

*Holy
Living*
TODAY

Donald M. Hultstrand

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Introduction

When I was on my sabbatical in 1989 at Canterbury, I spent my time at the library of Canterbury Cathedral. It is a separate old brick building behind the apse of the cathedral. I had to get in through a lower side door with a key and then go up to a quiet desk in a space I had all to myself.

I was surrounded by ancient tomes, some of them worth a fortune. Not so ancient were the books from the library of William Temple, Archbishop of Canterbury during World War II. From this collection I picked out the works of Jeremy Taylor. At first, I was a bit amused by the fact that many of the pages of *Holy Living* were sealed together at the outside edge and I had to cut them apart carefully in order to read them. Had William Temple never read *Holy Living*? Oh, he most likely had done so out of some other volume, and this was a special book he had been given and set aside.

Even I had read *Holy Living* before, but now in this setting it was all new again. Can “holy living” be new again for each of us? Why not take a new spiritual journey with Jeremy Taylor and find out what holy living means in the 21st century? This is what this series of writings intends to do.

Jeremy Taylor lived a short but eventful life (1613-67). Graduating from Cambridge, he was ordained in 1633 at the age of twenty. In that year he was already in the pulpit of St. Paul’s Cathedral. Soon thereafter, Archbishop Laud made him the preacher at Lambeth and then chaplain to King Charles I. By then, he was a husband and a father. But, by the age of thirty his faith would be severely tested as he was deprived of his living, faced with poverty, imprisonment and suffered the loss of four sons.

He was exiled to Wales and there he began his spiritual writings, among them *The Great Exemplar* on the life of Christ, and *Holy Living*. Great suffering brought about great inspiration. Such conditions might bring about bitterness but Jeremy Taylor teaches us that holy living puts us on a plane of life where, with Christ, we are more than conquerors.

Holy living touches every part of our lives, every nook and cranny. Once you begin this journey you realize that it takes more than this lifetime to bring completion.

Chapter One

On the Use of Time

“This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it.”
Psalm 118:24

Jeremy Taylor expresses the concern that so much of our time is spent in eating and sleeping, in business, in worldly affairs, trivial conversations, and the influences of a daily environment of corrupting education, false principles, bad examples, and unnecessary vanities, that we have little time left for holy living, for prayer, and walking with God.

Great authors and poets have dwelt upon the theme of our use of time. T. S. Eliot wrote a poem, *J. Alfred Prufrock*, in which a man “lived out his life in little teacups.” When he died it was not “with a bang but with a whimper.” Nathaniel Hawthorne told of a person who “was born a man but he died a green grocer.” Thoreau, in *Walden Pond*, wrote of “people who live lives of quiet desperation.”

People tend to have a “someday” attitude. They realize deep within themselves that they are not living a holy life but they rationalize that someday they will get to work on it. “Someday when I’m not so busy; someday when I get through with these projects; someday when I retire.” Someday never seems to arrive. The time for holy living is now!

There are two kinds of time, the world’s time which we keep by the clock or our calendar (*chronos*), and God’s time which is eternal (*kairos*). What we want to do in holy living is to step into God’s time. I remember when my calendar said that I must be at the House of Bishops in Philadelphia. Don’t we seem to be ruled by our calendar? While I was there I received a call that Emily Gardner Neal, the great author and servant of God in the healing ministry, had died in Ohio. I was asked to conduct the funeral service at the convent near Cincinnati. It was clear that my meeting in Philadelphia was *chronos*, but the service in Ohio was *kairos* and so I immediately left. Look at the “interruptions” in your life. They are not really interruptions but God’s time breaking into human time.

Jeremy Taylor says of time with God, “The choice of his time will also be the choice of his company.” Some would be critical and say that this is escapism. Time with God is anything but escapism. It

is the redemption of time. It is time under the rulership of God. It is time being cleansed and directed by the Holy Spirit.

Jeremy Taylor talks about the danger of idleness. In our day there are forms of idleness which he never dreamed of. In the BBC series called *Keeping Up Appearances* there is a character called Onslow who spends much of his time in bed out of sheer laziness. When he manages to crawl out from under his quilt he lodges himself in front of the TV to watch races from a lounge chair with his hand held out so that his neglected wife can place a can of beer in his palm. When his wife complains, "Onslow, you are idle," he replies, "I'm more than that; I'm bone idle, and that takes talent." We laugh at this and yet it is an image of the terrible waste of the precious life that God has given us. In real life it is a tragedy. We hear people boast about the thousands of pieces of music they can capture on their iPod. It is frightening to think that they would actually listen to all of them. Godly discipline says, "Turn off that infernal racket and listen to the Lord."

Jeremy Taylor does not discourage us from having recreation. He says, "Let not your recreations be lavish spenders of time, but choose such as are healthful, short, transient, re-creative and apt to refresh you." He would not recommend sitting around in a bar all evening. Nor would he think well of those who become addicted to endless hours of running, as was the case of a man I knew who neglected his wife and children because he had this compulsion every day. "Moderation" is a word not too often heard in our day. Yes, take time to take care of your body and relax your mind. This is godly work. But then consecrate that renewed body and mind in responding to God's higher calling. The psalmist had it exactly right, "This is the day the Lord has made, let us rejoice and be glad in it."

We don't want to waste time. It is too precious. On the other hand, we don't want to create an opposite form of franticness in which we are so anxious about our piety that it becomes exhausting. What we are looking for is a state of grace in which our Christian life becomes a joyful state of being; being in Christ.

I immediately think of E. Stanley Jones, at whose feet I was privileged to sit at one time, who went to India as a missionary when he was a young man. In his first year there he wore himself out trying to make converts. He didn't even succeed in making one. In his exhaustion he sat beneath a fruit tree and thought about going home to America as a failure. Then God spoke to him, "Stanley, look at this

tree. It bears fruit effortlessly.” He then understood; there are no fruits without roots. He needed to be rooted and grounded in the Spirit of Christ. Then things would happen, not by his own limited efforts, but by the power of the Holy Spirit. Thus began fifty years of successful missionary work, particularly among the Brahmin caste. He focused on Jesus and they saw Jesus through him.

This doesn't mean that we don't need to be intentional about the use of time. With the Holy Spirit as our guide we are like a sailboat moved by the power of his wind; but we have to hold on to the rudder and steer. Sometimes we allow other people to steer us. For instance, people recognize you as a good committee person. After a while every organization in the community wants you on their committee. Do you have to say “yes” every time? If you do you are allowing other people to take the rudder from you and steer your life. Yes, it seems complimentary that you are so desired but we have to know when to say “no.” Otherwise you could end up like the over-used community leader who, being worn out, died too soon. Carved on his gravestone were the words, “the most committed man we have known.” They meant to say “committed” but the error was correct.

People develop a rule of life in order to have God's time presiding over the world's time. A rule of life need not be the same for everyone. Each person has a unique walk with God. Yet a holy life has a daily inclusion of these elements: (1) A regular time for intentional prayer which will include adoration, repentance, thanksgiving, intercession and personal petition (at which we will look more closely in the third chapter). (2) Time to meditate on the Bible (this will come up in the tenth chapter). (3) Consideration of the body as the temple of the Holy Spirit (with more about this in the fourth chapter). (4) Understanding the meaning of prayer without ceasing as you go about your daily work (with the last chapter developing this theme). Your rule of life should not be like a rigid law but always should be open to the renewal and refreshing of the Holy Spirit. For instance, you may find yourself using more and more silent time. In the midst of the silence you will find the presence.

Chapter Two

Having Good Intentions

“The Lord is a God who knows, and by him deeds are weighed.”

1 Samuel 2:3b

Jeremy Taylor writes about the purity of intention. God is to be glorified in all we think, or say, or do. St. Paul says, “Whether you eat or drink do all to the glory of God.” (1 Corinthians 10:30). This is an extremely important part of holy living. It is the answer to the question that every thinking person has posed from the beginning of civilization: Why did God create human beings? The answer given in a classic catechism is, “The chief end of man is to glorify God and enjoy him forever.”

In other words, this is why I am here; this is my overall calling, to glorify God. If I think evil thoughts about people I am not glorifying God. What if electronic invention got to the point of being able to pick up your thoughts and cast them on a screen for everyone to see? How awful that would be. In the Gospels Christ is always probing into our inner lives. In Matthew 9:4 we read, “But Jesus knowing their thoughts said, ‘Why do you think evil in your hearts?’” However, if I think pure and loving thoughts I am glorifying God.

Then there is the matter of my speech. If I speak in a blasphemous or a deceitful way I am not glorifying God. Jesus spoke in such a way that people were astonished and they clung to every word that came out of his mouth. There were three reasons why he spoke so effectively. First, he spoke simply. He didn’t try to impress or coerce by his words. Instead, he spoke in parables, taking examples out of everyday life that people instantly recognized. The second reason is that he spoke compassionately. He didn’t use words to crush or to cast scorn. He came not to condemn but to save. Love was his theme. Thirdly he spoke with authority. That means he spoke out of what he had experienced. It was authentic because he said what he meant and he meant what he said. In the resurrection he explained how he could speak this way as he gave the Great Commission, “All authority in heaven and earth has been given to me” (Matthew 28:18).

He has authority because he is the author of life. Then we come to know that we can't speak *for* God unless we speak *with* God as he is revealed in Jesus Christ.

Then there is the matter of my actions. If I act recklessly and dangerously I am not glorifying God, but if I act as Jesus did I am. Whether we know it or not people are watching us. They want to see if our profession to be a Christian makes any difference.

My actions may even include what onlookers might consider a generous act. Why am I giving? Is it so that people will admire me and say good things about me? A church I visited one time had the word "Slaughter" engraved in large letters in front of the altar. It seemed like a crude way of referring to the sacrifice of Christ. I asked the minister what it means and he said, "Oh, that's the name of the person who gave the altar." God is not glorified when we give something so that it may be a point of boasting. When J. S. Bach composed a cantata he very humbly wrote in the corner, "To the glory of God." Jesus says that the best giving is done in secret.

Glorifying God is not a matter of *what* we do as much as *why* we do it. A story told in many classic novels finds relatives, even distant ones, fawning at the house of a wealthy old uncle. They haven't been in touch with him for years but now when he is close to dying they can't say enough endearing things to him. The old man is not fooled; neither is God fooled.

Let me paraphrase some of Jeremy Taylor's rules for our intentions.

- 1) In everything you think, say, or do ask yourself, "What is my motive?" "Is it for God and his glory?"
- 2) In everything begin in the name of the Father, and of the Son, and of the Holy Spirit. Then you are intentionally letting God into it and asking God's blessing upon it.
- 3) Pray over everything. Then you have entered into conversation with the Indwelling Christ, asking him to sanctify your purpose.

- 4) As you continue your thought, speech or action keep on praying right through it. I have developed the habit of saying, “Even now, Lord, you are with me.” Isn’t it a wonderment that we should ever hesitate to do the will of God? Nothing else is good for us. When we know that we are involved in God’s purpose we are happy. What could be better than to be in God’s employment?
- 5) In everything offer yourself to God. In the end, beyond your thoughts, words, and actions, God wants you; all of you in all of him. We often need help in knowing whether we are really glorifying God: (a) Look for corroboration from the Bible, (b) ask what Jesus Christ would do, (c) bring it up with a prayer partner, (d) look for an open door and walk through it in faith.

At this point people begin asking me, “What is the will of God?” Think of it in three ways:

- A. There is the *intentional* will of God. God intends that all manner of things will be well. He does not intend that anyone should be killed by accident or murder. He doesn’t intend that anyone should sin and become damaged by the boomerang effect of a sinful life. He does not intend that anyone should suffer from disease. He does not intend that anyone should become involved in a war. He does not intend that anyone should suffer from poverty. His intention is that all will be well at all times with all people.
- B. Then there is the *circumstantial* will of God. This is God’s plan within certain circumstances. For those who, in fact, suffer from harm he brings help. He promises that no circumstance can separate us from the love of God. To those who have lost someone by death he promises to bring comfort. To those who are sick he brings healing. We have even seen the dying being so at peace as they come close to their new home that they bring inspiration to those who stand by them. To those who are anguished by sin he brings the promise of forgiveness and restoration. To those who are in battle he gives a deepened faith. In all of these circumstances he gives us the gift of prayer. By prayer we walk through all things

with the assurance of his presence—even in the “valley of the shadow” he is with us.

- C. In the end there is God’s *ultimate* will. His ultimate will is the Kingdom of God. “Thy Kingdom come, they will be done.” It took the cross to cover all those things that did not fulfill the ultimate will of God—sin, suffering, accident, war, disease, ignorance, poverty, disaster and evil. God was in Christ taking them upon himself. “Surely he has borne our griefs and carried our sorrows (Isaiah 53).” He is always the God of redemption, seeking to set us free, from the crossing of the Red Sea to the cross itself. Sacrifice was necessary, but it was not *our* sacrifice but *God’s* own sacrifice that would bridge the gap between a fallen world and him.

Follow me through just one example of how God’s will was done on earth as it is in heaven. There was a family in one parish where I was the rector in which the mother was a devout member of the church along with her two daughters. Her husband, to her sadness, was a non-believer and he influenced their son to be the same. I had discovered that the youngest child, Ginny, was dropping into the church every day on the way home from school to pray. She was only six. God’s *intentional will* was that no harm should come to this family and that they all would believe in him. Yet, when the teenage daughter, Valerie, was on a trip to a city miles away there was an accident and she was killed. Christ’s promise, his *circumstantial will*, that they should be comforted was fulfilled. They were given the assurance that “earth has no sorrow that heaven cannot heal.” Valerie had graduated to a higher life at a younger age than most people and she was alive and well with the Lord. But there is more to the story. I came back to that church years later for a special anniversary. I discovered that Clifford, the husband, was now a believer, sitting in the church with his wife and daughter Ginny. I spoke to him after the service and he told me how he was converted in the year following the death of Valerie. (I had moved to a new parish before that time). I had no doubt that the daily prayers of little Ginny had prepared the way both for the comfort that came after Valerie’s death and for the conversion of her father. The whole family was in his Kingdom, which is God’s *ultimate will*.

The parables of sowing and of growth which Jesus told are to be understood by us as the pledge of the inevitability of the coming of the ultimate Kingdom of God. He encourages us to keep the faith and never lose hope even in the midst of a world of trying circumstances and the mystery of evil. As people who celebrate that the King lives within us (did he not say, “the Kingdom of God is within you?”), we are assured that nothing that we offer up to him—no work, no service, no gift, no tear—will go down the drain of futility, but will be woven into the warp and woof of the fabric of eternity. And as we believe in that heavenward journey we know that we are not saved because we do the will of God; we do the will of God because we are saved.

Chapter Three

Prayer and the Presence of God

“For all the promises of God find their yes in him. That is why we utter the Amen through him to the glory of God.”

2 Corinthians 1:19-20

We have already seen how we must pray about everything so that we may know whether we are doing the will of God. But we must go deeper into the matter of prayer and the presence of God. We can hardly do justice to this theme in a short teaching because it is the matter of great books on the spiritual life. I think of Evelyn Underhill’s giant book on Christian mysticism that runs many hundreds of pages. She takes us deeply into what she calls affective prayer that goes beyond words and thoughts to which we rest in the presence of God.

Jesus prayed about everything. It was the common denominator of his life. Many things varied from day to day but one thing was constant: prayer. The disciples wondered how he could have such profound peace. They also saw how he exuded sheer goodness at all times. How could he be so good? They were likewise amazed at his power: power to heal, power to still the seas, power to bring forth food for five thousand people. It gradually dawned on them that it had to do with his life of prayer. So, one early morning they hovered over him while he was at prayer. When he rose from his knees they had a request. It was not that he should give them peace of mind, not that he should show them how to be good, nor was it that he should grant them power. It was, “Lord, teach us to pray.” They were beginning to understand that Christ’s peace, goodness and power came from his constant communion with the Father. Jesus immediately began the teaching of prayer with them. This reveals a simple answer to the question, “How can we learn to pray?” The answer, “Just ask him.” He is eager to teach us.

May we ask “What is prayer?” My prayer life began when I was a child. At that time I didn’t wonder what prayer was. I simply prayed. Now that I have studied prayer for many decades, lectured on

prayer in many parts of the world, and even led an organization dedicated to the life of prayer, I'm not sure that I know more about prayer than when I was a child. Yes, then I simply prayed.

As I go back to that time I can almost enter into the state that I was in when I prayed. I instinctively knew that I could pray anywhere; while lying on the grass and looking up at the clouds, while walking around our home on the lawn, while riding my bike down the street, or when waking up at the earliest dawn when a rooster crowed. Where was God all this time? Way off beyond the stars? Not at all. He was inside of me. This was not a theological position. I didn't even think about it. I just knew he was with me everywhere. He knew everything I said or did. He knew what I was thinking. He was never a harsh or condemning presence. I knew when I disappointed him, but he never gave up on me or left me.

When I was about eight years old my father came home one Saturday night looking quite pale and shaken. The town grocer, Henry Block, had fallen dead of a heart attack before his very eyes and he had helped to carry him out of the store. I knew Mr. Block very well and had even worked for him by carrying hand-bills from house to house. I put in a restless night and the next morning I got up early and began to walk in a large circle around our home all the while praying. I kept this up for a long time and finally I had a sense of peace and comfort. Mr. Block was the age of my parents and I had been deeply concerned that they might be taken away suddenly. But now all was well. It was only when I was an adult that I realized that by encircling my home with prayer I was wrapping God around my family.

It took many years for me to articulate that prayer is being in Christ. The early Christian symbol of the fish (*ichthus*, in the Greek) illustrates this state of being. Like the fish in the water we are enveloped in Christ. He is before us, behind us, alongside us, and within us. At the end of 2 Corinthians Paul says, "Examine yourselves to see whether you are holding to your faith. Test yourselves. Do you not realize that Jesus Christ is in you?" This does not mean that you use no words in prayer. Prayer can be a delightful conversation. What it does mean is that we are still in prayer even when we aren't using any words. William Law, who wrote *The Spirit of Prayer*, said, "The spirit of prayer is the Holy Spirit."

So the key to this presence is the Holy Spirit. The work of the Holy Spirit is to bring Christ's presence into you. Thus, after the day of Pentecost, the apostles experienced the fulfillment of Christ's promise, "I will be with you always." When he spoke to them of the Comforter, the Holy Spirit, he assured them, "I will not leave you orphaned; I will come to you." He is not just a God "out there," but a God "in here."

Through the ages the great Christian scholars spoke of the Christian people as the people of the Indwelling Christ. Michael Ramsey wrote, "Have we forgotten who we are?" When we forget who we are, the people of the Indwelling Christ, we begin to dry up spiritually. We pray less and less, and God begins to seem remote. We are easy prey to the false charms of the secular world. But when we know who we are we pray more and more and find out that we cannot possibly pray too much. It becomes part of our breathing. The Breath of God (*pneuma hagion*, in the Greek) breathes in you. Then prayer without ceasing is not religious fanaticism; it is his risen life. This is holy living.

I was at the Lambeth Conference at Canterbury, England in 1988. Sometimes the daily session in the stuffy heat of July seemed uninspiring and tedious. Then came a service of evening prayer in the ancient cathedral. The bishops of the Anglican Communion from around the world were seated in the chancel. When the service was over and the last chords of the organ faded away we were suddenly in darkness. No one knew that all the lights would be extinguished. All were hushed and no one moved. The silence prevailed for a long time and it became a sacred space. In the midst of the silence there was a Presence. No one seemed to care when the lights would come on again. When they did come on everyone quietly drifted out of the chancel and out the doors into the night. It was a turning point for the conference. As we resumed on the following day there was a spirit of prayer and a new dedication to matters of importance such as evangelism and prayer itself.

I daily practice the presence of Christ through the simple use of what is called the Cross of Prayer. The cross is an image which is always in mind because it is the ultimate revelation of the God of love. It is to a God of such love that we dare to bring our imperfect

prayers. The dimensions of the cross help us to give a greater scope to prayer than we might otherwise express. I begin at the top of the cross by praising God. This can go on for a long while as hymns begin running through my mind. In essence, by praise we are saying, "Lord, I love you; I love you because you first loved me." Then, I move to the left arm (transept) of the cross with the prayer of repentance. Praising God in all his holiness leads me to see my own unholiness. I repent over those things that I have said, or thought, or done which did not glorify him. Then, I move to the other arm of the cross (right transept) and there I pray the prayer of thanksgiving. I am thankful first of all for the forgiveness of sin. I need not grovel before him in misery. He says, "Rise up, your sins are forgiven." Then, I recall all the blessings that God has bestowed on me, not only in this day, but from the beginning of my life. From there, I move to the center of the cross (the crossing) to pray the prayer of intercession. This is the prayer of love in which I lift others into the presence of Christ. I begin with my family (for who would be more likely to pray for them than one of their own?). Then, many others may come to mind. We may pray for them with the confidence that God is using our prayer in a special way. He has asked us to pray for others and he would not have asked us if it were not effectual. He has been so gracious as to give us a role to play in the dispensation of his spiritual gifts. Finally, I go to the foot of the cross for the prayer of petition, prayer for myself. God will answer yes, no, or not yet, but he will always answer. The Gospel makes clear the oft-surprising truth that God cares for me in an infinite way. That is the eternal declaration of the cross.

Chapter Four

Temperance of Life

“But the fruit of the Spirit is . . . self control.”

Galatians 5:23

We are bombarded by sensuality in our time. It is used to sell almost everything: cars, cosmetics, clothing, diet plans, movies, magazines, football cheerleading, and you-name-it. Men and women dress in such a fashion as to tempt people to embrace them (though they may seem offended if someone does). On television, so-called situation comedies openly depict people having sexual encounters outside of marriage and treat them in a light matter. Outside of that a general philosophy pervades that our sexual life has no moral or spiritual relevance.

When Jeremy Taylor writes of sensuality we are shown that it goes beyond sexual behavior. It also has to do with eating habits, drinking habits, unchaste thoughts, tastes in reading, and laziness. He says, “A longing after sensual pleasure is a dissolution of the spirit of man.”

Public television is not always on the side of morality but recently they showed a BBC story, a true story, called “Filth.” An ordinary housewife in England was shocked by the filth she saw on TV, even at hours when children would be watching. She started her own campaign to combat the heads of BBC who were allowing this to happen. She garnered a petition with the names of 345,000 people who joined her in this campaign. As a result she was ridiculed, bombarded by hate-mail, and treated by the free-speech elitists as if she were a fascist or an ignoramus. She was a woman of Christian principles and prayer and she would not relent. Finally, the chief executive who was responsible for this programming was forced to resign and the programs were moderated.

This kind of resistance is what we face when we strive for Christian standards of behavior. Young people on campuses have to be strong to remain chaste when most of those around them call them “prudes” or “old-fashioned”. Those who refuse to join weekend

drinking binges are called poor sports and worse. Pressures to cave in to the immorality of the world are everywhere affecting people of every age. How can people resist? The answer is, we probably can't all by ourselves. That is the significance of the opening text of this chapter: "But the fruit of the Spirit is self-control."

This is a direct follow-up to the preceding theme on prayer and the presence of God. There is no good without God. Or, as someone has said, "If you take the God out of good, you end up with a zero." The Holy Spirit gives us the power to maintain Christian values in the face of pressure and temptation.

Will-power means nothing less than surrendering our will to the will of the Spirit. We can also take common-sense approaches to life. We can decide to reject pornographic materials. We can go to a party where too much liquor is flowing and ask for a soft drink. We can stop eating when we are full. We can say to our body when we are neglecting good works because we are lying around in laziness, "Get up and get going." When we aren't getting enough sleep we can make the decision to go to bed earlier.

There is no possible way of treating this subject with any depth without reference to the body as the Temple of the Holy Spirit. I have written on this on many occasions but I find we must be reminded again and again that our bodies are not our own. We have been bought with a great price, the price of the cross. Then, the Holy Spirit entered us and our bodies have become holy places. To enter a consecrated temple and to throw filth on its altar would be a terrible desecration. God is not in the business of trying to improve us here and there; he is in the business of making us an entirely new creature.

It was Kierkegaard who pointed out that our bad behaviors are like the puffs of smoke that come out of the stack of the engine of a train. These puffs of smoke are the emissions of something burning deep inside the engine. They are signs of a profound alienation from the source of all goodness. We become people of angst (anxiety) because we are alienated from God. The Holy Spirit makes all the difference. He becomes the holy place within us that reconciles us to the source of all that is good, pure and holy.

Chapter Five

Humility of Spirit

“God opposes the proud, but gives grace to the humble.” James 4:6b

Humility is a very subtle thing. In the act of trying to be humble we can actually be exhibiting pride. When I was a teenager, I was staying with a cousin in St. Paul while I was doing summer work 150 miles away from my home town. When we were sent to bed in a space in the attic of my cousin’s home we always had what we thought were deep discussions about the meaning of life. At one point my cousin said, “You know, one thing I like about myself is that I never brag.” He had a hard time understanding why I laughed so hard that I nearly fell out of my bed.

Pride sneaks in just when we think we are being humble. Jesus said, “Learn of me, for I am meek and humble; and you will find rest unto your souls.” Jeremy Taylor pointed out many truths about our human existence that ought to humble us if only we would pay attention to them. I paraphrase some of them:

- 1) Our body is impure and it constantly sends out signals that would lead us to unwholesome appetites.
- 2) We are not as strong as we think we are. Almost any creature our size is stronger than we are.
- 3) We are not as beautiful as we think we are. We don’t have the color of many flowers, birds or butterflies.
- 4) We think we know so much, but we haven’t scratched the surface of knowledge or even what we could be capable of if we really applied ourselves.
- 5) We tend to take pride in our possessions but we don’t have to look far to find someone who has possessions that are greater in number or quality than we have.

- 6) We find it easy to look down on other people, but the one we look down on the most may have inner qualities that we have never come near to. Bert Behanna, an inspirational Christian speaker of times past, had a keen observation about pride and humility. She said, “If you don’t think you have a problem with sin ask yourself if you look down on anyone. If you do, you are a sinner. I have a problem of my own. I look down on people who look down on people.”
- 7) The most humbling thing of all is to compare ourselves with God. Jesus Christ is the image of the invisible God; therefore, we cannot excuse ourselves by saying, “But what is God like?” I may have deluded myself by looking at others and feeling that I am better than they are, but when I look at Jesus I know there is an infinite gap between what he is and what I am. I look at his purity, his love, his compassion, his wisdom, his glory, and his sacrifice and I must say along with the tax collector, “Lord have mercy on me, a sinner.”

We are to understand that pride is the opposite of humility. Most theologians have pointed out that pride is at the core of our sinful nature. There are several categories of pride.

- 1) There is the pride of *power*. This takes many forms but all of them point to our desire to be the top person in any situation – to be in charge, to have our way, to be in control. When I was a child in Minnesota there would be a large pile of snow in the schoolyard that we would climb on during recess. It always led to playing “King of the Hill.” The game was rough and simple. You tried to see who could stay at the top of the mound after pushing everyone else down. It was always a big hulk of a kid named Waldo. He would glory in being King of the Hill. In the classroom he was unsuccessful but here he ruled over others.

We are humbled when we know that all power belongs to God. The power of God is not like human forms: conquering armies, oppressive governments, punitive parents, or dominating bosses. The power of God is the power of love. He shows us that love is more powerful than hate or any other

human force. The power of God is even seen in vulnerability. When he is lifted up on the cross he draws all people to himself.

- 2) There is the pride of *intellect*. Its usual form is seen in our unwillingness to be taught. What we know is ultimate knowledge. We are not to be contradicted or challenged. Someone told me that this was the prayer of a Scotchman he knew: “God grant that I may always be right; for you know I am hard to turn.” The disciples were humble when they approached Jesus and said, “Lord, teach us to pray.” They were teachable. They didn’t say, “I have been praying all my life and I know all about it.” They wanted Jesus to lead them to a higher level of spiritual knowledge. God made the human mind and that mind serves us best when we seek the mind of Christ. This takes us beyond intellect to the person who knows us and wants to make us in his own image.
- 3) Pride of *spirit* is the most subtle form of pride. Just when we think we have become humble this form of pride sneaks up on us. It is said to be the downfall of many pious people. It is the tendency to judge the authenticity of the faith of other people: “They don’t pray the way I pray. Their orthodoxy is suspect. I doubt that they know the Lord as well as I do. They are hardly Christians at all unless they do as I do and think as I think.”

It also falls into the trap of thinking that I have arrived at the pinnacle of faith and I can begin coasting along at this level. It does not mean that we question the Christian teachings that we have received or that we should make the mistake of caving in to the idea that it doesn’t matter what a person believes. Religious tolerance does not mean that just anything is acceptable. What it does mean is that I must commit myself to spiritual progress knowing full well that I have a long way to go before I am made over into the image of Christ. I can’t build my life in holiness upon the criticism of the spiritual life of others. And whenever I find others in their state of life I must love them as Christ loves them and keep them in my prayers. Most likely I will help them in their spiritual life most of all when I am willing to expose to them where I am spiritually weak rather than where I think I am spiritually strong.

Here are some ways we can foster humility:

- 1) Remember that everything we have, every skill or talent, is a gift of God. Disclaim all ownership of them along with all thoughts these are products of our own cleverness.
- 2) Don't look for praise for what we do and don't feel slighted or undervalued if people don't give us recognition. Remember, we are not doing good things to be applauded but because we are reflecting Christ's life within us.
- 3) Don't try to give status or importance to our family background as if we will be more highly regarded if our ancestors were people of note.
- 4) By the same token don't be ashamed of our parentage if they were poor and uneducated. Christ was born of simple peasants.
- 5) Treat everyone the same whether they be of the highest society or the lowest society.
- 6) Don't try to build ourselves up by pointing out the faults of others. Remember that when we point a finger at someone there will be four fingers pointing back at us.
- 7) If others are praised in our presence and we have actually done more than they have, join in the celebration of their good work with sincerity. Jealousy or resentment is corrosive to our own spirit.
- 8) When we know we have made a mistake confess it to God and confess it to those who were affected by it. What pride it would be to pretend that we never make mistakes!
- 9) We have been taught by our culture that submission and serving in the background are demeaning but Christ showed us that the people of his kingdom are willing to sit at the lowest place and even to wash the feet of others.

Chapter Six

Contentedness

“I have learned to be content whatever the circumstances.”

Philippians 4:11

Contentedness has to do with handling our desires. It also has to do with being at rest within the things that really matter. We are probably the most discontented nation in the world. It is the business of advertising to create discontent. It comes at us from all sides: TV, newspapers, magazines, radio and billboards. It also comes from members of our own family who have been influenced by all this and carry on strong campaigns to have this or that because all their friends have them. There is unbelievable whining, complaining, and begging.

Discontent is not only a commercial matter; it also has to do with our restlessness about our state of life. It is a series of “if onlys”. We convince ourselves that we would be content if only we lived in a different location, if only we had a better job, if only we could belong to that special club or group, if only we could look younger, if only we could sleep at night, if only we could go on a long trip, etc.

Jeremy Taylor wrote, “God has appointed one remedy for all the evils in the world, and that is a contented spirit.” He also wrote, “No man is poor that doesn’t think himself so.” How true this is. I grew up in the Great Depression. Looking back I realize that we had very little but I never thought we were poor. We had no bathroom, no central heating, no running water, no refrigerator, and no electric or gas stove. We received one pair of shoes per year. Clothing was handmade, going to a restaurant was unheard of, and our food was from a garden. Yet, we were content and didn’t think of ourselves as poor. As children we were happy to be outdoors and to do things that cost no money: playing with friends, creating a rock garden, riding our shared bike, gathering around a street light at night with neighborhood children to play Run-Sheep-Run, playing football with the rag-stuffed football shell, and climbing trees. We were healthy and strong, and looked forward to each day. We felt secure in the

living room of our simple home as we gathered to listen to a radio program.

In other words, contentment was not based on what we didn't have but on what we did have. We did not desire what we knew we could not have. We rejoiced in a world that God made; a world of blue skies, green trees, pleasant lakes, and, when winter came, the white snow.

Surrounding this was a devout home; a home where prayer was common, the Bible read, and where Jesus was an unquestioned presence. God had not left us destitute and deprived. He was with us to bless us.

Jeremy Taylor teaches us that contentedness is agreeing with God. God has given us all that we have and all that we are. Some will say that this is an excuse for permitting other people to languish in their poverty or misery. Not at all; we are to care about them and help them. Our contentment is not based upon the conditions of other people. It is our own inner life we are thinking about. Our Lord told us that we could not add one cubit to our stature by being anxious about it. I need to be content with what I have, not discontent about what I don't have.

In St. Paul, Minnesota, I was taken to see a remarkable lady. When I saw her I was impressed by her physical appearance. She was tiny, and all curled up from a spinal disorder she had had from birth. In spite of this she had taken care of the Sunday school kindergarten for many years. She sparkled with the same joy and humor now as when she cared for those little ones. She had had such a profound effect on them that years later, when they had grown up, these people would come to see her to thank her for what she had given to them. Instead of being embittered she was content. As a result she had an inner joy that radiated out to children and all the people around her.

Working on contentedness:

- 1) If something displeasing happens to us, we can ask God to turn it into an advantage. Nature shows an example by the oyster making a pearl out of the irritation of the sand. The world is full of stories

of people who actually found a blessing in the midst of difficulty. They can even say afterwards that they thank God that they had to go through it.

- 2) Never wish that you were someone else. Their lives may seem more charmed than yours but if you lived in their shoes you would find that there are hidden things in their lives that you would never want to bear. You would be much more content to live with what you know within yourself.
- 3) Even if an unwelcome cloud seems to hang over you for what seems to be a long while, take the Christian attitude that God is still shining beyond and through that cloud. This is the meaning of hope. To despair means that you have forgotten that God is love and that he will bring you through to a better day.
- 4) Jeremy Taylor teaches us to enjoy the present. Yesterday is gone and there is nothing we can do to change it. Tomorrow is an unknown. Jesus tells us not to borrow trouble from the future but to live in the ongoing now. Miserable people are those who refuse to enjoy today because they have invented a dark tomorrow into which they have already thrust themselves; a day which, after all, is imaginary.
- 5) Teach yourself not to be surprised or overwhelmed when your situation changes. It *will* change. However, God never changes and our spirits go ahead unchanged as we are linked to him. As a child we expected everything always to remain the same; we thought that our parents would always be there, and that everything we counted on for our security would stay. Maturity means that we understand that we really live in an unstable and shifting world but that God is the same yesterday, today and forever.
- 6) A contented person does not desire what he does not need. Too often we begin to construct a list of things or conditions that seem to us absolutely necessary. Are they? Or are they invitations for disappointment and things that wouldn't make us more content if we had them?

- 7) A contented person does not allow other people to be judges of what should make us contented. There are people who want us to want more, to be treated with greater consideration, because they are expressing what *they* want, and they want others to reinforce their own desires. Their discontent must not be allowed to make us discontented.
- 8) A contented person knows God as a friend. This is not taking God too lightly; it is taking him seriously. A discontented person begins to think that he has no friends. Self-pity sets in along with depression. Yes, you have a friend and his name is Jesus. You can warm your heart, mind and soul on him. Greater love has no man than this, to lay down his life for his friend. This is what Jesus did for us. What more proof do we need of his friendship? Once we accept his friendship a great change happens toward those we thought were no longer our friends. They become our friends again because we no longer approach them suspiciously but with the eyes of Christ.
- 9) To be contented, simplify. Modern culture spreads the idea that you need to have a variety of everything—more changes of clothing, more sources of entertainment, more destinations, more social contacts, more gadgets. There is the supposition that if you had a greater variety of everything and every experience that you would have a beautiful life.

Jeremy Taylor has a striking illustration. An artist decides he will paint a beautiful portrait by taking the features of a variety of people: a chin from one, a mouth from another, another's nose, yet someone else's eyes, and then beautiful hair from another. When he put it all together it was ugly. It is not a composite that is beautiful but that which God put together.

So in life we can create an ugly picture by trying to tack this together with that in multiple ways. An unduly complicated life is not a happy one. A contented life finds the beauty of focused simplicity. The goodness of a single apple in your hand is better than a warehouse full of fruits that will rot before you can eat them.

10) A contented person is one who understands that time will heal all. Abraham Lincoln, who endured so much, said, "This too will pass." We are not adopting a form of fatalism. We are resting on the eternal arms. If we are with him, there is a time when grief ends, when emotional wounds heal, when strivings no longer matter, and our most challenging trials are over. In the ultimate end we go to him, and then we may wonder for a moment why we fussed so much about so many useless things.

Chapter Seven

Christian Duty

Paul says, "Render to all their dues; tribute to whom tribute is due; custom to whom custom; fear to whom fear; honor to whom honor. Owe no man anything, but to love one another."

Romans 13:7

Duty is a harsh word in our time. It used to be such an honorable thing to have done your duty. It may well be that, living in an age where license (I do not say freedom) is the expectation of this individualistic society, duty is a red light that tells you that there are things that you ought to do. You want to turn off that red light.

Don't get confused about the teaching of law and grace here. We are not saying that your salvation depends upon your doing your duty. Your salvation depends only on the amazing sacrifice of our Lord Jesus Christ. You do dutiful things, not for credit, but out of the joy of holy living. You want to do them because there is joy in serving the Lord and his people.

First of all, there is the matter of *obedience*. If the Lord decrees anything why wouldn't I want to do it? Would he ask anything that was not according to his will? Since his will is his love, I would be the winner and the gainer if I enter into his will. I would be the loser if I didn't do what he asks.

- 1) Obedience begins with the commandment, "Honor your father and mother." From the beginning of our lives God provides the best way to learn obedience. Christ modeled this for us when, after staying behind at the temple at the age of twelve, he rejoined his parents and was obedient to them, increasing in wisdom and stature (Luke 2:51). A child who loves to do what his parents ask of him is a happy child. A child who is constantly rebelling against his parents' directions is an unhappy child. Parents set boundaries around their children not to be mean but to protect them. If they tell them that they should not play in the street they are not being kill-joys; they are teaching them to avoid danger. If

they ask them to do chores around the house they are creating in them the values of helpfulness and work.

A troubled teenage girl came to see me at my office. She had a record of bad companions, late hours, and taking drugs. She talked about her behavior and finally said, "My parents don't love me." I said, "Why do you say that your parents don't love you?" She said, "Because they let me do anything I want!" She was hungering for boundaries so that she would know that her parents loved her enough to protect her.

- 2) Obedience has to do with respect for the civil law. The Bible has a lot to say about respecting the civil authorities. It seems that God does not want us to live in a situation where "anything goes." Even though these laws are made by secular entities they still serve God whether they are conscious of it or not. A lawless society would be a chaotic society. God is on the side of order, not chaos.

We learn simple things when we are young such as we should always stop at a stop sign. Always! This was so drilled into me that if I came to a stop sign out on a country road where you could see from all sides that no car was in the vicinity I would still stop. It is important to learn this because if you only occasionally stopped you would be creating a laxness that could one day lead to destruction.

It is a sad reflection on our society that we even need policemen. It should be enough to know that careless driving, theft, violence and neglect of children are contrary to the rule of love. Yet law enforcement exists because we live in a fallen world. Sin and evil are realities. We learn to respect those who face these realities to safeguard innocent people at risk to themselves. They serve God who wills an orderly world.

- 3) Obedience, above all, is honoring God. When we confess our sins we usually have to acknowledge that we have disobeyed him in some way. We have the Ten Commandments. They are not the ten suggestions. We know that we are not saved by keeping the commandments, but we who are saved want them to be written in

our hearts so that we will rejoice in keeping them. It becomes an act of praise and thanksgiving to him who has done everything for us. Christ spiritualized these commandments so that they are not merely outward concepts but they are matters of the spirit. He said, "It was said of old time, you shall not kill, but I say to you that whoever hates another is guilty of murder in his heart." He talked about adultery coming out of an inner state of lust. Hate and lust need to be turned to love.

Obedience to God has an awesome dimension when you consider how deep it goes. It inspires us to go with God wherever he leads. The greatest heroes of the Old and New Testament, and of church history, were those who acted with simple obedience. I had a converted Jew in one parish. I asked him why he had become a Christian. He said, "God told me I should become a Christian; it was an act of obedience." The simplicity of that response jarred me. He didn't have complicated stories about hours of weighing matters, sifting through ideas, and wrestling with his soul. God asked him to take this step and he did it.

It is like the response of Shandu Ray of Pakistan. He became a Christian and God asked him to translate the New Testament into the Tibetan language and then carry it to them. He had no idea how this could be done but he said, "Yes, Lord." He trusted that if God asked him to do anything he would provide a way for it to be accomplished if he said, "Yes, Lord." God sent a translator to him and when the work was done Shandu Ray himself carried the New Testament up through the dangers of the Himalaya Mountains to the people of Tibet. I was with him in England when he received an award from the World Bible Society for this act of obedience.

Duty means obedience but it also is a matter of everyday living, holy living. Here are two examples:

The Duty of Parents

- 1) Jeremy Taylor quotes Paul, "Fathers, provoke not your children to wrath" (Ephesians 6:4). Paul and Taylor were ahead of the times. It seems quite recent that it was pointed out by those who work with juvenile delinquents, particularly young people who are

violent, that they are the products of violent homes. As parents we are to be tender, sensitive and gentle. We have spoken of the importance of boundaries but there is a lot of difference between a parent who thunders down the rules in the form of a threat and one who calmly presents them as extensions of their loving care.

- 2) We are to bring our children up in the realization that the Lord is in their home. Some people are shy about mentioning God in daily living. Are they afraid of looking “too religious” in front of their children?” It’s as if they have seen too many movies where the pious parent is pictured as a sanctimonious hypocrite and they bend backwards so as not to look like that. They bend so far that they become guilty of the conspiracy of silence. If God is not spoken of he must not be there. Gert Behanna, who did not know Christ until she was middle age grew up in such a home. She said, “The only time I heard the name of God mentioned was when Dad fell down the back stairs.”
- 3) A great part of this realization is to pray with them every day. Children learn to love an appointed time of prayer. Our practice was to pray with them before going to bed. This was accompanied by a story out of the Bible. Those stories became lovingly intimate to them in that setting. If they only hear them read from the lectern on Sunday it appears as if they are too formal to have anything to do with life at home. Prayers are needed also at unscheduled times when the child or youth lets you know that he is troubled about something.
- 4) Parents are to be providers. It is all too obvious that they must give them food, clothing and shelter. Beyond that is the provision of healthy recreation. We have a right to be concerned about the amount of time a child spends in watching TV and doing computer games. They can be sucked up into a world which is totally without direct human relationships, and eventually leads to loneliness and depression. Participate in games in which everyone takes part. Get outdoors on the tennis court, hikes, strolls through the woods where you can point out God’s handiwork. Draw, build, and sing together. Parents are the providers. These things will not happen unless they instigate them.

- 5) Parents are to bring their children into the life of the church. When I grew up there wasn't even the possibility of asking the question, "Shall we go to church this Sunday?" It was a given. The only way to make this work is for the parents themselves to be this loyal. The worship of God is not *just* a duty; it is our *first* duty. Children often love worship; never think that we are dragging them into a dull experience. When they become teenagers they may be fervent in worship. None of this will happen if the parents consider worship an occasional thing that happens when there is nothing else to do on a weekend.

The life of the church is to be understood as a life which extends beyond the church doors. Parents are to teach them that there is a church gathered and also a church scattered. We represent the Body of Christ wherever we are, whatever we are doing. It involves our recreation, our work, our spending, and our use of time.

- 6) The parents' hope and prayer is that the children will grow up to seek a marriage partner who is also a practicing Christian. This will most often happen when they see that Jesus in the midst of the parents' everyday life. Jeremy Taylor expresses sadness over those who marry without any consideration of the Christian commitment of their partner. He predicts tragic disharmony from such marriages.

The Duty of Husbands and Wives

- 1) The romantic relationship that a man and a woman had during courtship sometimes leads to disappointment after the marriage takes place. It is true that we had tried to be at our shiny best when we were in a dating relationship. We only wanted to be seen at our best. There was no criticisms; only compliments. Marriage quickly reveals what we are really like, from the messiness of morning to the tempers of evening after a hard day. This is where the marriage covenant must kick in, "For better or for worse." Real romance means quick forgiveness; the knowledge that Jesus is the key to the deepest love. We will consider what Jesus' love means shortly.

- 2) Then we are to expect that love in marriage is to be a constantly growing relationship, not a fading one. Couples who have been married for a very long time will tell you that, with this expectation, their love has become more solid and precious year after year. They mined for the gold in each other and found treasures they never dreamed were there during the days of courtship.
- 3) Couples are to put each other first, next to their relationship to the Lord. Not even the children are to place the husband or wife into secondary position. Marriages have caved in at the empty nest time because everything has been invested in the children. Putting each other first also has to do with work. If the career of one or the other becomes more important than the marriage this is contrary to God's design. I have known husbands who work punishing hours, who are rarely at home, and who excuse themselves by claiming they are doing all this to provide a richer life for their family. The truth is not in them. They have begun worshipping an idol at a great sacrifice to what really matters in life. It eventually leads to fear because an idol is a dead god who cannot save you.
- 4) Couples are to practice all of the three kinds of love found in the New Testament. There is *eros*, which refers to physical love. Everyone experiences physical drives (which God requires us to keep under control). God created them for a good purpose and that is his design to make us co-creators with him. God shows us that this only belongs in a marriage between a man and a woman. It goes beyond sex and includes touches, looks, endearments, and embraces.

The second kind of love is *philia*, the kind of love that exists in friendship. Marriage is the deepest friendship. What kind of love would it be if you never conversed? One marriage counselor said that a key question to ask is, "Are you fun to live with?" Married friends play together, plan together, work together, dream together, and give one another a sense of security.

The third kind of love is *agape*, God's love. It brings maturity to the first two kinds of love. It is the love that never fails because

God is love and God never fails. Having such love in marriage presupposes that the husband and wife are immersed in prayer. I like to use the word “marinated” because it implies that everything we say or do is soaked in prayer. As we know, prayer is more than words; it is being in Christ. We may find ourselves thinking, from time to time, that it is not natural to love another person when they do or say such and such. No, it isn’t natural; it is supernatural. Nothing can quench *agape*. It is love that offers our total self for the other just as Christ laid down his total life for us.

Chapter Eight

Faith

“Now faith is the assurance of things hoped for, the conviction of things not seen.”

Hebrews 11:1

Faith is both believing and trusting.

- 1) We are to believe what God has revealed to us. Christianity is a religion of special revelation. It is not a vague speculation in which an individual may pick and choose what appeals to him and throw out that which we don't understand or which encroaches upon our own chosen life-style.

In this age of relativism absolute truth is considered to be politically incorrect. People are encouraged to make up their own religion out of a patchwork of their own inclinations. Or else they have that secular confidence that all that is necessary is that you be a “good person.” When St. Augustine was still a pagan he proudly pointed out the virtues of his pagan associates. When he was converted he understood that these virtues were pale things in comparison to the Christian revelation. He then called them “splendid vices.”

The doctrines of Christianity are not true because I believe in them; I believe in them because they are true. They would be true even if I didn't believe in them. For example, the doctrine of the Trinity is true because God revealed himself as Father, Son, and Holy Spirit. One may complain that the doctrine is too difficult to understand and then make the unfortunate decision that it therefore is unbelievable. However, faith decrees that God's truth is such that we take the leap that is beyond understanding. We need not explain the Trinity, we worship the Trinity.

- 2) The greatest journey a person can make is from the head to the heart. The mind apart from God becomes very proud. It thinks that nothing can be true unless the mind comprehends it. Then it

begins to imagine that it can handle any situation and, on some grand scale, create a perfect world. I heard a great atomic scientist say that he once assumed that religion was simply the absence of scientific knowledge, the worship of the unknown. As soon as science had discovered everything there would be no more need for God. Then he realized that the atomic chart was all filled out but the deepest needs of humanity were not met at all. It was not for the “unknown” that we need God, but for what we “know”—loneliness, separation, alienation, sin, and a great vacuum in the soul that is waiting to be filled. The scientist became converted to Christ when he knew there had to be a God; not just a force, but a personal God. The greatest thing we know in the world is personality. It could not be created by a force; it had to be a Person. The greatest Person is Jesus Christ.

So Faith is that leap from the mind to the heart, and from the heart to God. Picture the mind struggling by itself to reach up to God. It goes up a few miles and then has to stop. “How do I get up to God who is an infinite distance beyond the measure of my mind?” This is the wrong assumption. He is not a God way out there; he is a God in here, closer than touch or breathing. This is where faith finds God to be. This doesn’t happen by reason; it is a journey of the Holy Spirit.

This is why conversion is such a wonder. There is nothing more thrilling than to see a person who only yesterday believed nothing and then today he believes everything. Most people do not have such a sudden conversion but it does happen to someone every day. When it happens it is a signal to all who are slowly progressing in faith that all things are possible with God. It hastens our own progress as we see the Holy Spirit work so powerfully on unlikely subjects.

- 3) The true sign of faith is not that I have a new stack of knowledge; not that I have a secret that some other people do not have; not that I now have become a superior being. The true sign of faith is that I am becoming more Christ-like. It is rapturous just to begin to realize this. Oh the dimensions of Christ! The height, the depth, the width, the length! You study the Gospels and hear all his wonderful words and see all his heart-stopping works. I am not to

be depressed by the vision of Christ; I am to be thrilled that I have such a holy road to travel. I am to abide (make my home) in him and to begin to explore all the rooms and passages I am already in. Faith affirms that I am being made over in his image. I need not worry that I will not find the way. He will never let go of me once he has his hand in mine.

- 4) Faith believes the promises of God. This is where believing becomes trusting. He promised to send the Comforter, the Holy Spirit. Included in that promise was his word, “I will come to you.” Faith accepts the promise that you will receive the Holy Spirit and that the Holy Spirit will bring Christ to you—risen, alive, personal, and continual. Then all his promises are trustworthy. When I talk to someone who has just lost someone (not lost, but they think so), I remind them of the promise of Christ, “Blessed are those who mourn, for they shall be comforted.” It may seem too hard right then to go on without that person. But Christ fulfills his promise and comfort comes in a quiet but powerful way. Many will say that they began to feel closer to God than they ever had felt, and also that the one they had “lost” was found again.

A good Bible study would be to search out all the promises of God, to write them down, and then to begin to appropriate them. Among the highest would be the promise of forgiveness. How hard it is for us to accept the promise of forgiveness; that we are forgiven completely and that our sin can never come back to haunt us. Yet we are like ghost-hunters. Once we have been forgiven we often go back to feeling guilty. We regress and try to find that dark thing that was banished forever. Our sin has been buried at the foot of the cross. Yet, like a dog that searches for his old bones, we return to dig them up. Faith fully accepts the promise of God’s forgiveness. To those who are still chewing on those old bones and making themselves miserable and depressed we must say what Hannah Whittal Smith said in *The Christian’s Secret of a Happy Life*, “You are forgiven! Act forgiven!”

By the same act of faith we forgive others. When we have forgiven them we don’t go back to remind them from time to time about the injury that they have done to us. To forgive them is to

set them free and it also clears our own soul of any resentment. Old resentments weigh us down and create flat tires on our spiritual journey. Forgive us, Lord, as we forgive.

The story is told how Leonardo da Vinci set about to paint the great mural of the Lord's Supper. When he got to the face of Judas Iscariot he used the face of his enemy who had insulted him. Then when he came to paint the face of Christ the image would not come to him. He failed over and over and was near desperation. Then something moved him to seek reconciliation with his enemy. They ended with an embrace of forgiveness. He painted an unknown face for Judas and then, when he came to the figure of Christ, a wonderful face appeared to him and it was painted for posterity.

- 5) Faith is childlike. Christ tells us this in no uncertain terms. If you want to enter his Kingdom you must be like a little child. I'm sure I have written about this before because it is one of my favorite themes. It would be remiss not to bring this reminder into this context. How simple a child is in their receptivity of spiritual things. How complicated we become as we "grow up". In truth we put upon ourselves layer after layer of the world as we become more involved in it. Before we know it we have developed a hard façade that can hardly be penetrated. We begin to join the world in thinking that God couldn't possibly do this or that or, even worse, begin echoing the voice of a godless society.

When we become too hard we are no longer malleable. God wants us to be like a little child who is a soft substance for his hands. He is the potter and we are the clay. We can become soft in his hands again through the miracle of grace which breaks us up and puts us together again. When we are in spiritual pain we need to understand that God is working on our encrusted spirit. Don't resent it. Be glad that God cares enough to give us that pain. He won't leave us alone while we are lost in our own cocoon. He wills to bring us out and make us a child of the Kingdom.

- 6) Faith is the desire to profess the faith. We are apt to excuse ourselves from openly revealing our faith in Christ by insisting we are shy. It's not shyness but a lack of conviction. Do we think we

will offend people or that they will become hostile? I was greatly influenced when I was a teenager in the Navy by a sailor named Larry Welch. He had been on a destroyer where there was a lot of swearing and no evidence of Christianity. Although younger than a lot of tough and rough sailors he challenged them when they took the Lord's name in vain. He would say, "I am a Christian and it offends me to hear my Lord's name taken in vain." They might have struck him or scorned him, but they respected him. When he shared that he would have prayers at a certain time several showed up, and in succeeding weeks more and more came.

Evangelism is the sharing of faith. Where would we have been if the first Christians had been afraid to confess the faith of Christ crucified and risen? The age of martyrdom was a time when people died rather than to deny their faith. The persecutions actually increased the strength of the church. For every confessor who died ten more stood up to take his place. They couldn't resist the authenticity of a faith that one was willing to die for.

At one time I found myself in a college class, specially chosen to study semantics. Everyone in the class, including the professor, claimed to be an agnostic or an atheist; all except myself. I prayed to the Lord that I might be able to express my Christianity in this atmosphere. God gave me words to say that I didn't even know I knew. I found myself respected and enabled to hold up Christ.

- 7) Faith is to pray without doubting. You probably remember the old story about the congregation that was called to the church to pray for rain during a long drought. The minister looked out on the gathering and said, "You came to pray for rain. Where are your umbrellas?" To pray without doubting is to lift an open vessel up to the Lord. Let God pour through. He can pour through any vessel, whatever it is made of, as long as it is open. Trusting God in prayer does not mean dictating to him what he must do for us but being open to his answer, his way, his desire for us. God will surprise us because he always has something greater in mind than we can think of. Faith in prayer means that we know who God is; he is a God of love who has revealed that love in Jesus Christ. Therefore, we can trust that God will answer our prayer because he loves us that much. Whatever God has in store for us will come

out of his fountain of love. Even the things that seem at first to be hard will turn out to be a deeper blessing than our mind could ever have devised or imagined.

- 8) Faith is to let what God has planted grow. Jeremy Taylor says that a farmer doesn't bring his bed out by his field to see if his crop is growing at night. God is at work on us night and day. All the parables of growth are meant for our encouragement. This means that a Christian has a confident personality. He is sure that God is bringing to fruition that which he has planted in us. This spirit will reflect to others. People are attracted to a faith that is effervescent. On the other hand, if a person says he has faith but he looks unhappy much of the time, those who look on will want nothing to do with that kind of faith.

All of this has to do with the grace of God. Our salvation, in the first place, had nothing to do with our worthiness. Worthiness, then, is beside the point as God makes our spiritual garden grow. Growth takes place by the power of the Light. Darkness cannot overcome this Light. Our confidence is not in the effectiveness of our level of faith; it is in the magnificence of God's immeasurable love for us that can make a tree of life of the tiny seed that we offer up to him.

Chapter Nine

Love

“Love never ends.”

1 Corinthians 13:8

We have already entered the theme of love when we looked at the marriage relationship. Now let us look at love again in a larger context.

Jeremy Taylor writes, “Love is the greatest thing that God can give us; for Himself is love; and it is the greatest thing we can give to God; for it will also give ourselves.”

Love is the new commandment, it is the greatest commandment, and it is all the commandments. The revelation of this love through Christ is a total revolution in human thought. We might even call it “radical” when we consider the meaning of that word. It means “going to the root” (as in the word “radish”). It goes to the heart of God from which every emanation is that of love.

St. Augustine of Hippo may have shocked some people when he wrote, “Love God and do as you please.” He meant that if you really love God you wouldn’t think of doing anything that did not please him. If you love God you don’t need to ponder the Ten Commandments because you will have the right actions and attitudes written in your heart. This is what Jeremiah meant when he prophesied, “After those days, says the Lord; I will put my law within them; and I will write it upon their hearts, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people” (Jeremiah 31:33).

- 1) Jesus gave us a new commandment that we should love one another as he has loved us (Jeremiah 13:31f). Paul must have been pondering how we could appropriate the dimensions of Christ’s love when he wrote in Ephesians 3:14, “that you being rooted and grounded in love, may be able to comprehend with all the saints what is the breadth, and length, and depth, and height, and to know the love of Christ that surpasses knowledge.”

How broad is Christ's love? It includes the whole world, all humanity—"God so loved the world." He showed the breadth of his love by loving the rich young ruler to whom he offered the greater riches of his fellowship. He loved the Samaritan woman who had botched her married life over and over again. He loved Mary Magdalene who had a checkered past. He loved the Roman centurion and healed his son at a distance. He loved the Greeks who wanted to see his face. He loved the little children that others wanted to push away. He loved the repentant tax-collector whom everyone else despised.

The hymn says, "For the love of God is broader than the measure of man's mind, and the heart of the eternal is most wonderfully kind." It is hard for us to broaden our love. The child's bedtime prayer said, "God bless Ma and Pa, Sport and me, us four and no more." William Law, that great teacher of prayer, showed a way to love more people, especially those who are hard to love. He said that if you pray for them you will come to love them. You cannot enter into prayer for someone without entering the heart of God who already loves that other person.

What about the *length* of Christ's love? Christ didn't cease loving the disciples even when they deserted him. He continues to love the Church, his bride, even though the Church wanders from him into strange places. He never stops loving us even when we forget them. Our love is so short. We may get up in the morning determined to be patient over all circumstances all day long. By mid-morning our patience has worn thin and very soon we are blowing up over things that really don't matter. We can sound magnanimous about loving a generic mankind but too often we are insensitive to the person who is closest to us. Obviously, we need a love beyond our own. It is not for sale; it is the free gift of Christ.

What about the *depth* of Christ's love? It is a delight to go to the Apostle Islands in Lake Superior. You can stand on a boulder and look fifty feet into the depth of the water and it will be entirely clear all the way down. It is unpolluted and fresh. We didn't know how deep love could go until Christ came. It is profound love that plumbs the depths of our being. Izaak Walton wrote about Christ

being the complete angler who would go fishing for us no matter how far down we were submerged in our sin. He will try every bait and not give up until he catches us and pulls us in.

Our love is so shallow by comparison. We throw the word “love” around very carelessly. We can say, “I love desserts,” or “I love fast cars,” or “I love that rock star,” or “I love my sweetheart,” using the same word. Usually we mean that this is what I crave; this is what I want for my own satisfaction. We constantly have to come back to *agape* love if our love is going to have any depth. The Holy Spirit has promised that it is already in us but we have to lay down our selfish arms and surrender to him. We may be like a backyard pump which I used as a child. If it coughed and wheezed and brought up nothing, I had to prime it with water to make it work. You have to pour out your soul in surrender and a holy life will gush forth.

Then, what about the *height* of Christ’s love? No other love reached such heights. It is the loftiness of the love of Christ on Calvary. We sing, “Lift high the cross, the love of Christ proclaim.” We put crosses high on church steeples to point to this love. Christ showed the unquenchable love of God on the cross. Even though we kill him he still loves us. He had said, “I, if I be lifted up, will draw all people unto me.” It is love that surpasses knowledge. Over the ages many have been driven to their knees by that cross, not by understanding but by being smitten to the heart by the sheer force of that love.

Christ went higher by getting lower. He said that we could only be great by serving all others. In the end it’s all grace. This is how we discover Christ’s love, by giving it away. The history of Christianity is the story of people who received Christ’s love and then gave it away.

- 2) We now know and understand that this love is *agape* love, supernatural love that we can neither muster up nor produce through thought, philosophy, or effort. It is God himself. It is unconditional love that comes to us whether we deserve it or not. He loves us even when we are unlovable. This is so startling that it takes an act of faith to receive it.

I heard Bishop Michael Marshall of England say this about God loving us: “God says, ‘I love you,’ and you might say, ‘You couldn’t possibly.’ This denial is a form of hell. Again God says, ‘I love you,’ and you might say, ‘Maybe some of the time.’ This puts you into limbo, a sense of nothingness. Again, God says ‘I love you,’ and finally you say, ‘I know you do,’ and this is heaven.”

People discover this when they are suddenly converted. A man in Boston had thrown his life away on drugs, drink, and immorality. He found himself on a park bench after a binge, miserable and alone. He had nothing, he was nothing, but God met him there and told him that he loved him even as he was. He was filled with the Holy Spirit and knew that he had a Savior. He had done absolutely nothing to deserve this new life. He then developed a strong ministry among down and out people. In a couple of years he found a kind of legalism creeping back into his mind. A man came to him many times after failing to live a good life. In exasperation he angrily said to the man, “Wise up!” It didn’t help. Furthermore he came to realize that when God found him it wasn’t because he had wised up. He loved him the way he was. He couldn’t leave him there but loved him completely even while he was incomplete. He could, then, love other people even as they were.

Jesus put the concept of love to the ultimate test when he said, “Love your enemies.” Here is someone who will not return your love and so you can have no vested interest in loving that person. You love that person because God loves him or her not because they will give you anything in return. It is not a natural thing to do; it is supernatural. It is the Indwelling Christ reaching out of us.

- 3) Jeremy Taylor tells us that “love endeavors to be present, to converse with, to enjoy, to be united with its object; loves to be talking of him, reciting his praises, telling his stories, repeating his words, imitating his gestures.” When God’s love happens to us it is not a concept, it is an entrance into heavenly life. It is what a Christian mystic like Evelyn Underhill means by “affective prayer.” You get to that place in your spiritual life where you don’t ask anything of God; you already have it. You are totally

satisfied to be in his presence, desiring nothing, needing nothing. Just to be flooded by his love is measureless joy.

When we get vocal we find ourselves singing songs with him. When we go to sleep we find he is there, and when we wake up he is still there; we know very well that even in our sleep he did not leave us. In the daytime he may lead us to people who wonder what makes our life tick. These are the people who want to hear stories about Jesus and his love; to know that the holy life has been waiting for them.

Chapter Ten

Holy Living with the Bible

“All scripture is inspired by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction and for training in righteousness.”

2 Timothy 3:16

The most impressive scene of my childhood was to peek out of my bedroom door late in the evening and see my mother sitting next to the woodstove. Her hair, which was in a bun all day, would be loose and hanging down her back. She would be very intent in concentration as she sat there. I knew what she was reading; it was the Holy Bible. Nobody made her do it. It was what she longed to do once the work of the day was done. She had a look of contentment and peace on her face. The Bible was not merely a textbook to her; it was food and drink to the soul. Then, I understood why she was the kind of person she was in daily living. The written gospel became a fountain of the Spirit for her. It shaped her personality, formed her speech, and lighted her way.

Yet when I was young I had trouble with the Bible. At times it seemed difficult and dry. The people were of old times dressed in long robes like the shepherds in the Christmas pageant. I knew it was an important book, but surely it was ancient history. When I went in to the Navy at age eighteen I was still in that frame of mind. Stationed at Camp Shoemaker near San Francisco, I was a member of the Ship's Company in charge of a battalion office where sailors shipped out and shipped in. While standing in the endless chow line for lunch I became acquainted with a sailor named Larry Welch, whom I have mentioned before as being brave enough to call tough sailors together for prayer on a battleship. He missed seeing me in the chow line when I contracted “jungle rot”, a foot disease carried into the showers from sailors returning from the tropics. I was in the sick bay because my feet were swollen to twice their size. Larry tracked me down and brought me a New Testament. Then he prayed for me and began reading one of the gospels. In that moment I had a spiritual awakening with the Scriptures. No longer were the people of the Bible distant but they were very much alive in my spirit. I could see them, hear them

and I could walk with them. The words of Christ in the gospels were alive in me and applied to where I was living. I told Larry that he had handed me the keys to the Kingdom.

The saints and scholars through the ages spoke of reading the Bible with inspiration. That means “in the Spirit.” It would be possible for a non-believer to read the words of the Bible from cover to cover and to remain unmoved. For that person it would merely be ink upon paper. One has to “pray the Bible.” Ask the Holy Spirit to give illumination, ask what he wants you to learn and discern, and find out what is speaking to your present condition. Take time to meditate on each word and verse.

I was with a men’s prayer group in Kansas City. About ten men were meeting at a home. A young man came for the first time at the invitation of the host. He was quite successful in business and running a number of food franchises. He had little or no Christian upbringing. We prayed and then began to study a passage from the gospels. He had been very quiet the whole time but suddenly he sat on the edge of his chair and blurted out, “Why, they are talking about me!” It was the beginning of a deep Christian commitment. Under the illumination of the Holy Spirit we discover that, indeed, God is talking directly to us.

The Bible is still totally applicable today (not an outmoded textbook) for three reasons:

- 1) Human beings are still the same as they were in biblical times. That is why we recognize ourselves in the personalities that arise in the Bible stories. There are still people like David who repented over his affair with Bathsheba. There are still people like Joseph’s brothers who were jealous about his coat of many colors. There are still people like Samuel who wonder if God is speaking. There are still people like Peter who falter in faith and sink in the water. There are still people like Thomas who need a lot of convincing before they can believe. There are still people like Saul of Tarsus who need their intellect turned into revelation. The Bible is still applicable because we are still the same human beings as found in the pages of Scripture.

- 2) The Bible is still applicable not only because people are the same but because God is the same. He is the same yesterday, today and forever. The God who revealed himself in Scripture has not changed. In a world that is confounded and confused by rapid change God is the only unchanging factor. C. S. Lewis, in one of his stories, tells about the modernist bishop who has died and has gone to a place of separation from God, his own hell. He is forever working on a thesis about what Jesus would say if he were alive today. He assumes that Jesus would change his teaching to fit the desires and skepticisms of modern man. No, God does not change to fit our schemes. It is we who have to change, to begin to be re-created in his image. One scholar has said, "We do not judge the Scriptures; the Scriptures judge us." God's ultimate revelation of himself is in the incarnation of Jesus Christ. What Christ said to us and did for us stands forever. The meaning of sacred truth is that it is something that is *always* true, not just true for a time. How wonderful to know that we meet the same God who came into the lives of the apostles, and then into the saints (known and unknown) through all the ages.

I remember a time when I was at a dinner with Christians from India, Africa and South America. We were all inspired by the realization that the Jesus we knew was exactly the same Jesus for all of us.

- 3) The Bible is still applicable today because our need for salvation is still the same. We can in no way save ourselves anymore than people of old could save themselves. Advanced science, psychology, or scholarship have not found a new way of salvation. People grasp the latest gimmick as an answer to all things. Fifty years ago there was enthusiasm for group dynamics. It got so deeply imbedded in the church that even Sunday school curricula was wrapped up in it. It was considered pushy to press Bible teaching on students. You needed to ask people how they felt about things. Let the group decide what is true for today. Perhaps you needed to get away to a T-group where you could let everything hang out, find out who you are, and leave everything open to questioning.

At one youth conference I was teaching the doctrine of Christianity as found in the Bible. A clergyman, who was called “groupy Gus” because he believed group dynamics was the answer to everything, heard about it and soundly criticized me for “manipulating” young people. Unfortunately many of these group dynamics devotees ended up in divorce, destruction of belief, leaving the ministry, and even mental issues.

Over the years other gimmicks have risen up such as the “God is dead” movement. Denial of every truth seemed to be fascinating to certain people. It was the worship of “what’s happening now” with no message of salvation, only of emptiness and despair. Many thought they were holding before people the spirit of this age. As we observe, these gods go as swiftly as they come.

It has happened through the ages so that even centuries ago a church scholar said, “Whoever marries the spirit of this age will soon find himself a widower.” The biblical message of salvation still stands while all other messages fall away. Only God through Christ can save us. All other teachings are desperate attempts to save ourselves—by our own cleverness, by mental gymnastics, by the prideful insistence that we are as gods and need no outside help (God) to solve everything.

Back in Soren Kierkegaard’s day, the 19th century, the force he faced was rationalism. Everything could be attacked by reason, even in the Bible. For some, the end of this was secular humanism. This force is still aggressive today and it wants to take away any reference to God in schools, universities, and government. There is no salvation in it. People are still in sin needing divine forgiveness and a living Savior. Theologian Kierkegaard taught that sheer rationalism led to angst, deep spiritual anxiety. This angst is caused by alienation from God which brings ultimate loneliness and spiritual destruction.

So the Bible is the book of life and salvation. We cannot have holy living without the Bible. Every age is looking for a great love story; the greatest love story ever told is in the divine historical drama of Holy Scripture. It begins with creation, it continues with the mighty

acts of Christ, and it ends with the Kingdom of Heaven. And, he did it all for us out of the depths of his love.

Chapter Eleven

Holy Living with Our Temperaments

“I do not understand my own actions, for I do not do what I want, but I do the very thing I hate.”

Romans 7:15

Meanwhile we have to live day by day which means that we must live with our temperaments. We have flare-ups that surprise even ourselves. We don't know where they come from; some say it's something we inherit, others say it's from the environment in which we grew up. We are caught off guard at moments when something triggers a weakness. It may trigger anger, envy, depression, moodiness, fear or resentment.

Jeremy Taylor says this about anger: “Anger is troubled at everything, and every man, and every accident.” People with a bad temper are soon identified. No one wants to be with them for long. They spoil every aspect of life. But just when we think that we are not that kind of person some incident makes us angry. We may even vent it in front of someone and immediately feel ashamed that we have acted up in this way. This tells us two things: (1) that we need to say an instant prayer as soon as we sense this angry response; (2) that there is still something deep inside of us that is unholy.

What about depression? If you have opened an envelope that came in your mailbox and find that it bears bad news you may for a while have a sense of dread every time you approach the mailbox. Usually the bad news that has depressed you, and made you a grim person in the presence of others, is a passing thing. Meanwhile you have upset yourself and those around you. What it usually means is that you are too bound up in worldly things so that you lose your joy and serenity. You need to ask yourself right away, “Is this thing really that important?”

For six weeks I had been travelling all over the country leading prayer seminars. I came back to Lancaster, Pennsylvania, where I was headquartered, quite exhausted. As soon as I got there I

noticed, with a shock, that the antique hitching post in front of our house was gone. Someone had stolen it! They had gone to a great deal of trouble to dig it out of its concrete base. The rest of that day I was in a stew about it, depressed because it was gone. I was negatively affecting everyone around me, especially my own family. Suddenly a realization came to me, “Does it really matter that much? Is it more important than the reunion with my family?” Then I came to another realization; I had been teaching about prayer but I hadn’t taken enough time to pray. The truth is that when we are upset by little things it means that our spiritual life has grown thin. We need to beef it up with more prayer. Now I look for those signals which indicate an under-nourishment in prayer.

Then there is the specter of fear. Sometimes we go around with a sense of dread without knowing why. Deep inside there is a dark feeling that something bad is happening. It is already here or maybe it’s coming soon. There are people who have clinical depression and they must receive medical help, but this is something different. It is a spiritual condition that has deep implications. It means that we have stepped outside of our faith. We are not living trustfully with the good God. We are living on our own feeble powers. How feeble they are! They are not strong enough to support us through the smallest storm. Fear comes from worshipping a false god who is unable to save you. That false god is you.

We made the leap of faith at one time. Perhaps we thought that one leap would last for a lifetime, but we have to make that leap again and again. When Paul said “I die daily” perhaps he meant that we have to renew our faith everyday by dying to self-worship and rising up in Christ Jesus. Even when we are off the track Christ is still in us patiently waiting for us to return to him. Then fear will flee.

We need to think about our emotions. The world in which we live can quickly bring us to an emotional state. We may find ourselves crying, making the primal scream, losing our appetite, rushing to our bed, or pacing the floor while wringing our hands. Emotionalism is enervating to ourselves and those around us. We have known people who emote all day long and they get a reputation for being tiresome. Emotion, then, is given a negative image. People will say that they are

wired that way and can't help themselves. The same kind of excuse is made for every extreme kind of temperament.

Here is a definite spiritual problem. When people say they can't help being the way they are they are forgetting that God is a God of change. The Bible is the story of changed lives. Peter was anything but a rock but in the end he was a solid hero and martyr for Christ. The history of the Christian Church is not what is written in large books; it is the story of changed lives. If we are plagued by uncontrollable emotions we can be changed by the working of the Holy Spirit. One of the earmarks of honest prayer is the willingness to be changed.

But is emotion all bad? It comes from the Latin word *emovere* which means "to be moved." What would it be like if nothing moved us? When the leper called out to Jesus the Bible says, "Jesus was moved with pity" (Mark 1:40f). The Lord had emotions; he is not God in the abstract but a personal God who cares.

Being in his image God made us to have emotions, not emotions uncontrolled but emotions under his control. One of the reasons that spiritual renewal became significant is that people were allowed to express emotion in worship, song, prayer, and fellowship. Without warm feeling and enthusiasm the congregation is formal, dead and uninviting.

There is also appropriate emotion in the family. Laughing is an emotion. We need to laugh with husband or wife and with our children. There is healing in laughter. We learn that we are taking God seriously when we can laugh at ourselves. Elton Trueblood wrote a book on the humor of Christ. Yes, the Son of God had a sense of humor. Trueblood points out that if you find a teaching of Christ too difficult look for the humor in it. People probably laughed with Jesus when he said, "If your eye offends you cut it out." A humorous exaggeration makes a strong point. When the Syro-Phoenician woman came to Jesus for the healing of her daughter the humorous by-play is delightful. Jesus jokes with her. "I was sent only to the lost sheep of the house of Israel. It is not fair to take the children's bread and throw it to the dogs." She perceived that he had used the term for "little dogs", meaning pets so she responded, "Even the (little) dogs eat the

crumbs that fall from the master's table." He commended her simple faith and her daughter was healed instantly (Matthew 15:21-28).

There are also times to cry in the family. Remember, Jesus wept. I grew up in a Swedish culture where crying, especially among men, was considered a weakness. We held it back. If someone were on the verge of crying we would say, "Don't cry." If they did we rushed to get Kleenex in the hope that they would quickly dry up the tears and get over it. There was something shameful and obscene about it.

It wasn't until I became an adult, and I had tears of joy over the experience of the presence of Jesus in my life, that I learned that it was not a weakness to let tears flow. Now I can cry over many things: a hymn, a great classical performance of music, a work of art, the grieving of a friend, the returning home of a member of the family, and the reflection upon Jesus on the cross.

Perhaps the most common expression of temperament is our resentment at being hurt. Granted that some people are hypersensitive and are always feeling hurt because they are thin-skinned. But even the most thick-skinned people can be hurt. The hurt can be genuine. It is especially keen when you know you don't deserve it, that you have been misunderstood, maligned because of the false word or gossip of people you thought were your friends. The hurt can go so deep that it affects every daily moment and tortures your sleep.

It is then that we have to look at Jesus. Was there ever anyone who deserved less to be hurt? And yet, he was assaulted by false accusations of his jealous opponents. They called him a wine-bibber and an associate of prostitutes. He was even called a servant of Satan. He was criticized for healing people on the Sabbath and for allowing his disciples to snack on corn on that day. In the end his own disciples denied him and deserted him. Then, he was cruelly killed on the cross though he had done no wrong.

In all of this Jesus shows us how to handle hurt. You forgive! "Father, forgive them," he said from the cross. He fulfilled what he taught in the Sermon on the Mount, "Love your enemies and pray for those who persecute you" (Matthew 5:44). He built this teaching into

the Lord's Prayer, "Forgive us our trespasses, as we forgive those who trespass against us."

The choice is ours; we can go around feeling hurt or we can forgive. Even if our forgiveness is not reciprocated forgiveness still works. We come into a state of grace with Christ and the burden is lifted out, washed away, and cancelled forever. We have been set free and we have set someone else free.

Jeremy Taylor has an interesting list of provocations that can bring havoc upon your temperament. I paraphrase them.

- 1) Remove yourself from games of chance and wagering. You are bound to lose and be upset.
- 2) Don't heap up a lot of jewels and expensive artifacts. They are easily lost or stolen. You are simply inviting occasions for distress.
- 3) Don't encourage gossipers. If you join in you are injuring people. You can be sure they are talking about you when you are absent.
- 4) Choose as much as you can to live with peaceable persons. Volatile people may be more interesting but they will wear you out.
- 5) Don't be inquisitive about the affairs, faults and mistakes of others. You have enough of your own to take care of.
- 6) If people are disagreeable don't judge them. They may be living through something that is very hard. You may have bad days yourself and wish people would understand.
- 7) If people are rude to you don't retaliate with rudeness. Most likely it's not personal, i.e., directed at you. They treat everyone the same way.
- 8) If someone attacks your faith don't respond with loud arguments or else it will deepen their hostility to believing people. You may

say, "I'm sorry you feel that way." Then hold them in your private prayers.

In the end we need to realize that there is something unique about our personality. God did not make us all the same. If we were all leveled off to sameness it would be a boring world. God is so creative that he can make each person different from any other. He illustrates this in nature in which he made not just one kind of flower but an infinite variety of colors and forms. The same is true of the birds of the air. How gracious of God to make such a colorful, interesting world! Even each snowflake is different from any other. Then, he chose to give each person their own fingerprints. Jesus chose as his disciples men who were very different from one another.

This leads us to these thoughts:

- 1) Don't expect another person to be like you.
- 2) Rejoice in the uniqueness of other people.
- 3) As we have seen, some traits and talents are good. We need to guard them and share them.
- 4) We have also seen that some traits and habits are harmful. We need to ask God to change them.
- 5) It is not our business to change other people; this is God's work.
- 6) Our business is to love people as they are, and we hope they will love us as we are.
- 7) God does not intend to leave us where we are but to make us into the image of Christ.
- 8) When we are in the image of Christ we will still be unique individuals with the special features God has given us.
- 9) When we meet relatives and friends in heaven they will not have been made into homogenous form; they will be fully recognizable to us because God treasures what he has made.

Chapter Twelve

Holy Living Is Sitting Loose to the World

“And the peace of God which passes all understanding will keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus.”

Philippians 4:7

One fantasy I have occasionally entertained is to find myself standing in the middle of a football field in a vast stadium filled with 100,000 people. I would pick up the microphone at half-time and simply say, “I have an announcement to make. You will all die.” Most people would be angry to hear it and would throw their garbage down upon me. But the message is entirely true: every man, woman and child in that place would sooner or later be gone from this earth.

People live in denial. “It may happen to others, but it isn’t going to happen to me.” When you are a child you have a very vague feeling about this ultimate future. It is so far away that it cannot touch you. Even as young and as middle-aged adults you still cling to this vagueness. You build, develop careers, accumulate, and stow away as if you would always be here. Perhaps your parents had raised you to avoid the subject of death. They wouldn’t talk about it, they wouldn’t take you to funerals, and they also gave you the feeling that they would always be with you.

It was early in my life that I learned that even the young could die. I had a lovely thirteen-year-old cousin named Eunice. She went into the hospital with a ruptured appendix. Surely she could be saved. Doctors could do wonders. But peritonitis set in and there were no antibiotics to cure it. I saw the progression through the eyes of my mother; Eunice was dying, and her heart went out to her brother who was losing his beautiful child.

When she died our whole family moved into the home of my uncle and aunt for a few days. It seemed a natural unspoken thing to go beyond mere words of sympathy and to be a presence among them. Somehow I was a comfort to my uncle Oscar because he would sit

with me in a rocking chair cradling me to him. Nothing was said but we were just together in the midst of sorrow.

At the funeral I saw the body of Eunice in her little coffin. She looked like a china doll asleep. I will never forget her blouse that was a bright purple with a white ruffle around her neck. She was buried in the Swedish cemetery on a bright spring afternoon. The birds still sang unknowingly and the mystery of life leading to something beyond hung in the air.

As time goes on most people begin to entertain the certainty that they will depart from this world as others do. It becomes much clearer when your parents die. As a child you never thought they would leave you but now they have. You still have occasional thoughts that they are alive and you want to share something with them. They appear in your dreams and you find yourself visiting with them in your home town. You wake up both comforted and disturbed.

When you begin to realize that you have been clinging to the world you wonder how you can sit more loosely to it. The evidence of clinging is all around you. Why is your attic full of things you have shoved up there? If they weren't good enough to have a place in your living room why do they need to have a place up there? The garage tells the same story. Why are you hanging on to your Dad's old tools, the scythe he used to cut the weeds, his old fishing tackle?

Cleaning your attic and garage is the beginning of sitting loose to the world. Give it away. Throw it away. Why should you have so many sets of dishes that there is no room in your cupboard? You stow them in the attic in case you should want them again. Along with this, you never use your best china and crystal because you might break it. You might as well use it or it will be hidden away your whole life and never enjoyed.

It's a good feeling to begin to un-clutter your surroundings. You have been placing things on shelves, above the fireplace, and every end table because they are mementoes of the past. If you clear them away you will never miss them and the space around you will be more tranquil and neat. If you have anything in cardboard boxes you

probably will never need those things. You will save your next generation the trouble of sorting through them.

Now let us go to deeper aspects of sitting loose to the world. Your mind is still fixed upon a succession of days. You buy a three-year calendar and begin filling it in. How can you get your mind to sit loose to the world? You can only do it by starting with your spirit. Already, through the Holy Spirit, Christ lives within you. This means that you are living in two dimensions; the first dimension is time, the second dimension is eternity. You are in eternity because you are with the Eternal Christ. You are an Easter person. Eternal life is not only in the hereafter, it is here.

As you enter quietly into prayer you sit loose to this world knowing that Jesus has you by the hand and he will never let go of you. You realize that your calendar is a fictional thing and it doesn't worry you. You can also sit loose to the things you have written on your calendar. God may have other plans that will knock out even the most important event you have registered there.

We are meant to live by the divine perspective. When you take up drawing you learn to work from a vanishing point. If you don't, all your buildings will be formless like the drawing of a six year old. Our vanishing point is God. As we look at him the details of our life take shape and proportion. Upon examination, we find that we have given only part of our life to Christ and we are holding back on other parts. In other words, we are still clinging to the world and we do not trust him enough to turn everything over to him. What are we to do about this?

I like the formula I received from Dr. Sam Shoemaker, "Give as much of yourself as you now know and understand to as much of Christ as you now know and understand. This is a growing edge." While he is weaning us from our dependence on the things of the world God is being very patient with us. Remember that he loves us completely even while we are incomplete. He is not waiting for us to get better before he starts loving us. The more I give over to him in this patient process the more contented I am. Whoever gives his life for Christ's sake will find it. Why should the un-surrendered parts of my life be satisfying to me? It would be like a man who is carrying

huge, heavy boulders on his back. He would not likely say, “Even though these boulders are breaking me down I wouldn’t want anyone to lift one off me.” Nor would he likely say, “Give me some more boulders so that I can be crushed.”

Most of the things we worry about are unnecessary boulders and so it is no wonder we are hurting. We worry about money, position, the opinions of others, our own bodies. As soon as we can say, “Everything belongs to God; I can turn it over to him and then my burden will be light and God will put all these things where they ought to be,” the tug of war with God is over. I am no longer fighting him, and peace comes with unconditional surrender. I am at peace with God, at peace with others, and at peace with myself. This is why so many people find peace at unexpected times, times when they have looked at a great loss.

Jim and Judy had waited a long time for the birth of a child. When they become parents of a baby boy they were thrilled and thankful. A week after the baby was born I received a late night call from Jim that their baby was rushed to the hospital and was dying of a lung disorder. Would I come immediately and baptize him? When I arrived I found Jim and Judy in the waiting room outside of the children’s ward where the child was in an incubator. I thought they would be distraught; instead they sat there with a look of utmost peace on their faces. Jim said, “We know that whatever happens to our baby is in the hands of God.” They had stepped into the eternal realm and were given the divine perspective.

I went to the baby with them and I saw a pitifully blue child struggling for life. He was taken out of the incubator and I laid hands on him and then baptized him. When we went out the parents still had the same look of peace. They had given their son into the hands of God and all would be well. Before the next morning the baby had completely recovered to the surprise of the medical staff. I knew that even if this miracle had not taken place Jim and Judy would still have been fine because they had put him in the hands of God and had visited eternity.

I have been with people who have had one loss after another and I have seen perfect serenity in their eyes. It’s as if they have gone

through the valley of the shadow and have come out on the other side where there is unfailing light. They are like pioneers who have travelled through every rough place and have found that after all they have been through nothing more can hurt them. Not only are these pioneers of faith safe and secure but they are new people. What they have lived through has built up spiritual muscle that they never had before. At every juncture the Lord was there. They were not worn down; they were built up by an increasing awareness of his presence.

At one time I went on that journey when I thought it was more than I could bear. I simply lifted it up to the Lord and let it go. God spoke to me so clearly then that I was sure I heard a deep voice saying, "If all you have left is my love, it is enough."

Most people are experiencing economic reversals in this time. Companies that we thought were as reliable as the corner drug store have let us down and taken away the money we had set aside for a rainy day. Then we realize that this is one of many things to which we have to sit loose. When some of us were children we never had more than a few pennies. Our parents took care of us even though they were living through a far worse depression. We lived off the vegetables in our garden. We had no luxuries but we had each other. We could not spend our days in self-pity, wringing our hands and thinking of all the things we might have done with the money that is now gone. We lived on the riches of love and we created recreation out of things without cost—hiking, gardening, games around the table, horseshoes in the back yard, visiting with our friends and neighbors. Above all, a less complicated life meant we had time to turn to God in prayer. We have the fellowship which Christ offered to the rich young ruler if he would sit loose to his worldly riches and come and follow him. He told him he would have treasure in heaven. That heaven is already with us in the person of Jesus Christ. More will come, but the treasure of his risen life is even now at our disposal.

Jeremy Taylor's *Holy Living*, written in 1650, is one of those devotional classics that transcends the passage of time and changes in culture. Therefore, it is a bold attempt to write *Holy Living Today* for Christians of the 21st century. Let us call it a current reflection upon the work of that great man; hopefully both complementary and complimentary to him.

As a bishop on sabbatical at Canterbury, England, Donald Hultstrand had the opportunity to re-read *Holy Living* in that ancient setting and realized that the same striving for wholeness (holiness) of life is drastically needed in this broken world. Wholeness is God's work and this book calls us to reach out and grasp the hand of Christ that he might lead us on that journey, day by day, and hour by hour.

The late Donald M. Hultstrand was involved in the life of prayer through writing, retreats, conferences, and as Executive Director of the Anglican Fellowship of Prayer, spanning the past fifty years. He was the Bishop of Springfield Retired and the author of several books, including "The Little Book on Life in the Spirit", also published by the Bible Reading Fellowship.