. But the sinful part of your self can be divorced—removed, eradicated, cleansed, purged—from your self.

So, instead of starting divorce proceedings against your self, why don't you start praying for your self, that God may pardon and cleanse you?

THERE IS SOMEONE IN THE BIBLE LIKE YOU

SCRIPTURE: Hebrews 11:23-26

The Bible is the world's greatest literary masterpiece. It is composed of sixty-six books written by forty different authors over a period of sixteen hundred years. These inspired writers represent all classes, stations, and offices of men from kings to peasants, priests to laymen, prophets to fishermen, poets and philosophers, musicians and shepherds, tentmakers and tax collectors, men and women, old and young, rich and poor, prime ministers and ordinary citizens, educated and illiterate, lawmakers and mystics.

Because of this widespread array of authors, all points of view, all races, colors, languages, and economic conditions are included.

One might catalogue all the emotions, instincts, appetites, desires, and ambitions of mankind as a whole and then find some person in some specific situation illustrative of each of them. The Bible is a record of men in all possible human situations. There is someone just like you in just the kind of situation you are now in. If you can locate that person in your situation, you can get help to make you a victor, or you can get a warning from his unsuccessful meeting of the situation.

One of the strong arguments for the divine origin of the Bible is that it does not protect and glamorize its heroes and blacken and distort its villains. It paints the picture as it is with all the reality of raw, stark human passions.

God loved David, but did not cover or approve his lustful licentiousness.

God anointed Saul, but did not withhold judgment when he willfully disobeyed His command.

Samson had great favor and power from God, but was not spared when he sinned.

Adam was God's perfect creature, but was not protected and coddled when he violated God's law.

Ananias and Sapphira were in the circle of the Early Church, but were stricken when they lied to the Holy Spirit.

On the other hand, Peter was a rough, raw, cursing, sinful fisherman; but he was called by Jesus. He vacillated, forsook his Lord—was heartbroken, repentant, and was forgiven.

Paul was a zealous and bigoted member of the Sanhedrin. He persecuted the Early Church; but he was converted and he himself was persecuted and finally was murdered for the gospel's sake.

Demas loved the world and forsook the circle of believers.

Judas loved gold, betrayed his Lord, committed suicide.

Jacob was a slick, crafty, selfish, deceptive son. He would even double-cross his father.

Cain tried to get by with an offering of vegetables in place of a blood sacrifice demanded by God.

Solomon loved money, wine, and women. He had 700 wives and 300 concubines.

Job was a multimillionaire but hit a super-financial crash.

Haman tried to rig conditions for his own selfish ambitions. He built a gallows for another and hung from it himself.

Achan thought he could get by and hide some treasure, but he was found out and slain.

Lot chose selfishly and lost, while Abraham took the rocky hill country and became rich.

The rich man treated Lazarus like a dog. Both died. Lazarus became a spiritual millionaire in eternity, while Dives was crying for one drop of cool water.

Pilate tried to play neutral; he faced duty and refused to follow right.

The thief on the cross in his last hour repented and received eternal life.

The rich young ruler wanted eternal life but would not pay the full price. He lacked only one thing, but he went away sorrowfully; he missed it.

Nicodemus was a good, clean, moral man, a ruler. Jesus told him that he must be born again, of the Spirit.

Look at these Biblical characters:

Cain—the first murderer

Noah—laughed at and mocked

Joseph—tempted but true

Moses—highly educated but loyal to God and his people

Delilah—the seductress

Salome—the fickle, wicked dancer

Ruth and Esther, Mary and Martha—women of noble spiritual royalty

Elijah and Elisha—true men of God

Isaiah, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel—inspired messengers of Jehovah

Stephen—the first martyr

Timothy—an ideal young minister

What an array! Some good, some bad, some victors, some victims!

Characters of all descriptions—loyal and true, tricky and deceptive, lustful and sensuous, selfish and self-

seeking, proud and haughty, murderers and martyrs, suicides and saints, pure and chaste, seductive and voluptuous, moral and upright, cursing and denying, repentant and contrite, arrogant and defiant, intriguing and designing, loyal and true, hateful and revengeful, loving and dependable.

This gamut of human personalities playing significant parts in the Biblical drama were not pawns of fate nor predetermined creatures of destiny. They were what they were because they chose to be. Every one of them could have been different. The rich young ruler might have become another St. Paul, and Paul could have been an apostate suicide.

One's choice determines one's destiny.

There is somebody in the Bible *just like you*. You, too, have possibilities for great good or terrible evil. All men are sinners. To continue in sin is to proceed toward greater evil and ultimately hell.

Jesus can change you. He took a Peter and made a saint; he took a Saul and made a Paul; he took a Magdalene and made a noble woman.

You—with your instincts, appetites, desires, and habits—can become a person like one of the Biblical tragedies, or you can become as one of the Biblical triumphs.

It depends on your choice for Christ and right or Satan and wrong.

While the choir sings the classic of Charlotte Elliott, you come to your Saviour.

*Just as I am, without one plea
But that Thy blood was shed for me,
And that Thou bid'st me come to Thee,
O Lamb of God, I come, I come!*

YOUTH: OURS BUT ONCE

SCRIPTURE: Ecclesiastes 11: 9; 12: 1; I Timothy 4: 12

Someone has suggested that it is a shame that *youth* should be squandered on young people who have insufficient experience to use it wisely.

Youth is priceless and golden. It passes all too rapidly. It is gone before one can appraise its worth accurately. Then one looks back with sickening dismay and disappointed ambitions to the one period in life that *could* have made a difference in all succeeding stages. Middle age and old age can never affect youth. But what one is in youth makes all the difference to middle and old age.

Time travels in one direction. Youth first—then it is gone forever; middle age next; finally old age.

Why is youth so all-important?

First, it is the period of *habit formation*. Psychologists inform us that 98 per cent of all of our acts are those of habit. Personal habits are formed before one is twenty, and professional before one is thirty. These mold and set the remaining years of our lives. Therefore it is imperative that good habits be formed.

Second, youth is a period of *awakening*. Physically one "grows up." Awkwardness produces self-consciousness. With this comes a social awakening—and a mental stirring which leads to such questions as: Who am I? Where did I come from? Why am I living? Where am I going? Following such always comes a spiritual awakening.

To be awake means to be conscious. To be conscious means to be active—and to be active means to make de-

cisions—and decisions are made in the light of one's ideals, be they good or bad.

Third, youth is the period of the *formation of ideals*. We grow morally to the extent to which we actualize our ideals. In fact, moral value or one's character is the degree to which one has turned his ideals into personal reality.

Nothing is more important in youth than that the proper heroes and heroines, who are the embodiment of the highest ideals, are placed before our young people.

Fourth, youth is the period of *vision*. The Bible declares, "Your young men shall see visions, and your old men shall dream dreams." Here is the dividing line between youth and old age. Dreams are made up of past experiences; visions are composed of future possibilities. Age looks backward; youth looks forward. And it is not always a matter of biology. Some men of seventy are young; they see bigger and better things ahead. Some men of twenty are old; they lack vision.

Fifth, youth is a period of *creative genius*. In every field of life, masterpieces are either produced by young men or their foundation is laid in youth. Great old men have usually been great young men.

Agassiz, the great naturalist, was a professor at Harvard at twenty-five.

Alexander Graham Bell invented the telephone at twenty-five.

Galileo discovered the law of the vibration of the pendulum at eighteen, was a professor at twenty-five.

Joan of Arc led the armies of France at eighteen.

William Jennings Bryan became a member of Congress at thirty-one.

Alexander had conquered the world at thirty-two.

Oliver Cromwell became a member of Parliament at twenty-nine, Gladstone at twenty-three, and Pitt at

twenty-one. He also became chancellor of the exchequer at twenty-three and prime minister at twenty-five.

Abraham Lincoln entered the Illinois legislature at twenty-five and Congress at thirty-eight.

Alexander Hamilton wrote the Constitution at thirty and became Secretary of the Treasury at thirty-two.

Napoleon was commander of the armies of Italy at twenty-seven and emperor of France at thirty.

Theodore Roosevelt was President at forty-three.

Isaac Newton, professor of mathematics at twenty-seven.

Robert Maynard Hutchins, dean of Yale Law School at twenty-five and president of the University of Chicago at thirty.

Berkeley, the great idealist, wrote his principal work at twenty-five.

William Cullen Bryant wrote "Thanatopsis" at nineteen; Robert Burns, his first volume of poems at twenty-seven; Lord Byron, at nineteen; Charles Dickens, at twenty-four; Shakespeare, at twenty-nine; and Tennyson, at eighteen.

Caruso was acclaimed at twenty-five, Galli Curci at twenty, Fritz Kreisler at thirteen, Paderewski at eighteen, Schumann-Heink at seventeen.

Raphael frescoed the walls of the Vatican at twenty-five, and John Singer Sargent exhibited his masterpieces at twenty-one.

John Calvin wrote his famous *Institutes* at twenty-seven, Martin Luther became professor of philosophy at twenty-five, and David Livingstone began his career in Africa at twenty-seven.

Henry Dunster became president of Harvard at twenty-eight; Elisha Williams, of Yale at thirty-two.

Disraeli published "Vivian Grey" at twenty-two; and Shelley, "Queen Mab" at twenty-one.

Macaulay, Carlyle, Scott, Webster, Bok, Westinghouse, Burbank, Eastman, Ford, Edison, Wright brothers, Woolworth, Rockefeller, Schwab, Heinz, and Gilbert all did the work for which they are remembered before they were thirty-five.

Youth is a time for preparation, for good habit formation, for visions, and for creative genius.

Don't squander it. Don't waste it.

Mold it.

Train it.

Cultivate it.

Use it.

James Allen said pertinently and pointedly: "You are today where your thoughts have brought you; you will be tomorrow where your thoughts take you. You will become as small as your controlling desire; as great as your dominant aspiration."

Give yourself to the best.

Give your best to Christ, the Ideal of the Ideals.

He said, "Come, follow Me, and I'll *make* you."

Use your youth so that your middle age can be useful and your old age can be blissful.

LOST CONTROL

SCRIPTURE READING: Luke 15:11-24

One of the most frightening, helpless experiences one can have is to be driving a car and suddenly to realize that you have *lost control*. You have your hands on the steering wheel but you cannot steer. You put your foot on the brake but you cannot stop. The automobile is out of control. It is free from your guidance. You now have to trust to nonhuman factors, hoping the crash will not be fatal.

It is a terrible moment—that instant when I know that the direction of the car and the lives in the car are no longer in my hands. I have lost control. From here on the machine is at the mercy of other forces. I sit back, helpless, and wait for the consequences. I can do nothing about it. It is out of my hands. Whether these other powers will bring the car to safety or disaster I do not know; but, worse, I cannot determine. I had control but I lost it. Some other power took over—I merely await results. Gravitation, velocity, winds, trees, stones, precipices, bridges, fences, other cars and trucks, telephone poles may play their part in wrecking or saving my car, killing or sparing my life. Impersonal forces now take over. I am their prisoner and victim. I no longer call the signals. I have lost my grip; the controls are no longer mine.

But—I *am* responsible for this horrifying situation.

Lost control may be due to mechanical difficulties; I should have had them checked.

Lost control may be due to excessive speed; I should have slowed down.

Lost control may be due to carelessness; I should have been more attentive.

Lost control may be due to foolhardiness; I should have been more cautious.

Lost control may be due to drunkenness; I should have remained sober.

Lost control may be due to boisterous, wild companions; I should have warned them.

But, no matter what may be the cause of my lack of control, I am now helpless. I can do nothing—nothing but wait for the consequences of my careless acts.

The car is now swerving, bouncing, careening on two wheels—no personal control, only the fate impersonal things may have for me. If I'm lucky, I may escape. If not, I have killed myself. In reality, I'm a suicide because I had control and lost it.

Such a situation as described is bad and tragic. It has to do only with material machines and human bodies.

More horrifying and more alarming is the fact that many persons have *lost control* of their lives. They are careening through life, bringing destruction to others, and finally will commit spiritual suicide and be lost forever. The end—the wreck—is only a matter of time. They are out of control, they have lost their grip. Their will is no longer at the wheel; something else pulls the stick. Their chart and compass and rudder are determined by other forces.

The serious, sobering question of this sermon is this: What controls you?

Temper?

Have you given way so often to outbursts of passion that you now fly off and do irrational things without intelligent control?

Habit?

Have you so permitted yourself to follow certain courses of activity that now you have lost the ability to change?

For years you have imbibed alcohol until now your body cells are so drenched you no longer control the intake—alcohol controls you.

Is it true that nicotine has so saturated your body chemistry that you can no longer call the signals—nicotine signals the call?

Have narcotics so debauched you that they are in control and you are just an obedient servant?

Are you a slave of habit? Do alcohol, nicotine, and dope control you or do you control them?

Possibly it is neither temper nor habit that controls you. Maybe it is the *gang*. You do what they want. They call the tune and you dance to it—and then pay the fiddler. Do you control the activities of your clique or group or gang, or do they control you?

Does your love for money or for pleasure or for position or for power or for social approval cause you to be controlled by them, or do you control them?

Have you decided where you are going on the highways of life? Do you have an objective and goal? Are you heading that way? Do you have your hand on the wheel, your eye on the road, and your mind on the objective; or have you *lost control* of your personal soul and are being shoved, pushed, by bad habits, evil pals, sinful desires until it is only a matter of time until you crack up? *Lost control!*

At the bottom of all moral and spiritual wrecks is *sin*. There are no moral accidents. All spiritual tragedies are the result of personal, willful choices. One gives himself to sinful practices and continues such until his habits, his inner nature, his evil companions take him over, body and soul—*lost control*.

And when one loses control he then tries to make up in speed what he lacks in direction. He will compensate

by speed for what he loses in purpose. So he goes twice as fast toward nowhere and crashes fatally. His motto is, "Go faster—eat more, drink deeper, for tomorrow we die."

Yes, but what about the *day after tomorrow*—the Judgment?

There is only one way to regain control of your life—turn it over humbly to Christ. He will break the fetters of sin. He will snap the chains of sinful habit. He will cleanse from carnal desires. He will bring back to your life purpose and objective and meaning. He will adjust your rudder, release your steering wheel, and give you a road map, a chart, and a compass.

And in addition, He himself will be your constant personal Guide.

An ocean liner was crossing the Atlantic. A terrific storm struck. The lightnings flashed, thunders roared, winds blew. The ship climbed the mountainous waves and plunged to the watery depths. It seemed that the vessel would break in two or sink. Everyone was frightened—that is, everyone except one little girl who sat rocking her doll and singing.

Someone asked, "Little girl, aren't you scared?"

She replied, "No. My father is captain of this ship. His hand is on the wheel. All is well."

Listen, friend. If you have *lost control*, let Christ, the great Pilot, become *your Pilot*. Thus you can gain control here and hear God say, "Well done," hereafter.

OUT AT HOME!

SCRIPTURE: Acts 26

Imagine this situation. It is the seventh and final game of the World Series, each team having won three games. It is the ninth inning; the score is three to nothing in favor of the Yankees; there are three Giants on the bases; the batter has three balls and two strikes on him. The next ball is hit squarely. The player rounds first base, goes to second, streaks to third, heads for home, slides for the plate. The umpire cries, "You're out." Had he been safe, the game and the series would have been won. Had he arrived at home a split second sooner, or had he gone eighteen inches farther, he would have been safe, the game would have been won, the series won, and the player a hero. But—he was a fraction of a second late and inches short.

Out at home!

So near and yet so far!

Had the player struck out, or flied out, or merely hit a single, there would have been no psychological build-up. But to hit a home-run ball, to slam a winning blow, and then to be called out by inches and seconds causes a tremendous letdown. Almost a home run—almost a winning hit—almost a hero—but *out at home!*

The margin between success and failure, victory and defeat is very small sometimes.

We are familiar with the expression, "A miss is as good as a mile." If you don't hit the target, you've failed—you've missed. But how tragic to lose by a hair—to *just miss!*

In a race to be beaten by a hand's breadth—to just miss breaking the tape—is pathetic. Almost a winner!

A horse wins a race by a nose. The runner-up loses by that small margin. Just a nose from victory and the fabulous purse! Almost a victor!

To lose a basketball game by a basket, or a hockey game by one goal, or a football game by a single point, is maddening. To be so near and yet lose! To be so good and yet to be defeated! Forever the record book carries the loss. Almost but not quite!

Out at home!

To miss a train by a minute, to flunk an examination by a percentage point, to lose an election by a handful of votes is distressing. Almost but not quite—a miss, a failure, and a loss! It's in the record.

Out at home!

Aaron Burr missed being President by one electoral college vote. Henry Wallace missed renomination for the Vice-Presidency (and would have been President) by a half dozen votes. Had not Charles Evans Hughes lost California, he would have been President. William Jennings Bryan lost the Presidency in three elections, and Thomas E. Dewey twice. They almost made it. So near—and yet so far!

Out at home!

Saul lost after he had the spiritual game partly won. Pilate almost set Jesus free, but instead washed his hands. Judas almost made it, but died a traitor and a suicide.

The rich young ruler came running to Jesus. He wanted eternal life. He kept the commandments. He was moral and law-abiding. He met Jesus and was in the very presence of the Saviour. He was willing to pay the complete cost except *one* thing. A thousand items he would yield—one thing only he would keep. Jesus said,

“One thing thou lackest.” Think of it! In the presence of eternal life and to lose! Almost—just one thing! But he refused, turned his back on Jesus, and went away sorrowful. So near and yet so far!

Out at home!

Almost—but lost!

St. Paul stood before King Agrippa and gave his stirring testimony. When he concluded, the king was convinced intellectually and was deeply moved emotionally. He cried out, *Paul*, “almost thou persuadest me to be a *Christian*.”

Paul said, “I would to God, that not only thou, but also all that hear me this day, were both almost, and altogether” persuaded (Acts 26:28, 29).

Imagine what would have happened to the Early Church if King Agrippa had accepted Christ. His mind and heart were agreed. But he failed to put his will on Christ’s side. Almost—but not altogether!

Out at home!

It is pathetic to lose a game by a run, an examination by a point, a race by a nose; but the most tragic, most heart-rending of all life’s experiences is to lose one’s soul by a hair’s breadth.

To be the son of godly parents, to be the object of many prayers, to be moved on by the Holy Spirit, to know what is right, to feel deeply the sense of guilt and condemnation, to hunger for spiritual peace, and with tears flowing to say the final “No” is the most horrible thing in all the universe.

To spurn a father’s pleadings, to crush a mother’s loving heart, to refuse all overtures of mercy, to wade willfully through the shed blood of Jesus, to resist the Holy Spirit and say the conclusive, decisive “No” is terrible.

So near—and yet so far!

Out at home!

Almost—not quite—only an inch—only a second!

Friend, whomever God has this sermon of warning for, take the margin—go one inch farther—take up the slack—don't be lost just in sight of home. Almost is not enough; add just a bit—be altogether.

Don't be called out by the Great Umpire one inch from home plate.

Put your will behind what you *know* is right. Put your will on the side of your hungry heart. Give God your *mind* and your *heart*—and then your *will*. Be completely, entirely, wholly persuaded.

Don't turn back after having come so far.

Don't be called out at home.

A hymn has been written illustrating the awful truth of this sermon. While the choir sings, why don't you kneel by your radio and turn "almost" into "altogether"? Come to Christ wholeheartedly and completely.

Listen to the first stanza:

*Almost persuaded now to believe;
Almost persuaded Christ to receive;
Seems now some soul to say,
"Go, Spirit, go Thy way;
Some more convenient day
On Thee I'll call."*

Here is the final, tragic stanza. Listen.

*"Almost persuaded," harvest is past!
"Almost persuaded," doom comes at last!
"Almost" cannot avail;
"Almost" is but to fail!
Sad, sad, that bitter wail—
"Almost—but lost!"*

THE GREATEST WORLD-WIDE VICE

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 10:39

Mr. Lee Bristol, president of the Bristol-Myers Company of New York, used a phrase in his article in the popular symposium, "This I Believe," which gave the inspiration for my sermon today. He referred to the "greatest world-wide vice." Immediately one begins to speculate as to what it might be—gambling, drunkenness, licentiousness, prostitution, graft, lying, stealing, murder, suicide, war?

If you were asked to cast a ballot, which would you vote for as the world's worst vice? Quite a problem!

Mr. Bristol not only raises the question but gives his answer, with which I am in hearty and complete agreement. By now I know you are wondering what his answer is. And I am wondering if you too will agree with him.

Well, here it is: "The world's greatest vice is *selfishness*."

Why is he right?

Because at the bottom of all our troubles, be they personal, social, national, or universal, is selfishness.

War is the most world-wide and universal vice the human race faces. What is its cause? National selfishness. It becomes a struggle between the have's and the have-not's. The latter enviously desire what the have's possess while the have's selfishly fight to retain it.

Class war within nations is the conflict between the upper crust who are wealthy and the lower stratum who are poverty-stricken. One selfishly fights to hold, the other to get.

The struggle between capital and labor is basically selfish. One battles to retain wealth while the other strives for a greater distribution of it.

Social position is another battleground between the blue bloods listed in the social register and those who want to be listed. So those on top because of heredity, wealth, or position fight to stay there and those who would be there struggle up the social ladder. Basically both groups are selfish.

Let us shift now from collective situations to the more personal, individual vices.

What is gambling? A selfish desire to get something for nothing.

What is drunkenness? A selfish habit to satisfy a normal thirst illegitimately.

What is prostitution? A selfish practice to get money by turning a priceless virtue into a horrible vice.

What is graft? A selfish method to get money illegally.

What is lying? A selfish device to protect one's self after wrong conduct or to help one's self to improper ends.

What is stealing? A selfish method of procuring things which belong to others.

What is murder? A selfish crime to eliminate some individual who is thwarting one's personal desires.

What is suicide? A selfish attempt to avoid the responsibilities of life.

What is Sabbath desecration? A selfish practice to make Sunday a day of physical pleasure instead of a day of divine worship.

What is idolatry? A selfish worshiping of things that give personal gratification instead of worshiping God.

Covetousness, envy, jealousy, anger, hatred, animosity, and revenge all find their base and cause in selfishness.

For a moment, look at the Ten Commandments. Idol worship, lying, stealing, murder, adultery, covetousness, false witnessing, dishonoring of parents—the cause of the violation of any of the commandments or all is selfishness.

Yes, I think it is conclusive and noncontroversial that Mr. Bristol is right—selfishness is the world-wide vice.

Now we are ready for the final step in this discourse—What is selfishness?

The answer is sin.

Sin is putting self against God.

Sin is acting contrary to God's will to further one's selfish interests.

Sin is taking advantage of others in order to satisfy personal, selfish desires.

Sin is satisfying normal appetites in an abnormal way to satiate selfish wants.

Sin began in heaven when Lucifer selfishly desired to make himself God.

Sin began on earth when Adam selfishly satisfied a desire contrary to God's known law.

And so it has been since. Selfishness is a sinful expression of a desire, appetite, or instinct in an illegitimate, illegal way.

Happiness never comes from selfishness. In fact, it is a result of just the opposite. Service to God and others results in happiness to self.

Jesus enunciated this great principle of successful living: "He that findeth his life shall lose it, but he that loseth his life for my sake shall find it" (Matt. 10:39).

Surrender yourself to something bigger and beyond yourself and you will find yourself.

Surrender yourself to Christ and He will give himself to you.

Turn the world's greatest vice—selfishness—into the world's greatest virtue—service—and if you do you will merit happiness yourself and bring happiness to others.

Sing and pray with the poet—

*All to Jesus I surrender,
All to Him I freely give.
I will ever love and serve Him,
In His presence daily live.*

Francis of Assisi embodied the truth of this sermon in his famous prayer—

“Lord, make me an instrument of Thy peace. Where there is hatred, let me sow love; where there is injury, pardon; where there is doubt, faith; where there is despair, hope; where there is darkness, light; where there is sadness, joy.

“O Divine Master, grant that I may not so much seek to be consoled as to console; to be understood as to understand; to be loved as to love; for it is in giving that we receive; it is in pardoning that we are pardoned; and it is in dying that we are born to eternal life. Amen.”

TOP PRIORITIES—IMPERATIVE FIRSTS

During the war we all became familiar with the term priorities. We met it in relation to automobiles, steel, food, and transportation. Several times I was "bumped off" an air flight because some top military "brass" had to get to some strategic place or conference and possessed a *priority*. He came before I did, was more important—and rightly so.

In addition to priorities there were top priorities. Even among those who possessed importance there were others who were more important than the important, and a few top persons who were most important. The rating depended upon rank and relative significance in relation to speeding the war to victory.

Whether you have ever thought of it or not, is it not true that life itself sets up priorities and top priorities? If one would succeed in the battle of personal living he must designate some things as important and other things as most important. There must be top priorities, imperative firsts.

Probably the number one danger of modern living is to substitute secondary matters for primary, nonessential for essential, incidental for fundamental, and peripheral for the central.

The Old Testament records a classic example of this human tendency. A prisoner was put in custody of a keeper, with this charge: "Keep this man, guard him, watch him. If for any reason he escapes—be missing—thy life shall be for his life." There was a top priority, an imperative first. But what happened? The custodian or keeper became occupied with other matters—second-

ary, incidental things—and forgot his top charge. The prisoner escaped. And then what? The warden cried out to the king, “As thy servant was busy here and there, he was gone.” Did that excuse him or absolve him from blame? The king decreed: “You knew the charge. You knew the penalty. Thou thyself hast decided it. Thy life shall be for his life.” So he was condemned, not because he was busy doing sinful, evil things necessarily, but because he betrayed his top priority—his imperative first (I Kings 20:38-42).

The classic New Testament illustration of this same principle is commonly designated “The Story of the Rich Fool.” Jesus himself related it. In essence it is this. A man’s business prospered; he had to build larger barns to care for his bounteous crops. He sat back smugly and complacently and said to himself, “Soul, thou hast much goods laid up for many years; take thine ease, eat, drink, and be merry.” But God broke the silence and said, “Thou fool, this night thy soul shall be required of thee.” What a pathetic tragedy! Here he was at the triumphant apex of his career, just ready to live life to the full. But now his number was up. He must die. He ignored top priorities. He put sensuous satisfaction ahead of his soul. He gave all of his time seeking for gold and none searching for God.

Successful living must recognize top priorities, imperative firsts.

Permit me to suggest what they are:

1. God’s will for your life must be first—your personal desires second.
2. Make the kingdom of Heaven first in your activities. Jesus commanded, “Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness, and all these things [needful things] shall be added unto you” (Matt. 6:33).

Here is the top priority. It must transcend even home, friends, school, work, and pleasure. In all things Jesus must have pre-eminence (Col. 1:18).

3. Give God the first hour of every day. It is recorded of Jesus, "And in the morning, rising up a great while before day, he went out, and departed into a solitary place, and there prayed" (Mark 1:35). Early prayer and Bible reading each day is an imperative first.

4. Give God the first day of the week. Here is another top priority. The Sabbath must be a holy day and not a holiday. Its observance is so important that it is included as one of the Ten Commandments. You must not ignore it or shove it to a secondary place. It rates top priority in God's requirements and thus of necessity must be an imperative first in man's observance.

5. Give God the first portion of your income. Under the old Jewish order the first fruits—the first of the flocks, herds, and material increase—were the Lord's. One-tenth was the minimum. Offerings were to be over and above the tithes. It is still God's plan for financing His Church. So give Him the first tenth, top priority, and He will bless your nine-tenths.

So here are the top priorities, imperative firsts.

1. Give yourself to God.
2. Give the Kingdom first place in your activities.
3. Give the first hour of every day to prayer.
4. Give the first day of every week wholly to God.
5. Give the first portion of your income to His Church.

If you give God and His kingdom top priority, He will give you top blessings here and eternal life hereafter.

I propose this personal question: To what do you give top priority in your life?

CLASSICS OF CONSECRATION

Acts beyond the call of duty are always inspired by a supreme devotion to a great cause. It is in such moments that the finest in man is manifest. The basic law of life is that one finds his best when he gives himself to the best. Jesus gave us this truth when He declared, "He that findeth his life shall lose it, but he that loseth his life . . . shall find it." It is in *giving* that we *find* and in *losing* that we *gain*. Those that are remembered are those that have given.

Numberless examples of unselfish sacrifice dot the pages of history. Everyone thrills at the story of the small Greek band of heroic soldiers at the Pass of Thermopylae. During World War II when the enemy was driving the Allied forces off the continent and into the English Channel it was a brave, courageous company of English flyers who died to save thousands at Dunkerque.

A general commanded his own son to carry out a very dangerous operation. He was almost killed. After the heroic deed the boy said to his father, "Why did you order *me* to undertake such a dangerous mission?"

The general replied, "Son, I needed someone whom I could trust and I knew loved me as I know you do."

In our daily lives it is possible that the more painful, dangerous experiences God permits us to go through may be a yardstick of God's love for us and our love for Him. "Whom the Lord loveth he chasteneth," St. Paul declared.

In the recent war the captain of a submarine was severely wounded. As he was stretched out on the deck the enemy approached. All of the crew and the submarine

itself were in danger. It was impossible to take the captain below in his wounded condition. Lying there helpless, knowing death was sure, he commanded, "Take her down." The crew hesitated. He ordered, "Take her down." As the submarine submerged he floated and drowned. There is an instance of supreme consecration to a cause.

A United States stamp came out commemorating the act of extreme heroism when four chaplains refused to take to the lifeboats. With arms clasped together they died when they could have lived. Some things are more eternally worth while than biological life and animal pleasures.

In the great spiritual warfare millions of men have died as martyrs to the cause of Christ. Such heroism requires supreme consecration.

The giving of one's self to the Kingdom means a cross, a discipline, a suffering. It indicates the willingness to lose personal pleasures, financial gains, and popular acclaim for the Master. He must be *Lord of all* or He is not *Lord at all*.

Jonathan Edwards, one of America's greatest ministers and philosophers, when only nineteen years of age made his life's commitment and wrote it down. It is dated January 12, 1723. Here it is—listen:

"I made a solemn dedication of myself to God and wrote it down; giving up myself and all I had to God, to be for the future in no respect my own; to act as one that had no right to himself in any respect; and solemnly vowed to take God for my whole portion and felicity, looking on nothing else as any part of my happiness, nor acting as if it were; and his law for the constant rule of my obedience, engaging to fight with all my might against the world, the flesh, and the devil, to the end of my life."

C. T. Studd, one of the great contemporary Christians, made a unique consecration. He said he died to the appeals of the world and "acted as though he were dead." Therefore he said, "Nothing that happens to me matters." He was wholly alive to Christ and the Kingdom and completely dead to the things of the world and Satan.

Susanna Wesley, the great mother of John and Charles, the founders of Methodism, once wrote to John regarding his consecration what has become a classic declaration.

"Whatever weakens your reason, impairs the tenderness of your conscience, obscures your sense of God, or takes off your relish of spiritual things; whatever increases the authority of your body over your mind, that to you is sin."

St. Theresa uttered a sublime and hallowed classic when she exhorted,

*Let nothing disturb thee;
All things are passing;
God never changeth;
Patient endurance attaineth all things;
Who God possesseth in nothing is wanting;
Alone, God sufficeth.*

Madame Guyon wrote:

*I worship Thee, sweet will of God,
And all Thy ways adore;
And every day I live I seem
To love Thee more and more.
Ill that He blesses is most good,
And unblest good is ill.
And all that seems most wrong is right
If it be His sweet will.*

The sainted Susan N. Fitkin, one of the outstanding Christian women leaders of this century, when but a girl penned her consecration as follows:

*I am willing
To take what Thou givest,
To lack what thou withholdest,
To relinquish what Thou takest,
To go where Thou commandest,
To be what Thou requirest,
I am, O Lord, wholly and forever Thine.*

In closing this service I am asking the choir to sing Adelaide Pollard's classic of consecration. Listen to these sublime verses—

**Have Thine own way, Lord! Have Thine own way!
Thou art the Potter; I am the clay.
Mold me and make me after Thy will,
While I am waiting, yielded and still.*

*Have Thine own way, Lord! Have Thine own way!
Hold o'er my being absolute sway!
Fill with Thy Spirit till all she see
Christ only, always, living in me.*

*Hope Publishing Company, owner.

FAMOUS PRAYERS

SCRIPTURE READING: Matthew 6:9-14

Animals do not pray. Only man, created in God's own image, reaches out beyond himself for a Being greater than himself to whom he can commit and upon whom he can rest his own self. Intercourse between man and man is called *conversation*, between man and God is called *prayer*, between God and man is called *divine revelation*.

Prayer is of supreme importance. Heiler says, "*Prayer* is the center of religion," ". . . is the central phenomenon of religion, the very hearthstone of all piety." Schleiermacher said, "To be religious and to *pray*—that is really one and the same thing." Deissmann declared, "Religion, wherever it is alive in man, is *prayer*." Tiele made a similar observation when he said, "Where *prayer* has wholly ceased, it is all over with religion itself." Stolz added, "*Prayer* is the blood and the circulation of the blood in the religious life." Thomas Aquinas declared, "*Prayer* is the practical proof of religion."

Gergensohn uttered a mighty truth when he said: "Prayer is a perfectly accurate instrument for grading the religious life of the soul. Did one only know how a man prays, and what he prays about, one would be able to see how much religion that man has. When a man without any witnesses speaks with God, the soul stands unveiled before its Creator."

James Montgomery, the poet, wrote a classic:

*Prayer is the soul's sincere desire,
Unuttered or expressed;
The motion of a hidden fire
That trembles in the breast.*

*Prayer is the simplest form of speech
That infant lips can try;
Prayer, the sublimest strains that reach
The Majesty on high.*

*Prayer is the Christian's vital breath,
The Christian's native air,
His watchword at the gate of death;
He enters heaven with prayer.*

Lord Tennyson asserted correctly, "More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of."

Men in great moments—in extreme crisis, in depths of sorrow—have uttered sublime prayers from the depths of their souls, revealing complete consecration and entire commitment to God's will.

George Whitefield, the famous evangelist, prayed, "O Lord, give me souls, or take my soul."

Henry Martyn, the great apostle to India, cried out, "Here let me burn out for God."

David Brainerd, missionary to the North American Indians, declared: "Lord, to Thee I dedicate myself. Oh, accept me, and let me be Thine forever. Lord, I desire nothing else; I desire nothing more."

Thomas a Kempis offered one of the classic prayers: "Give what Thou wilt, and how much Thou wilt, and when Thou wilt. Set it where Thou wilt and deal with me in all things as Thou wilt."

Dwight L. Moody, one of America's most famous evangelists, implored God as follows: "Use me then, my Saviour, for whatever purpose and in whatever way Thou mayest require. Here is my poor heart, an empty vessel; fill it with Thy grace."

Martin Luther, the night before he appeared before the Diet of Worms, prayed: "Do Thou, my God, stand by

against all the world's wisdom and reason. Oh, do it! Thou must do it. Stand by me, Thou true, eternal God!"

The greatest of all prayers, the classic utterance of all time, is commonly called "The Lord's Prayer." It is the prayer Jesus taught His disciples. It is only sixty-five words long and yet it embodies every need the human heart has and every desire man craves from God. It is incomparable, matchless, classic, supreme, sublime.

Wellington said, "The Lord's Prayer contains the sum total of religion and morals."

Notice its comprehensive, universal, ethical, personal, and social scope. Jesus said,

After this manner therefore pray ye:

Our Father which art in heaven,

Hallowed be thy name.

Thy kingdom come. Thy will be done in earth, as it is in heaven.

Give us this day our daily bread.

And forgive us our debts, as we forgive our debtors.

And lead us not into temptation, but deliver us from evil: for thine is the kingdom, and the power, and the glory for ever. Amen. (Matt. 6:9-14).

In conclusion permit me to ask these pertinent, personal questions:

1. Do you pray?
2. For what do you pray?
3. Is your life such that God will hear and answer your prayer?

Here are some of the criteria or yardsticks for effective praying.

First, Psalms 66:18:

If I regard iniquity in my heart, the Lord will not hear me.

Second, John 15:7—Jesus said,

If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you.

Third, James 5:16:

The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.

The qualifying word for effectual prayer is *righteous*.

If St. James had said a *wealthy* man or an *educated* man or a *powerful* man, only a minority could have qualified. But he said "a *righteous* man." Here all can meet the requirement through Christ, who first will "cleanse us from all unrighteousness" and thus enable every man to come before the throne of grace and utter the desire of his innermost being with assurance that God will hear and will respond.

DO YOU KEEP A BOX SCORE ON YOURSELF?

SCRIPTURE: Matthew 7:1-5

Life has frequently been likened to a game. There are many analogies: goals, rules, judges, scorekeepers, training, teammates, captains, spectators, opponents, coaches, timekeepers, and trophies.

America's national pastime is baseball. In England and Australia it is cricket or Rugby. Canada goes strongly for hockey and curling. Every country has its favorite sport or popular game. All are based on competition governed by certain rules and judged by qualified referees.

Today's sermon has but one essential truth to proclaim. It is fashioned on the framework of baseball. It might have been illustrated as well by football, cricket, soccer, hockey, or basketball.

Here is the question of the theme, "Do You Keep a Box Score on Yourself?" Just what is the import of this pertinent inquiry?

A box score is a scheme used by the official record keeper to chart runs, hits, and errors of both teams. Hits and runs are assets; errors, liabilities. It is the prerogative of the scorekeeper to decide on each play, whether the batter should be given a hit and thus improve his batting average or the fielder an error, which lowers his fielding record. Over a full season's play a high batting or fielding average means a promotion, while a low average carries with it a demotion. The record is important. It is in the book and cannot be changed.

In baseball the scorekeeper is an appointed official and must be neutral and impartial. In life, too, God is keeping the record, which is just and true.

In baseball the sour notes come when the umpires' decisions are questioned by partisan, partial fans. Also the scorekeeper is criticized for calling an error against a certain player when that player's friends insist on a hit. On this same play the opposing partisan fans would applaud the scorekeeper's recording of an error. Partisanship, favoritism, partiality, and prejudice do not make for fair play and justice. That is why the officials must be absolutely neutral and completely impartial to teams and players.

In life it is a favorite pastime to keep a box score on others. We favor our friends and slander our enemies. One of humanity's weaknesses is to be able to see nothing bad in those we like and nothing good in those we dislike. So our box score is usually inaccurate because it is colored by prejudice and distorted by friendship and enmity.

Another strange quirk of human nature is the ease with which we find errors in others and overlook the same in ourselves. So we are very busy filling in the box score of *others*. We tend to reduce their hits and increase their errors. In other words, we magnify the liabilities and minimize the assets. But with ourselves we increase the home runs and decrease or eliminate the errors; i.e., we magnify our good points and minimize our bad traits.

It is very easy to see faults in others and at the same time possess these same faults ourselves and to a greater degree. If we could see ourselves as others see us, we would be less inclined to criticize others. Jesus accentuated this human tendency when in His Sermon on the Mount He said:

Judge not, that ye be not judged.

For with what judgment ye judge, ye shall be judged; and with what measure ye mete, it shall be measured to you again.

And why beholdest thou the mote that is in thy brother's eye, but considerest not the beam that is in thine own eye?

Or how wilt thou say to thy brother, Let me pull out the mote out of thine eye; and, behold, a beam is in thine own eye?

Thou hypocrite, first cast out the beam out of thine own eye; and then shalt thou see clearly to cast out the mote out of thy brother's eye (Matt. 7:1-5).

In other words, if your own box score is full of errors, why criticize your brother for one little error? First clean up your own box score before you fill your brother's full of errors.

There is also one other thing you should remember—you are not the official scorekeeper. You are only self-appointed. What you write does not affect the official record. God keeps the score and He lists all hits, runs, and errors. He misses none that should be included and He adds none that should be omitted. It is a relief and a comfort not to have to keep a box score on anybody else. And we do not even have to keep it on ourselves. Our responsibility is to make the hits, score the runs, and avoid making errors. We make the record, God fills in the box score.

We must guard against the tendency to see errors and be blind to good plays. Have you ever driven along the highway past a farm and noticed a flock of sheep when somebody exclaims, "Oh, look at the black sheep!" There were ninety-nine white ones. So we put one black sheep in our box score and fail to write ninety-nine white.

So it is in life, it is easy to find the black. Why not look for the white?

Better still, why not turn your gaze from without to within and check your own hits, runs, and errors honest-

ly? Record your own box score—it might not make others look so bad.

Sheridan offered significant advice when he said, "Believe that story false that ought not to be true."

In other words, don't charge up an error against a player who should not make such a misplay—not until it is proved to be an error. Keep his box score clean. Let God, the Official Scorer, fill it in.

Shakespeare uttered a sublime truth when he said:

"It is pretty safe to presume that about all the glaring effects or petty weaknesses which we are looking for in others may be found in ourselves, with a little careful investigation.

"Go to your bosom, knock there and ask your heart what it doth know that is like my brother's fault; if it confess a natural guiltiness, such as his is, let it not sound a thought upon your tongue against my brother."

The moral is, don't keep a box score on others until your own is free from errors. And even then, let God do it.

So in the game of life make hits, knock home runs, win the game, make as few errors as possible. Let God, the Official Scorer, keep the box score on yourself and others.

THE TIDE LIFTS SHIPS

SCRIPTURE: Psalms 16:11; Ephesians 1:23; 3:19; 4:13;
Colossians 1:19; 2:9

In a conference with Dr. Jesse Bader, secretary of evangelism for the National Council of Churches, he dropped a phrase that stayed with me and upon which I have been meditating—*The Tide Lifts Ships*.

Immediately I thought of that ship which had been sunk in the harbor of a large city, obstructing navigation—in fact, rendering that harbor useless. Ships of any size simply could not enter and unload their cargoes. The city fathers decided that the submerged, disabled vessel must be lifted and towed away. Irrespective of the cost the channel must be cleared—otherwise the business of the city would be almost completely ruined. Experts were summoned and proposed plans tried, but to no avail. The ship was sunk so deep and was so securely entrenched that nothing would budge it, much less lift it. When everything had failed and the city and harbor leaders were at wit's end trying to conceive of an effective scheme, an old sea captain approached them and said, "I can raise the sunken ship. Give me a try." After consultation and in view of the fact that their methods had failed and feeling that nothing could be lost, they authorized him to proceed.

The captain first procured two large, old mud-scows—flat-bottomed boats with square ends. These he placed over the spot where the vessel was sunk, one to the right and the other to the left. His next move was to send divers down to fasten thick steel cables to the disabled ship and place them under it. The ends of the steel

strands he attached firmly, tightly, and securely to the mud-scows. Do you see the picture clearly? Steel cables attached to one scow, then down under the sunken ship, and up and secured to the other scow. These operations all took place when the tide was out and the water at its lowest level. When all was in readiness, the captain sat back and waited for developments while critics said that it would never work. The captain declared: "We'll get results. It's only a matter of time—six hours at the most. The cables are strong and will not break. They are securely attached. The scows cannot sink. We've done our work. We'll just rest and wait. *The tide will lift the ship.*"

Little by little the tide came in. The cables tightened, then they strained; they creaked a little. The tide kept coming in—the scows rose bit by bit, riding the waves. They tossed somewhat but always rose a bit higher as the tide rolled in. Finally there was a great release when the sunken vessel was sucked and pulled out of its grave at the bottom of the harbor. With the submerged vessel in tow the victorious captain cleared the harbor of its obstruction. Why? He knew the power behind the tide. He also knew that if he could securely harness the sunken ship to the mud-scows, it would come up as the tide came in.

Yes, *the tide lifts ships.*

In a publication of the Methodist church I came across this phrase. *Evangelism Lifts Ships.* My heart responded affirmatively. Why? Because *evangelism* is the tide of God's Spirit coming in—yes, and *into* the hearts of people.

Evangelism lifts the ship of WORSHIP. When the tide comes in, more people want to worship and the form is filled with spirit.

Evangelism lifts the ship of FELLOWSHIP. As the tide comes in, there is a growing feeling of comradeship

and brotherhood. We are really fellows in the same ship going to the same place.

Evangelism lifts the ship of STEWARDSHIP. When the tide comes in and all hearts are filled with the Holy Spirit, it is not hard to empty our pocketbooks to support the cause of Christ. When the floodgates of God's love are opened on our souls, sacrifice seems sweet and giving seems very easy. Stewardship is lifted when the tide of love comes in.

Evangelism lifts the ship of DISCIPLESHIP. When the tide comes in, unconverted husbands and wives, sons and daughters, brothers and sisters, neighbors and friends are touched and lifted out of sin to become disciples of our Lord and Saviour, Jesus Christ.

Most certainly and unfailingly evangelism lifts the ships of *Worship, Fellowship, Stewardship, and Discipleship.*

It is also a corollary truth that when the tide of evangelism begins to recede and go out, these ships begin to flounder on the shoals of secularism, individualism, selfishness, and formalism.

When the Church is not evangelistic, *worship* is empty and sterile, resulting in ecclesiastical absenteeism. Millions do not go to the holy sanctuaries. *Worship* is affected both qualitatively and quantitatively when the fires of evangelism go out.

When the Church is not filled with the spirit of evangelism, *fellowship* turns into cliques and clubs. Communion with Christ is broken and fellowship with other church members is marred by jealous, suspicious, and miserable irritations. Evangelism oils the machinery and unites the army of God around a common objective—the salvation of men.

When the Church is not evangelistic, *stewardship* suffers. Tithes are withheld and offerings are small. When

our love for God decreases, our love for things increases and thus our money is diverted from the channels of the Kingdom to the marts of the world.

When the Church is not evangelistic, *discipleship* is smothered by selfishness. When the tide goes out, disciples break vows and no new disciples are made.

The Church to be successful and triumphant must keep the tide coming in and running high. Evangelism lifts all the ships.

How may we lift ships?

Two spiritual scows are needed: one of PRAYER, the other of FAITH. These are strong and reliable. Then fasten the strong cables of LOVE around the ship or difficulty you want lifted or changed, tie them firmly to the scows of PRAYER and FAITH, and then wait confidently for the tide of God's Holy Spirit to come in. Any ship can be lifted.

Jesus said: "If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ye shall ask what ye will, and it shall be done unto you" (John 15:8).

And again He said, "All things are possible to him that believeth" (Mark 9:23).

Yes, *prayer* and *faith* will bring God's tide in. Tie them by bonds of *love* to any problem and it will be solved.

No trouble is so deep, no difficulty so great, but what God's tide will lift it.

Pray and believe and let the tide come in.

IF I SHOULD DIE BEFORE I LIVE

SCRIPTURE: Romans 6:19-23

Most of us are tenderly familiar with the child's bedtime prayer taught to us by our mothers:

*Now I lay me down to sleep,
I pray the Lord my soul to keep.
If I should die before I wake,
I pray the Lord my soul to take.*

For my sermon today I am lifting out that third line and changing the last word from "wake" to "live" to read, "If I should die before I live." Sounds like a paradox, doesn't it? How can a man die before he lives? Well, it all depends on how you define the word "live."

A cow or a sheep or a hog lives. In contrast to a stone or a mountain or a coal mine, animals live—they are animate. The other objects are inanimate. They have no powers of locomotion. They are static, unmoved, set.

The word "animal" comes from the same root as "animate." It moves, eats, drinks, sleeps. In brief, it lives biologically.

A man also moves, eats, drinks, sleeps—lives biologically.

In nature there is a mineral, a vegetable, and an animal kingdom. Each exists. Man physically and biologically belongs to the animal kingdom.

But he is *more* than an animal. He is a living, breathing, pulsating soul. His body is made from the dust of the earth but his soul is the breath of God. The account reads, "God created man in his own image" (Gen. 1:27).

After creating the heavens and the earth, the sun and moon and stars, the mineral kingdom, the vegetable kingdom, the animal kingdom, God climaxed His creative genius by making man in His own image. Here is the procedure as recorded in God's Holy Word, the Bible: "And the Lord God formed man of the dust of the ground, and breathed into his nostrils the breath of life; and man became a living soul."

Man has a unique existence. He is more than an animal. He is more than a biological, physical organism. He is a living soul. He has a body which needs food and liquid and sleep as all animals do. He exists physically but he is more—he is a spirit inhabiting a body.

When a man lives like an animal, just eats and drinks and sleeps, he has stooped from the high levels of moral and spiritual living to the low plane of mere physical existing; and this is the number one tragedy. For a man created in God's own likeness to wallow in the quagmires of sensual, animal, physical cesspools is pathetic.

A child in its first years is concerned almost entirely with physical needs. Its body must be fed and protected. Later the mind begins to function and think. To remain in the animal stage and spend all of one's time in satiating thirst and satisfying hunger, ultimately leading to drunkenness and gluttony, is a horrible prostitution of God's crowning creation. Never to reach the levels of moral achievement or scale the heights of spiritual enrichment is the supreme travesty.

That is the import of my sermon subject—to die before one lives. Merely to exist, like an animal, and never to live, like an immortal soul, is tragic.

One of our great magazines carried a soul-moving story of the war recently. The writer was a soldier. He recounted the experiences of his outfit and gave a graphic

description of one of his fellow soldiers. He was a low character—had a foul tongue mouthing the most blood-curdling profanities and boasting of the vilest, unclean escapades. Whenever on leave he became drunk and frequented the lowest dives. He gambled and cursed and drank and caroused. He finally died in one of his drunken brawls. The author of the article in commenting on his death wrote this striking, sobering sentence: "I'm not sorry he died; I'm sorry he never began to live."

George Bernard Shaw advocated that every five years every man should be arrested and put on trial. When asked, "Why?" he replied, "To decide whether it is justifiable for both society and himself that the person on trial should live longer."

If a man is not producing anything, if he is not creating value, if he is merely a parasite consuming and destroying, why should he live longer?

If a person has already descended to animal levels, if society is no better (probably worse), if his family is not uplifted (probably embarrassed), if he has ignored his soul and forgotten the blessings of God, if he is a thankless ingrate, a profligate prodigal, a human animal, what claim does he have to continue to exist? And if he has squandered this mortal life why should he merit immortality?

No man can really live without Christ. He came to bring life and life more abundantly. He sets goals, posits worthy objectives, and gives worth-while ideals. In addition Jesus makes available a power that one may not become a victim on the animal level but that he may become a victor on the God-inspired spiritual heights. In brief, that one may *live*, not merely exist.

Of course the personal import of this sermon is: Are you existing like an animal or living like a son of God?

Clarence Edwin Flynn wrote:

*To be a slave when one might be a king,
To walk low roads when one might walk the high,
To crawl when one might just as well take wings,
To take the slime when one might have the sky;
To mingle with those whose lives are cheap
When with the sons of God we might commune,
To have the shallow rather than the deep,
To choose the discord, rather than the tune,
To dwell in swamps when one might have the heights,
To have a hovel for a heart and miss the golden dome
Where we might dwell in light—
Is there a greater tragedy than this?*

If you should die before you live may God have mercy on your wasted life and ruined soul.

Why don't you surrender yourself to Christ and begin to live?

ARE YOU MAJORING IN MINORS?

SCRIPTURE: Philippians 3:12, 13; Matthew 6:33; Matthew 16:26

One of the great dangers of our fast, modern tempo is that we will become so occupied with incidentals, non-essentials, and minors that we shall neglect the fundamentals, essentials, and majors.

It is not enough to be busy or to be active or to be alive. We must be busy for a purpose, active for a cause, and living for an ideal.

A person riding a merry-go-round and whirling a hundred times travels three miles but he gets nowhere. He merely takes a ride for the ride's sake. In reality, he is "taken for a ride." For millions of people, life is one continuous merry-go-round—going but never arriving—moving, but nowhere.

There are other millions who are preoccupied with the incidentals of life and allow the essentials to slip away. Such are "penny wise but pound foolish." They save a dime and lose a dollar.

Others spend so much time and energy on nonessential things that they lose the fundamental items of value. Such keep the peelings and throw away the banana or potato or apple; or, to use another figure of speech, they keep the shells and throw the pearls back.

In brief, such persons are *majoring on minors*. Everyone majors in something. Some interest or project or activity becomes one's primary concern. It is his *major* even though it may be *minor*.

A well-known nursery rhyme conveys the truth of this sermon—

*Pussy cat, pussy cat, where have you been?
I've been to London to see the queen.
Pussy cat, pussy cat, what did you there?
I frightened a little mouse under a chair.*

Poor little pussy cat started out to see the queen but instead merely saw a mouse. Too many people start out with worthy ideals and noble ambitions but end up chasing mice, killing mosquitoes, executing gnats, or exterminating bats. They *major on minors*. For them the little thing becomes big, the means becomes the end, or the incidental becomes the essential.

Here is a talented young man who has the ability to become an outstanding surgeon, but he is too wrapped up in burning the midnight gasoline to have a good time rather than burning the midnight oil in preparation for a life of usefulness. He is *majoring on minors*.

Here is a woman with outstanding qualities for leadership but she has so many little things to do—card parties, dances, and the like—*majoring on minors*.

Here is a minister who could be a spiritual giant in leading a needy flock to the green pastures of inner satisfaction but he is obsessed with some nonessential—fiddling on one string—*majoring on minors*.

Here is a young woman who could be a leader of youth toward the high plateaus of moral achievement but she is flitting her time away like a butterfly in one little episode of fleeting pleasure after another—*majoring on minors*.

After all, *what is the major thing in life?*

Is it my *body* and the satiation of its sensuous demands for pleasures and thrills?

Is it my *mind* and its desire for knowledge?

Is it my *social self* and its craving for friendship and fellowship?

Is it my *position in society* and its resultant place of influence and prestige?

Is it my ambitious *desire for power*?

Is it my abnormal *urge for popularity* and wide social approval?

No, all of these are *minors*.

The number one fact of my entire personality is that *I am a spirit* possessing a body and a mind, and living in a social environment. I have appetities, instincts, desires, and emotions. When I major on my body or my mind or on the satisfaction or satiation of any appetite or instinct or desire, I am *majoring on minors*.

What should be the major concern of every person?

The welfare of his soul and its relationship to God. Everything else is incidental, nonessential, and minor.

The wisest man who ever lived said: "Fear God, and keep his commandments: for this is the whole duty of man. For God shall bring every work into judgment, with every secret thing, whether it be good, or whether it be evil" (Eccles. 12: 13, 14).

St. Paul proclaimed: "This one thing I do . . . I press toward the mark for the prize of the high calling of God in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 3: 13, 14).

Jesus commanded: "Seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you" (Matt. 6: 33).

In other words, Solomon, St. Paul, and Jesus are agreed in saying, "Seek the *majors*, and the *minors* will be added."

Seek the all-important, necessary, essential *major* and the needful, desirable *minors* will be yours as well.

But the man who *majors on minors* will never find the *major* and eventually will lose the *minors* also.

It is the *major* that gives the *minors* meaning.

Jesus asks: "What shall it profit a man, if he shall gain the whole world [minors], and lose his own soul [major]?"

If you *major in minors*, you will soon be a minus sign yourself. But if you seek the *major*, you will find it and also have added the *minors*.

So, permit me to exhort every listener—

Reorient yourself!

Put first things first!

You are more important than your body.

God is all-important.

Relate yourself to Him and His will, and He will relate himself to you and your needs.

Don't—whatever you do—don't *major in minors*.