"As for me, I almost lost my feet, my steps had well nigh slipped."

Psalms 73:2

That which makes this Bible the most abidingly alive and interesting book in the world is that it comes up out of life. This is true of the Bible as a whole. It is more especially true of this amazing Hymn Book of the Jews. For this reason many of these songs which were written thousands of years ago are far more fresh and up-to-date than what you heard on your Song Hit Parade. They tell us of their struggles, of their aspirations, of their hopes, of their tragedies, and of their dreams of life. There is hardly a mood of the soul that you cannot find in one of these ancient songs. This song of which our text is a part is even more at home in our modern day than when it was written perhaps twenty-five centuries ago.

I.

"As for me I almost lost my feet, my steps had well nigh slipped." This is a word that comes out of experience. Here is a man who has lived not in a cloister but in our kind of world. Of course it was not quite so trying and quite so desperate as ours. Yet it was very like our own. He is looking back over the yesterdays. From the summit of the hill he is viewing the way which he has traveled. As he looks he sees one particular bit of road that gave him trouble. Here he says, "I had a hard fight. Here was a slippery place where I came very nearly falling in the abyss, perhaps to rise no more."
When we hear this Psalmist talk after this fashion we instinctively give him our attention. We feel that he is one with ourselves. He is talking our language. We too have found life a bit of a fight. Perhaps we have won through in some fashion and feel ourselves on firmer footing than in other years. Perhaps the battle is raging for us at this moment. We are being hard pressed. Some of you have doubtless come to church this morning for that very reason. You have come hoping that you might find some word, some inspiration that would steady you and enable you to walk forward unafraid.

There may be even those who feel that they have lost the fight. You have come to church once more, but you are desperate rather than hopeful. Sometime ago on the streets of a city where I had formerly been pastor I met an old friend. He once belonged to my church. In fact, he was converted under my ministry. He had been a drunkard but had been mightily saved. But through changes and unfortunate circumstances he had weakened. Under the influence of former friends he had fallen again and again. Getting up bravely each time to renew the fight. But when I asked him about himself this time he said, "I am through. I have shamed my church. I have disgraced my family. I am never going to try again."

His face looked like a bit of parchment. Life and hope seemed to have gone from him. He had quit trying. There are few sadder tragedies than that.

II.

Here then is a man who has walked our kind of road. As most of us he has found the going at times hard. I think there are few exceptions to that rule. Sometimes you meet a friend, a favorite minister perhaps. And you have a feeling that everything in life has come to him right side up. You fancy that he has never had such struggles as you have. But the chances are that you are mistaken. The best of us have floundered many times. The best of us have looked shame-facedly over our shoulders wondering if we had better quit and give it up alto-
"Slipping" together. What was it that tripped this man? What is it trips us?

1. Some of us find the going hard and the way slippery because we are in an unfriendly environment. Perhaps we are the only Christian in our family. Perhaps we are the only one in our office who is making a serious effort to follow Jesus Christ. Every step of the way seems up hill. Sometimes we find the going so hard that we decide we might as well quit. Remember many have felt just as you. Yes, in spite of feeling that way they have plucked up their courage and faith and gone right ahead. "All the saints salute you," writes Paul in his letter to the Philippians. "All the saints salute you, especially they of Caesar's household." These victorious saints were living in the most corrupt city in the world. They were slaves of one of the most corrupt men in all the world. Yet, in spite of their slippery road they were keeping their faith though I am sure they at times felt it very difficult.

2. Sometimes we fall through sheer weakness. I have been impressed more than once with the fidelity with which Christian Scientists give themselves to the study of the Bible after they have become converts to that faith. In almost every instance these had formerly belonged to some other church. I am not reflecting on them. I am not saying that many of them have not found a fuller faith. But what I do say is this—that if they had exposed themselves to the Truth with the same constancy and fidelity they would have found the same Lord in their own church that they have found in the new.

"Blessed is the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight is in the law of the Lord, and in his law doth he meditate day and night. And he shall be like a tree planted..." Such a one will have a fine steadfastness that will enable him to keep his feet. Some of us fall from sheer weakness. When Richard Mansfield was struggling to become an actor he at last succeeded in getting a small part. As he went on the stage he fell down flat. Some thought it was from
fright, but it was from starving himself. A group of scientists got lost in
the wilds of Australia a few years ago. They ran out of food. They found the
root of a certain plant that was palatable on which they tried to live. But
they died to a man. When their bodies were found and the content of their
stomachs was examined, they found that the root they had been eating was ab-
solutely devoid of nutrition. That is the trouble with the spiritual food
we eat. Hence some of us haven't the strength to stand. We fall from weakness.

3. But what came so nearly troubling this Psalmist was God's strange order-
ing of things. The Psalmist had gone into life with a faith that simply refused
to check with the facts. As all pious Jews he had been taught to believe that
the good always won the prize and the bad went to the wall. The good prosper in
business and in health, while the wicked are poor and sick. He was convinced
that God paid a man for being good in the coin of the realm.

Of course, this is not the case, but it is a faith that dies hard. One
reason that it takes so long to die is because there is some truth in it. Other
things being equal, righteousness does pay. A man who is a good man is likely to
enjoy good health. He is more likely to be prosperous. But while that is the
case it does not follow by any means that the good always prosper and the bad
always fail. If that were the case character would be a mere matter of invest-
ment. We cannot buy life and goodness. The devil pays wages, God never does.
"The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus
Christ our Lord."

Now going out with a faith that the good man has a golden touch while every-
thing that the bad man handles turns to mud, he found that life simply tore this
complacent theory into shreds and threw it into his face. In spite of the fact
that he himself was a good man, that he tithed and went to church he went to the
wall. In addition he lost his health. Perhaps he lost his health as a result of
losing his money. Meanwhile a Godless neighbor of his was fairly coining the money
and meantime was staying in the pink of condition physically. This wicked man was so prosperous that he threw wild parties and kept his good neighbor awake. "It is not fair," the good man sobbed into his pillow more than once. "I have made a mistake in being good. In vain have I washed my hands in innocence."

This man, therefore, was tempted to give up all righteousness because it didn't seem to pay. In trying to be right he was fighting a losing fight. If he felt so tempted the temptation was sharper for ourselves. There is no shutting our eyes to the fact that goodness seems to be having a hard time in our present world. The declaration that the meek shall inherit the earth has always looked ridiculous. But it never looked madder than it does today. In the face of the seeming defeat of goodness, therefore, in the life of the individual, and the group, and the nations, many can say with the Psalmist, "My feet have well nigh slipped."

III.

But this Psalmist did not actually lose the fight. In spite of the fact that he was hard hit he won through. That is always a possibility. This I say with all boldness. However desperate may be your plight there is a way out. I am not here speaking out of my own experience. But this I do know:—however fretful and peevish and hopeless you may find your situation today, there are thousands of others who are in situations just as trying who are going bravely forward. Not only keeping their own feet, but being a source of strength and inspiration to others. Let us see how this man steadied himself, may be it will help us.

1. He did not do so by getting into an ideal situation. God did not put him on an easier road. He helped him to walk the road where he was. He did not find strength by losing heart and repudiating everything for which he had stood.
As hard pressed and desperate as he was he still believed it was better to face toward the right than toward the wrong. He believed it was better to stand up and fight than to lie down and whine. He believed it was better to fight even though he failed than to fail without a fight.

2. Then he found help by taking the long view instead of the short view. When he took the long view he saw that though evil prospered its prosperity was temporary. That is the conviction that comes to all of us when we consult the centuries instead of the seconds. Brutal nation after brutal nation has conquered the world. Babylon, Assyria, Persia, Rome, Macedonia, these have all stalked with bloody feet across the world feeling that their victories were permanent. But they passed as a morning cloud. So when I look out at the triumph of Germany, Italy, and Japan, I say they too will pass.

3. But the supreme help came to this Psalmist through his attendance at church. It is his own personal testimony. "I went into the sanctuary of God." That sounds silly enough, does it not? But this rugged saint of the long ago did take time to go to church. Not only so, but it is his own testimony that he found it helpful. Of course, Mr. Channing Pollock would laugh him completely out of court. But Mr. Pollock is theorizing while the other man is talking out of experience. One ounce of experience is worth a whole ton of theory.

Some of you doubtless saw a recent magazine article by this brilliant and gifted writer. It is rather amazing that a man of Mr. Pollock's fine character can have nothing better with which to steady men against these tempestuous times than to warn them against going to church. Of course, Mr. Pollock finds God in the great open spaces. He finds him among the trees. But those who find him in the sanctuary may also find him in the solitudes as well. Going to church does not cheat us of the privileges offered by this brilliant writer. It only gives us an opportunity in addition.
"Slipping"

But while I am disappointed that a man of Mr. Pollock's intelligence should write such an article I also find it very heartening. If a man of his ability can find no better reasons against church attendance than he finds they must be rare indeed. He begins by stating that church attendance has no more to do with religion than hearing Fourth of July orations and singing the Star Spangled Banner has to do with patriotism. To this we agree. But patriotic orations and singing patriotic songs have a lot to do with patriotism. During the first World war, how did we seek to arouse the patriotism of our people to such a pitch that they would enlist and buy Liberty Bonds? We got together and made patriotic speeches and sang patriotic songs. That is what they are doing in the warring nations this morning. These two are related as cause is related to effect. There is just as much relation therefore between the worship of God in the sanctuary and religion as there is between sowing and reaping.

Then Mr. Pollock criticizes the Church for its costly buildings. They have made a great mistake in not using this money to feed hungry minds and hungry bodies. It is hard to believe that a man of his knowledge and intelligence would say a word so stale and silly as this. Surely Mr. Pollock knows that it was the Church that kept learning alive in the middle ages. It was the Church that built Harvard, and Yale, and all our great institutions. It is the Church that has always ministered to hungry minds and hungry bodies as well. Take out of our Community Chest the funds contributed by the Church and not one of them would have enough to carry on. If this brilliant man would face the facts he would see the folks who have built the churches have built about everything else in the world that is worth building.

But Mr. Pollock's most lengthy indictment is against the ministers themselves and the futile services that they conduct. Matthew tells us that the Roman soldiers set to guard the tomb of Jesus were to testify that the friends of Jesus came while they were asleep and stole the body away. But the testimony of somebody who was
asleep would not be greatly prized in a court of law. Nor would the testimony of Mr. Pollock. He declares himself that he does not go to church. That is, he goes only to hear himself. Yet this man who never attends knows all about the kind of men preachers are and just what sermons they preach.

Once, for instance, Mr. Pollock in the course of an address used a witicism. He was rebuked and reminded that one should never laugh in the house of God. Having received this rebuke this distinguished gentleman discovered that laughter and religion never mixed, and that in no church was there ever a natural and human smile. But in so assuming, every church goer knows that Mr. Pollock is assuming what is frankly not true.

This man who hears nobody but himself also knows just what we ministers are saying. This is the gist of the vast majority of our preaching:- We are holding out to our listeners vague hopes of a future reward while utterly ignoring their present problems. Now we believe in a future reward. Some of us are still old fashioned enough to believe in heaven. But I doubt if you who are regular church attendance have heard two sermons on heaven for the past twenty-five years. Meanwhile, you have heard your own pressing problems discussed hundreds of times. There would be something very damaging in Mr. Pollock's declaration but for the fact that it is about ninety-five percent pure falsehood.

Not only does this absentee gentleman know exactly what we are saying, but he know why we say it. Our lack of contact with reality unfit us for saying anything else. He tells us that the modern minister lives in an ivory palace. This he declares, "may be conducive to getting close to God, but not to men."

Yet, this keen writer claims that he knows preachers. I too know them. I have associated with them for thirty years. There is no other profession that I know that comes so close to humanity with the possible exceptions of the family physician. This, too, is a damaging statement that is about ninety-nine percent false.

But nowhere does Mr. Pollock show himself so utterly poverty stricken as
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when he condemns the Church because the majorety of people do not attend it. When an intelligent man tries to settle a question of right and wrong by nose counting he leaves one with serious misgivings as to his fair-mindedness. In fact it is my very candid opinion that if a skilled psycho-analyst were to get hold of this charming writer he would find there a deep seated prejudice against the Church and all connected with it. This I say because the reasons he gives are not in reality reasons at all. They are excuses, and very flimsy excuses at that.

To say the Church is useless because the majority of people do not attend it is to say that the majority is always right. But the truth is just about the opposite. The majority is almost always wrong. Had man always stood with the majority we would still be living in caves. It is the minority that has made all discoveries in the realm of science. The majority once taught the world was flat. But that fact did not keep it from being round. If the majority is always right then Socrates was a dummy while his murderers were wise. If the majority is always right then Jesus Christ was a mad man and the mob that crucified him was a bunch of philosophers. The fact, therefore, that Mr. Pollock finds nothing in the Church means nothing because he does not give the Church a chance.

Here is a man who took the opposite course. "I went into the sanctuary of God." Having gone thus with a hungry heart he was not disappointed. And his experience, mark you, is the experience of countless thousands. "In the year that King Uzziiah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne, high and lifted up, and his train filled the temple." The place of the vision was at the church. "I have been to church today," says Robert Lewis Stevenson, "and I am not depressed." It would seem that he was depressed, that the burdens that lay upon him seem heavier than he could bear. But he went to church. While there, regardless of whether the sermon was alive or dead, whether the singing was inspiring or depressing, he
ran past them all till he became conscious of God.

So it happened to this Psalmist. He realized that God was near. He realized that he was eager to help. "Thou hast holden my hand," he declared.

He realized God, came in touch with it, and went forward unafraid. The other day I saw a little child walking down the street with her mother. When she came to the crossing she reached up and put her hand in her mother's hand and went across unafraid. So may we. "Put your hand in the hand of God and you will find it better than a light and surer than a known road."

Not only did he realize God was near undergirding him with his own strength, but he realized the all-sufficiency of that God. "Whom have I in heaven but thee?" he sings. "There is none upon earth that I desire beside thee." Whatever may be your circumstance He is in the midst of it to help. Whatever your hunger He can satisfy. "He satisfies the longing soul." On the east coast of England there is a grave of a minister who once moved among his flock like a sweet and rare perfume. The tomb above his dust bears this epitaph: "Here lies Benjamin M, a man who was satisfied with Jesus." So may we all be if in in his house this morning we open our hearts to Him.
SIN AND SUFFERING

"Suppose ye that these Galileans were sinners above all the Galileans, because they suffered such things."

Certain individuals had just rushed into the presence of Jesus bearing tragic tidings. I have an idea that these messengers were Judeans. If so, they looked askance at these suffering Galileans as crude folks from the sticks. Therefore, it was with more emotion that tears that they told the Master of how these unfortunate Galileans had come to worship, but had ended by having their own blood mingled with the blood of the beasts that they were offering in sacrifice. What terrible sinners they must have been! That is what they meant to imply as they told their heavy news. But Jesus did not agree with them. Instead he told them frankly that this tragedy did not indicate that these slaughtered saints were worse than their fellows. If you and I are in an automobile accident and you are killed and I escape without a scratch, that does not argue that you were wicked while I am good. Instead of agreeing with these men of hardened judgment, Jesus affirmed that they were just as real sinners as those who had suffered. He declared further that unless they should repent, they too would perish. It is evident as we read this story that these ancient bearers of evil tidings were possessed of certain convictions that were a strange mixture of truth and error, or of truth and half-truth.

I

There was one conviction that they held that is one hundred percent true. They were firm in the faith that sin always results in suffering. In their own scriptures they had read this emphatic sentence, "Be sure your sin will find you out." This they steadfastly believed; this we should do well to believe. It was true in the long ago; it is true today. It was true in a primitive society; it is true in our scientific age. Every man who sins turns a Nemesis upon his tracks that he can no more escape than he can escape his own shadow. "Be sure your sin will find you out." Your friends, your closest loved ones may never find you
"As for me, I almost lost my feet; my steps had well nigh slipped." Psalm 73: 2

I.

That which makes the hymn-book of the Jews immortal is that it comes out of experience. It is of the "stuff" of which life is made. These words are so vital that if you prick them even at this distant date, they will bleed. In fact, there is a springtime freshness about them over which the years have no control. They are just as much at home in this hectic century as they were in the distant and primitive day in which they were written.

In fact, it seems to me that these words are more up-to-date than they were in that distant day long ago when this greatly tried singer told his experience. "I almost lost my feet," he says, "my steps had well nigh slipped." He is looking back over a bit of the journey of life that he has found very trying. Here is a place where he came very near to losing his footing and to slipping into some dark chasm that skirted the road where he might have been heard from no more. He found it very hard amidst the trying circumstances that environed him to keep his feet.

But if it was hard to keep his feet in his easy-going and primitive days, how much harder is it for you and me. When this psalmist, therefore, tells us that he almost lost his footing, we know exactly how to sympathize with him. As we look back, we can see stern chapters in our life's story where a similar experience came very near happening to us. Now that we have won through, we feel a bit like some tempest-tossed mariner who has at last put his feet on solid ground. We feel like some convalescent who after bitter days of torture and darker nights of pain is at last getting back to the bright and sunny land of health once more.

For others of us, this experience is more than a memory, it is a present reality. We are on the point of losing our footing even now. We are keenly conscious of the fact that we are walking in slippery places. Our road is very slippery. We, ourselves, are a
bit awkward and prone to stumble. We have come to God's house tonight, perchance, hoping that we can find something to steady us, praying with more of doubt than of faith that the Lord will make our feet, as the prophet sang like hinds' feet, that He would enable us to be sure footed.

Then there are others to whom these words are far more than a bitter trial over which we triumph. It is more than a present struggle and—sadder. "My steps had well nigh slipped." "But for me," you say sadly, "it was more than a 'well nigh'—I did slip, I completely lost my footing. Therefore, these words bring to me sad and mocking memories. I have given up. I have quit trying."

There are more of this class, I daresay, than most of us believe. Seldom a day passes that we do not find some disillusioned heart for whom life has proved too difficult. On the street of a Texas city, I met one such some time ago. I had known him well. In fact, he had been converted under my ministry. He had been a member of my church. Once a drunkard, he entered upon the high task of being a Christian with a joy I have seldom seen equalled. But his old friends got hold of him. He slipped, but he got up. He slipped again and again he got up. But when I saw him, having tried and failed and failed again, he turned to me a face as seemingly dead as a piece of parchment declaring, "I have disgraced my Church and disgraced my family, I will never try again." The most pathetic character in the world, to my mind, is the man who has failed and failed till he has quit trying.

II.

How did this psalmist come so near losing his footing? What tripped him? What trips you and me? We fall for many reasons.

First, there are those who lose their feet through sheer carelessness. We seem neither to look nor to care where we are going. Surely there are millions today who are morally and spiritually adrift. They have no steadying convictions. They have ceased to inquire for right roads. They do not believe there are such. They usually fall flat be-
cause they are not seriously trying to do otherwise.

Now the surest way of losing anything is through neglect, carelessness, and indifference. To lose a friend, it is not necessary that you insult him. It is not even necessary that you get a loan from him. All you need to do is to neglect him—simply leave him alone. If you want to wreck a home, all that is necessary is neglect. If you want to wreck a church, there are many ways, but neglect will take the place of them all. If you want to wreck your own life, all that is necessary is an indifference to its highest values. Be like the joy-rider—indifferent to the goal and indifferent to the road and you will lose your footing.

Second, then there are those of us who fall from weakness. One of the greatest actors for the past century was Richard Mansfield. When he was trying to get a start in London, he would buy a hot potatoe, warm himself with it as long as it was hot, and then eat it. One night while doing a small part in a play, he fell down flat. But it was not from awkwardness nor carelessness—it was from hunger. He had not enough strength in his tottering knees to keep him on his feet.

There are many who are falling for the same reason today. Years ago, some scientists lost their way in the wilds of Australia and ran out of food. They found a certain plant called the "nardoo" whose root was palatable so they ate that and sought to sustain life upon it. But when they failed to come home, searching parties went out. They found their bodies. Their stomachs were full of this nardoo root. But when they subjected this food to analysis, they found it was not food at all. It had not the slightest nutritional value in it. Is it any wonder that when you read only those books that minister to your doubt instead of to your faith, when you see plays that dig at the fundamental integrities by which the soul lives, when you constantly put yourself amidst the companionship that has no look-out upon the things of the spirit, is it any wonder that under these circumstances you lose your footing?

Third, but neither of these was what tripped this psalmist. He stumbled over
God's amazing order of things. He went out into life with a faith that simply refused to check with human experience. Naturally, when this staff of faith on which he leaned broke under his hand, it came very nearly to upsetting him.

What was his faith? It was that of the typical Jew of his day. He believed that if he were a good man, that if he obeyed God to the best he knew, that in return God would bless him not only by giving him joy and peace, not only by giving him a right character, but by giving him material prosperity as well. He had the firm conviction that the Lord blesses those who serve Him in physical well-being - good health and good times. Now there is just enough truth in this to make it dangerous. It is hard for it to tally. The man who is honest and upright and clean, other things being equal, does enjoy better physical health and does tend to prosper more than the man who is not. That, we recognize. But that does not mean that every good man will have a sound body and a sound bank account. But this psalmist was taught to believe that such was the case without fail. Wherever there was suffering, it was the result of sin. Wherever there was prosperity, it was the result of righteous living.

This was likewise the faith of Job's comforters. When Job fell on evil days, when he lost his possessions then his health then his inward peace, these friends came and one question they asked him was this, "What particular sin have you committed?" They were sure of the fact. "Wherever there is suffering," they said, "it is always a direct result of sin." Such was the faith also of the disciples of Jesus. When they came upon the man born blind, they asked, "Who did sin, this man or his parents that he was born blind?"

But as smug as this faith was, and as satisfying to many, the actual experience of this psalmist tore it into shreds. He, himself, was a good man. He was trying hard to serve God. He tithed. He tried to be just, but instead of prospering, he went to the wall financially and the wolf of want seemed at his very door. Instead of enjoying vigorous health, he was a great sufferer. "All the day long," he cried,"have I been plagued,
and chastened every morning." Bitter day followed bitter night till he cried in sheer
desperation, "Surely in vain have I cleansed my heart, and washed my hands in innocency."

This conviction of the sheer futility of being good was not only enforced by
his own failures, but by the prosperity of the wicked. He knew folks who made no pretense
at religion, who were not even honest. They never went to church, but they enjoyed the
best of health and everything they touched seemed to turn to gold. Perchance he had a
neighbor like that and when he was tossing in pain wondering why God should let a good
man suffer as he suffered, he could hear the revelry of a wild party where this prosperous
sinner was joining his guests in drinking himself to drunkenness.

"How can a good God permit such injustices," he sobbed into his restless pillow
and millions have asked that same question. While I was in Washington some months ago, I
talked to an old friend. I did so at the request of her husband. She had passed through
a great sorrow. She had been called to give up her only daughter - a beautiful girl who
had died of a terrible and disfiguring disease. "I have given up prayer," she said, "I
have given up the church. There is no good God. A good God would not manage a world like
this one is managed." She was stumbling over the same vexing question that came so near
to tripping the psalmist. It may be that that experience has been yours.

III.

But in spite of all his stumbling, this ancient singer managed to keep his feet
and so may we. How did he manage? God has many agencies for steadying us, for preventing
us from falling, or for picking us up when we have gone down.

1. One of the first I mention and one of the best is the right kind of a friend.
This friend may be a loved one - your own father, your own mother. One of Job's comfort-
ers, according to Moffatt's translation said a very beautiful thing. "Your words," he
said, "have kept men on their feet." How magnificent! I have known men like that, thank
God! I have been steadied by them. When my feet were ready to slip from under me, they
have spoken just the right word and I have gone on my way steadied and heartened.

During the War, there was a gentleman living in Richmond, Virginia, whose only son was in France. This gentleman was a rather disagreeable neighbor and very few liked him. But one day the papers carried the sad news that his son had been killed at the front. A good man who lived nearby debated as to whether he should go to see him or not. He did not think he would be welcome, but at last he decided to go. He rang the doorbell and waited. The wait was long, but at last he heard slow steps coming down the stairs. The door was opened and the man looked at him with a forbidding frown. "I have read," said his visitor, "of your sorrow and have come to give you the sympathy of a Christian brother." The bereaved man glared for a moment and then flung his arms around his neck and sobbed like a baby. "Come up-stairs," he said. And he led him up and into his son's room. A revolver lay on the table. "I was just fixing to use that when you came." The man's words had kept him on his feet. We can do that for some brother, if we will.

2. While this man was perplexed, instead of repudiating God altogether because he could not understand his dealings, he still kept his face toward the Light. He went to church. How trite that seems, yet that was the first step toward deliverance. Two friends were stopping at a certain home for the weekend. When Sunday morning came, one said to the other, "I am going to church today." "You don't mean it," was the surprised reply. "I never go. What is the use?" Well, none if it is not our Father's house and if Jesus was mistaken when He said, "Where two or three are gathered together in my name, there am I in their midst." But if this is the case, then to go is infinitely worth while.

In God's house that day there came to this man certain new insight. He came to discover that this was, after all, an ordered world; that what men sow, they do reap; that while wicked men prosper, it is always an outward prosperity and therefore one that fails either to abide or to satisfy while it lasts. And we can see with a clearness that
might not have come to him, that while the devil pays wages, God never does. "The wages of sin is death, but the gift of God is eternal life through Jesus Christ our Lord."

Then in the sanctuary that day he re-discovered God. That is an all-inclusive discovery. And that, let me say, is the big purpose of church going. Worship is social. Every man who attends church helps every other man. In the process of helping others you receive help. Of course, there are times when the singing may be uninspiring, the prayer dull, and the sermon dull and boring, but if you have an expectant and hungry heart, you can win past all of these into the divine Presence. He came to certain bracing convictions with regard to God that enabled him to keep his feet.

(1.) He realized that God was continually present with him. "I am continually with Thee," he sings joyfully. He knew then that there was no trying experience through which he need pass alone. That does not mean that he always realized that he was with God. That does not mean that he constantly felt the thrill and joy of His presence. But he was sure that whether seen or unseen, realized or unrealized, that God was ever near and that he lived in His fellowship. He was sure that he was never alone.

(2.) He was sure that this God who was so near was able to help. He did not believe that He would allow His child to fall to rise no more, if that child would give Him a chance. He gave Him a chance in the church that day and God did not fail him. And out of his experience of deliverance and victory, he sings, "Thou hast held me my right hand." I saw a mother going down the street with a little child. When they came to the crossing, the child stopped and reached up a hand and the mother took it and led her across in safety. "And God is like that," says the psalmist. When you are walking in slippery places and reach up, there will be a mighty hand to grip yours and God will see you through.

(3.) He found in God the ultimate satisfaction of his soul's deep need. "Whom have I on earth but Thee, and there in heaven is none that I desire besides thee." From his own experience, he found that He satisfied a longing soul. He met the deep hungers of his heart. That is what this same Lord yearns to do for us. He is saying to us as He said
to the peevish elder brother, "Son, thou art ever with Me and all that I have is thine."

Men of every nation and kindred and tribe and tongue, men in every kind of desperate circumstances have tested the truth of this and have found it to work.

Here is a gallant-hearted gentleman, bearing his wife and baby in far off

It is midnight. He dares not bear them in the day because the savages that He has come to serve are thirsting for His life. How does he bear up under his terrible load? How does he keep his feet as he tries to navigate this awful and bitter road. "I must needs have gone mad," he declares, "by that lonely grave, but for the conscious presence of Christ." And as in prayer He opened his heart to Him and he felt the undergirding of His everlasting arms and walked in peace with the Lord, so the same privilege is yours and is open for you.

"Lord, what a change within us one short hour

Spent in Thy Presence will prevail to make!

What heavy burdens from our bosoms take,

What parched ground refreshes as with a shower!

We kneel, and all around us seems to lower;

We rise, and all, the distant and the near,

Stands forth in sunny outline brave and clear.

We kneel, how weak; we rise, how full of power!

Why, therefore, should we do ourselves this wrong,

Or others, that we are not always strong,

That we are ever over-born with care,

That we should ever weak or heartless be,

Anxious of our troubles, when with us is prayer,

And joy and strength and courage are with Thee?

(Archbishop Richard C. Trent)
Every mood of the soul is reflected in this amazing hymn book of the Hebrew people. If you are joyous and your life is full of sunshine, you can find a singer here with the same joy in his heart and the same radiance upon his face that you possess. If you are in trouble, if life has fallen into ruins, if your heart is broken, if you cannot put the full weight of your woe into words, you can find it expressed for you here in these Psalms. If you are thrilled with the glorious adventure, if you are bewildered, if life is all tangles and knots, you can find here one who will share your uncertainty or your bewilderment. Every mood of the soul is expressed here.

I

Now, this Psalmist finds himself in the day declining. Morning is not breaking, but rather the skies are growing gray, as night is coming on. He is not among the lush days of springtime; he is facing the autumn, and the loitering sun is rising later each morning, and like a weary traveler, passing earlier to his evening rest. The pulse of life is not growing quicker, but growing slower and slower with each heart beat. What is the matter?

Well, first, it is not a matter of personal decline. It is not that To find yourself failing physically is sometimes a heart-breaking experience. It comes to those who are the prey of some deadly disease. It comes to all of us more or less who live long enough to grow old. Our joints begin stiffening somewhat after twenty. They
stiffen more and more with the passing of years. And it is no
thrill to see ourselves failing. I knew my father as an old man.
He had been one of the finest specimens of physical manhood. But
he used to come in from doing a half day's work and sit in brooding
silence by my mother and then say, "I can't do the day's work as
I used to do it." He realized that he was failing, growing weaker.

Then, there are times when that weakening is not so much
of the body as of the mind. It is impossible to keep our bodies
flexible always. But we can go further in keeping our minds flexible.
And yet these fail us oftentimes long before we reach the end of
the journey. We forget the names of our own children - call Bill,
George, and George, Bill. Sometimes even brilliant men become little
less than stupid. "My God!" said Dean Swift, in a lucid interval,
as he turned the pages of Gulliver's Travels, "My God! what a genius
I was when I wrote that book!"

Then, there is moral and spiritual decline. This is one
decline that need never come. Life at its best is a "life that
shinest more and more unto the perfect day." But sometimes we
allow ourselves to fall into spiritual decline. Samson did so
without at first being aware of it. He thought he was going out to
new victories, when he was going out to slavery and blindness. "He
wished not that the Lord had departed from Him." Then, there was
Saul, poor self-ruined Saul. There are few sadder pictures than to
see this once splendid man crawl down into a cave to consult the
Oracle of Delphi, saying, "God hath departed from me." All these
declines are tragic, but they are not the burden of this Psalmist.
Neither is he bewailing the fact of a slowly dying church. That is
something to bewail. The most fascinating something in the world is
a church that is a thrill and a throb with life. There is absolutely
nothing so appealing as a church that is doing the work that it was
sent into the world to do. But when it loses its vision, when it lets go its grip of God, then it is a pathetic thing indeed. But the decline of the church is not the burden of our poet.

Finally, he is not sobbing over the desperate decay of society in general. This was a matter for serious concern then, as it is today. Our lot has been cast in a fashion that is peculiar to all of us. More and more restraints have been flung aside. More and more high and holy compulsions have been disregarded. Thousands of people find themselves neglecting privileges today that they never expected to neglect. Vast thousands find themselves indulging in sins, petty and large, that a few years ago they would have spurned. But this is not what chokes the voice of this Psalmist with sobs.

What, then, is he bewailing? He is bewailing an all-inclusive decline. He fancies that he sees about him a growing weakening, whose end is the defeating of his own personal life, the weakening of the Church, the rotting down of society. He is facing the grimmest of all possible tragedies, the tragedy of a weakening God. "This is my grief," he declares desperately, "that the Most High has not the strength that He once had." He has had His day, He has reached His zenith. Little by little He is moving to where "the clouds are homing for the night." Soon darkness will close over all. That is the very climax of tragedy.

Now, I wonder how this Psalmist had allowed himself to be gripped by such a dismal conviction. How do you and I? Because most of us have at times felt this dilemma, if we have not put it into words.

1. This Psalmist took his first step down when he allowed himself to be overwhelmed by the ugliness of the day in which he lived.
His was an evil time. Injustice was everywhere. Right was on the scaffold, and wrong on the throne. Being a desperately earnest man, he made these wrongs a matter of prayer. He lay awake nights beseeching God to help. No trifler was he. He was a man that took life seriously.

But though he spent whole nights in prayer, God did not seem to do anything about it. That was at once bewildering and heart-breaking. This has been a burden for countless thousands, the problem of unanswered prayer. Why did not God answer? There are many reasons for an answer to prayer. "You ask and receive not," said James, "because you ask amiss, that you may consume them on your lusts." God does not answer the prayer that we offer in crass selfishness.

But as we read between the lines I do not think that that was the secret of this man's failure. I think his failure was due to the fact that while he prayed, he fixed his mind on the evils that he sought to have remedied rather than upon God who was to give remedy. We do that quite often. The trouble with the ten spies was that they looked at God through their difficulties instead of looking at their difficulties through God. Prayer for deliverance of some particular sin often seems to do more harm than good, because we focus our attention upon the sin instead of upon God. His word is "Look unto Me and be ye saved." Now, since the world was full of evil and God was not doing anything about it, this man reached the very natural conclusion that either he did not care, or he did not have the power to help. He still clung to His love, but he decided that he was growing weak.

2. Then, the second reason for his collapse was that seeing so much evil in the present and finding no positive proof that God was improving the situation, he began to retreat back to the past. He tells us that he dwelt on days of old, dwelt on them
because they were great days when God was strong. And dwelling on them he came to idealize them. He allowed himself to believe that then saints were saints and God was God, and just in proportion as he magnified the glories of the past he minimized the glories of the present, till standing in the present he turned his back on the God of today and tomorrow and looked back to the past where God was strong and where He was really bringing things to pass.

III

Now, what did this conviction of a weakening God do for him? What effect did it have on his life? The same effect that it has upon yours and mine, if we give way to it.

1. It made him wretched. "This is my grief," he says, "that the Most High no longer has His strength that He once had." No wonder it grieved him! Of all the tragedies of which the human heart can conceive there is no tragedy that is so black with night, there is no tragedy that is so wet with tears as the tragedy of a declining God.

2. It robbed him of his hope. Yesterday was a day in which it was good to live, but not today and tomorrow. He had no hope, and when hope goes, life ceases to be worth living. I was called some time ago to look into the face of a suicide. "What got the matter?" I said to myself, as I looked into that face so pitiful under the magic touch of death. And the answer seemed to come back from the lost heart, "I gave up hope."

3. This dismal conviction caused this psalmist to faint. He has a queer word,"I fell musing on God." Now, musing on God is supposed to have the opposite effect. Another Psalmist said,"While I was musing the fire burned." Musing on God is a source of strength, but not for this Psalmist. Why? Because he
was musing on a weakening God. Men are like the Gods they serve. If your God is cruel you are likely to be cruel. If your God is weak, you are likely to be weak.

4. Finally, it made him weaker and weaker. It changed him from an asset into a liability. He was deeply in earnest. He was genuinely grieved over the sins of his people. He was desperately eager to build a better world. But he did none of these things. He simply took the heart out of others. He didn't enter the kingdom himself, nor allow those who were with him to enter, all because he had lost his faith, and had come to believe in a weakening God.

IV

What is the remedy? Or, what is the preventative, if we have not reached such a spiritual collapse.

1. If you are gazing back to great days when God was strong, I think it would be helping you to face the facts about the past. There is nothing possibly on which we waste more good sentiment than the good old days. This is true because when we come to see the good old days as they really were we find that they were not quite so good as we often allow ourselves to think. The Church has seen more victorious days than she is seeing now. I believe far more victorious days are ahead of us, but never at any time was the Church perfect. This is the case because it has always been made up of imperfect men.

2. We need to face the facts about the present. These are difficult days. Gigantic evils stalk abroad. The whole world seems on the point of turning into an armed camp. But amidst it all
God is at work. He has not left Himself without a witness. And while the nations are glaring at each other across fiery chasms of hate more men and women are thinking in terms of world peace than ever before in human history.

3. Finally, we need to face the fact about God. There is a part of a sentence in the Letter to the Hebrews to which we need to run for refuge when overtaken by moods like this of the Psalmist. That is this brave word: "Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today, and forever." He is a Christ with a past. He has lifted empires off their hinges, and changed the course of human history. He has conquered death and hell and brought life and immortality through the Gospel.

But He is not only a Christ with a past; He is a Christ with a present. He is in the midst of our present day world. He is walking the streets of our cities.

"Where cross the crowded ways of life, Where sound and crash of race and clan, Above the tumult and the strife, We hear Thy voice, O, Son of man."

He is face to face with every man of us tonight, "closer than breathing, and nearer than hands and feet." He is knocking at the shut door of our hearts saying, "Behold, I stand at the door and knock." And what He did for the apostles, and what He did for the saints in the days of Luther, and what He did for the saints in the days of Wesley, He is ready to do for you and me. And wherever there is failure, it is ours and not His.

Then, Jesus Christ is in the tomorrow. We can never run past Him. He is always out ahead. If we take the wings of the morn and dwell in the uttermost part of the sea, there He shall be, and His right hand shall guide us. And because He is there
today and tomorrow, final victory is sure. He is still saying, "I will build My Church, and the gates of death shall not prevail against it." If you are a part of that Church, you are a part of a conquering institution.

What, then, is our need to win the fight in our own personal lives? What is our need, if we would play our part gallantly in a world where the needs of men who know God are so desperate? We do not need the saints of yesterday, we do not need Elijah, or Moses, or Paul; we need the Lord God of Elijah. We can do without the glory as long as we have the spring. Vessels come and go, but the spring abides. And when we get back this God for ourselves, we will no longer say, "This is my grief that the Most High hath not the strength that He once had." But we should rather shout, "This is my joy, Jesus Christ, the same yesterday, today, and forever, is still able to do exceedingly abundant above all that we ask or think."
"Wilt thou not revive us again, that thy people may rejoice in thee."

Psalms 85:6

Here is a man on his knees. He is one of God's saints. His face glows upon us in sweet winsomeness across the far spaces of the years. He is engaged in the high and holy enterprise of prayer. He is exercising that high privilege which is the richest that God puts into our hands. He is holding communion with the most high. You and I are privileged this morning to hear him as he pleads with God. Maybe as we listen we shall be constrained to kneel at his side and join him in his heavenly communion.

For what, is this ancient saint praying? There are many worthy objects of prayer, but it seems to me he has chosen the best. He is not praying for his nation. He is not praying for better homes. He is not praying for a greater liberality on the part of his people. He is not praying for a better educational system. He is asking an all-inclusive blessing; he is asking for something that he believes will vitalize the home and remake the nation. He is praying for a revival. "Revive us again, that thy people may rejoice in thee." Now, there are some who can say a hearty "amen" to this rich and roomy petition. But, there are others who cannot. They rather tend to say, "Forbid them, Lord." But the revival has certainly fallen on evil days. There are churches that will not tolerate them at all. They would no more
dream of undertaking a revival than they would of selling themselves to spread some contagious disease. The word "revival" is a winsome and objective word. But, to many of us it has lost its sweetness. It has no form nor comeliness, and there is no beauty that we should desire it.

II

Why has the revival become so unpopular. There are perhaps many reasons, but two are outstanding.

1. As a means of promoting the kingdom, it has often been misused. So often what has passed under the name of a revival has been nothing more than a counterfeit. Often such spasmodic efforts have littered up our church rolls with people who have never been really converted, and have been a financial drain upon our church. I know of one evangelist of mediocre ability who told his friend that in 1924 he made $60,000, conducting evangelistic campaigns. Such gospel profiteers were not altogether uncommon in those days. Now, with those who abhor this type of evangelist, I am in entire sympathy. As a rule I have conducted my own revivals. Only once since I have been a pastor have I had a professional evangelist who had never been a pastor of a church to hold a meeting. That man was John Brown, whom we have invited to come to this church in February. I have invited him again because I came to believe genuinely in the man, and in the type of work that he is doing. We must not allow the counterfeit to cause us to throw away the genuine. There are diamonds made of paste and glass that look very much like your wedding ring, but you are not going to throw away your jewels for that reason.

2. Then, there are those who object to a revival because it is too costly. A revival in a church is a disturbing something,
It makes worldly and lifeless church members uncomfortable. What we are unwilling to pay for, we are likely to talk down. When the ten spies came back from the Land of Promise, they spoke disparagingly of the land that they had visited, not because it was worthless, but because they did not have the gallantry and grit to possess it.

A revival is costly. It costs repentance. It costs hard work. The church of today is in a large measure an ease-loving church. An ease-loving church will never be strong for revivals. There are multitudes that are interested in the Church, after a listless and half-hearted fashion, if the pastor and a few faithful helpers can carry it to victory all right. But if they cannot, it is simply too bad, because they themselves are not going to get under the load. One of the greatest hindrances to a revival today is the fact that so few folks want one enough to pay the price.

III

But, in spite of all objection, it is my firm conviction that every single member of the church ought to join the Psalmist in this prayer for a revival. We ought to for the following excellent reasons:

1. Because every single one of us really, in our hearts, believe in revivals. This is certainly true in the realm of nature. Our world looks rather drab this morning. The trees wave their bare branches in the wind like the fleshless arms of a skeleton. The flowers are dead. The birds are songless. The grass, for the most part, is bleak and sere. The apple trees are without beauty and the rose bushes without a hint of color. You should be grieved at such a gray, dead world, but for one fact: you are looking forward to a revival. Soon it will be springtime once more.
What will springtime do for us? It will bring us a new world. The trees will deck themselves in their Easter garments of green. The rose bush will become a riot of color. The apple tree will be as radiant as a June bride. The Bob White will again call to his mate, and once more the Cat Bird will sing among the apple blossoms.

"What is so rare as a day in June,
Then, if ever, come perfect days.
Then Heaven tries earth if it be in tune,
And over it softly her warm ear lays.
Whether we look, or whether we listen,
We hear life murmur, we see it glisten.
Each clod feels the stir of might
An instinct within it that reaches and towers,
And groping blindly above it for light,
Climbs to a soul in grass and flowers."

We are looking forward to the springtime, because we believe in revivals. Then, we believe in revival in business. What is the New Deal except this, an effort at an economic revival. We have Dollar Day. The merchant puts on a special sale. He is trying to bring about a revival. Far and ahead the most thrilling news I could give you this morning would be to assure you that a revival was just ahead for Birmingham, where Real Estate would be as worthful as it was in 1929, and where nature once more turned a stream of gold down our streets.

Then, we believe in revivals in these physical bodies. Were you ever desperately ill? What a thrill it was to get well again! How delightful to have some friend look at you in great amazement and say: "Man, you look brand new!" What a joy to see health once more bloom on the shadowed cheek of one that you love! A certain doctor years ago was giving directions for the revival of a boy that had fallen overboard. "Now, turn him on his face," he ordered. And the boy was turned on his face, and the doctor recog-
mized him as his son. At once he undertook the task. And, when at last his heart beat once more, the father’s joy knew no bounds.

Everybody believes in revival. After a period of darkness that lasted almost a thousand years, there came a revival. It is known in history as the renaissance. As the Prince kissed the Sleeping Beauty upon her lips and awakened her out of her sleep, so this revival came to a sleeping world, and men awakened were thrilled with the wild joy of living. Some went to the marble quarries, and brought imprisoned angels to freedom. Some spilled lovely dreams upon the canvas. Some burst into poetry. Some turned their faces toward the sea, and discovered new continents. Now, since we believe in revivals in every other direction, how blind not to believe in them in the realm of religion. Religious revival is reasonable. To doubt their value is to shut your eyes to some of the biggest victories of history. The first church was born of a revival. Methodism is a child of the revival. Human progress has not been upward in a stern and unbroken line; it has been a process of relapse and recovery. We are in the relapse now. We believe in the possibility and in the desirability of the recovery.

2. We ought to pray this prayer because we need a revival. Surely there is not one of us that will doubt that. It is not simply one of our needs; it is our supreme need. This, I think, everyone will confess when we consider what a revival is. What do we mean by revival? Not a hurrah, not a high tide of emotionalism. Not a mere getting folks out to church and into church. Revival means new life. A religious revival means new life from God.

Now, who is there among us that has a super-abundance of life. Most of us are ready to profess a shortage here. "Jesus
is come that we might have life, and have it in abundance." But we have not all availed ourselves of this priceless gift. "A little learning is a dangerous thing." We have been told, a little life is oftentimes even more dangerous. One of the best men I know said to me recently: "I never lie down at night without saying in utmost sincerity these lines:

"One sweetly solemn note comes to me o'er and o'er, I am nearer my home today than I've ever been before."

What is the matter? He was old and battered and broken, and he longs to be gone from the bit of mere gossamer thread of life to where he expects to find life in its fullness.

Life is the big thing. This is the supreme asset. If we have life, everything is possible. Without life, nothing is possible. This new life from God is that which we all stand in need. It is that for which we all hunger and thirst. To profess it is to profess joy. "Revive us again, that thy people may rejoice" is certainly not an outstanding trait of our church. But it has been characteristic of every revival period throughout the history of the Church. Whenever the Church is truly revived, it bursts into song as naturally as roses bloom at the kiss of springtime.

"A little bird sits at its door in the sun, Atilt, like a blossom among the leaves, And lets its illumined being overrun, With the deluge of summer it receives."

And as our souls are deluged with this spiritual summertime, we burst into songs of sheer joy. Now, joy is a source of strength. It gives us enduring power. It is an antidote against temptation. We pass by the siren voices of the world as Ulysses passed by the sirens that hung around the rock-bound coasts of Italy because he had Orpheus on board. We become strong to win others because the world is short on joy. If they see that we have the secret, they
3. Finally we need to pray this prayer because God stands ready to accept it. Now and then we hear one say, with a who of wisdom, "The days of the revival are over." If that is true, why is it true? It is not because human nature has changed. We are the same that our fathers have been. We are dogged by the same sins. We stagger under the same burdens. We are threatened with the same hungers. Human nature remains the same through the centuries. It is certainly not because God has changed. Jesus Christ is the same yesterday, today, and forever, the same in his love, the same in his power, the same in his eagerness to give. I should hate to think that the days of springtime are forever past. If the tree would never grow green again, and the flowers would never bloom again, but stopping still, I should hate to know that there was no way out of a moral and spiritual desert into a richer and fuller life. We ought to pray this prayer because God is ready to answer it.

III

How should we pray so that God can answer? Hear this word: "If my people who are called by My name will humble themselves and pray and seek My face, and turn away from their iniquities, then will I hear from heaven and will forgive their sin, and will heal their land." Notice the condition. It is not "if willing". There is no doubt about his willingness. It is not "if circumstances." We can master our circumstances if we will. It is not "if the world". The world can never prevent a revival. It is "If my people." There is no power on earth nor in heaven that can prevent a church from having a revival if it wants one.

Now, then, shall we pray? We are to pray humbly. That is, with the sense of our need. We are to live reputedly. We are to live cooperatively. That is, we are not to ask God to do what
we ourselves can do. We are to go as far as possible in accomplishing our own prayer. Praying after this fashion, results are sure. I have seen it in my own ministry not once but over and over again.

Years ago a pastor who was then regarded as the best pastor in the West was leaving a certain church at Ft. Worth. Three men were appointed in quick succession to take his place, and the Official Board wired each time that they would not accept him. At last I was appointed and accepted, not because of any merit, but because they had never heard of me. I did not make an auspicious beginning. But a few sincere saints joined me in prayer for a revival, and I saw a great refreshing from the presence of the Lord that made my entire ministry there a joy and a thrill.

We are not doing here what we ought to do. You know it; I know it. Remember that the idea of the work of the church that your children carry into the world with them, the idea of the success of God depends on the kind of church we make this church. Is it worth while? Making it a glorious church without spot or blemish, or any such thing. Do we really desire that it be a conquering, victorious and joyful church? If so, we must have a revival. We must pay the price, and be willing to pay it.

(Instance, the run-away team)
"Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits:

Psalm 103:2

I.

The psalmist is resolved to have taken his sluggish soul in hand, in undertaking to shake it into wide-wakefulness. He finds that soul of his very dull and listless in the matter of thanksgiving. He realizes that unless he takes himself in hand and really bestirs himself he is going to sink into the baseness and ruin of ingratitude. It is in the realization of the ugliness of this sin and of the ease with which we fall into, that he lays his hand upon his slumbering soul and undertakes to arouse it to the high task of thanksgiving. He says, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits." Wake up! and get yourself to being grateful.

Now if this psalmist needed to arouse his sluggish soul, so do we. This is the case because ingratitude is such a common sin. It is one to which almost all of us have to plead guilty. A friend of mine used to tell of the graces meeting together in Heaven. There were present on that occasion Love, Peace, Patience, Kindness, Goodness, Faithfulness, Self-control, there were also present Benevolence and Gratitude. Almost all of them were old friends. They had met and loved each other in this world, but two of them had never gotten acquainted. Benevolence, said this friend, had never had the pleasure of meeting Gratitude. When they were introduced on the other side, Benevolence looked at the beautiful creature with wide-eyed admiration. You are angelic, she said, I am sorry I did not get to meet you sooner. I might have done my work better if I had had you for my friend a long time ago. Of course, Benevolence and Gratitude do sometimes meet in our present world, but they
"Lest we forget"

It is said that early one morning God asked two angels and sent them each with a basket to make up the prayers of the day. Each carrying a great hamper strapped upon his back. One was to gather the prayers of thanksgiving, the other was to gather the prayers of petition, "the give me prayers," the prayers that sought only for help. When they came home at the close of the day, one hamper was crammed to overflowing. In fact this angel left a line of prayer on the garden street as he walked. But the other angel had almost an empty basket, only two or three prayers rattled about on the bottom. Which think you was the full basket? and which do you think was the all-but empty one? It was the basket that had the prayer of petition that was full. The basket that carried the prayers of praise was nearly empty. So it happens again and again.

II.

Why are we so ungrateful?

It is not because we have deliberately decided upon such a course. We have never made up our minds that we are going to stifle all gratitude and never utter another sense of thank you to God or man. If we are not grateful it is not of purpose. No, we are not lacking in gratitude because we have nothing for which to be thankful. But gratitude is not a creature of circumstance. You could not go into the homes of our city and pick out all the successful and healthful and put them on one side with the deseased and disappointed. The misfits and the failures on the other, and say that one group was thankful and the other not. Some of the most joyously thankful people in our city today are those that have the least so far as human eyes can see for which to be thankful.

Why then, I repeat, are we so thankless?

1. This ancient singer puts his finger upon one ailing spot. We are thankless because we are thoughtless. We are lacking in gratitude because we are so forgetful. Listen to him Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits.
"Lest we forget"

See the modest demand that this poem is putting on his soul. He is not asking that his soul remember all God's mercy, that would be impossible. We can no more count our blessing than we can number the flowers in the springtime. All that the psalmist is asking is that his own soul should not forget them all. That is a modest request.

But how easily we forget. How easy to forget the mercy of God. How easy to forget the tenderness of loved ones. How easy to forget the daily kindness and courtesies of friends. How easy to forget the helplessness of the multitudes of whose faces we have never seen. This comes about because we are so thoughtless. Think and thank come from the same root word. The more we think on the blessings showered upon us by God and man, the more we thank. It is also true that the less we think the less we thank.

How starved hearts of the world are. How many souls are mere deserts when they might be flower gardens. What is needed to make those barren hearts to rejoice and blossom as a rose? One something that is sorely needed is a bit of appreciation. Sometimes we will recognize that fact, but so often we have to be startled and made thoughtful by tragedy before we ever realize how thankless we are. Here is Thomas Carlyle thinking of all the snarling years he had lived with Jane. How little appreciation he had shown. No wonder he cries in bitterness, "If I had her back, if I had her back for only five minutes to get to tell her that all through the stormy years, I loved her." He did not mean to be cruel, but just forgetful.

Yet it was never in my heart
To place so ill apart,
But evil is wrought for want of thought
As well as for want of heart.

2. The second foe of gratitude is our tendency to take our daily mercies for granted. Ours for such a law abiding world. Morning follows night, springtime follows winter with such assumed regularity that we take it as a matter of course. How many of us thought to thank God for the sunrise this morning? But did you ever hear of that day when the sun did not rise? Eight o'clock and still utter darkness. Nine o'clock and black night was all over the land. Noon came, but it was
dark as midnight. Then came the time for the sunset, but there was no gold in the West. No mellow rays lighting up in Eastern hills. All this because there had been no sunrise. Then came another horrible night. Millions were wondering would the sun ever rise? Meriads of haunted eyes as the time for morning came were looking wistfully toward the East. At last there was a faint tinge of gray that came, gradually turning into a blush of gold. Instantly there went up a loud shout of voices in thanksgiving that fairly shook the world. Why were these folks so grateful? Not so much because the sun was rising, but because it failed to rise for just one day.

When I was a boy I used to work with mules. I had extensive dealing with that wise and stubborn animal. If you are acquainted with this son of a donkey, you will know that it is of the good mercy of God that I am with you this morning. I developed into quite a good sideways bare-back rider. But one day an animal that I was riding, took flight, gave a terrific jump, I came very near falling over backward but recovered, but not sufficiently to keep from falling forward. As I went down my ankle struck a chain that tied itself securely around it. It was only the fact that I happened to catch the reigns close at the animals mouth that saved me from being torn into bits. It might surprise you to know that after days when I passed that spot my boyish heart uttered a prayer of thanksgiving. But I never thought to be grateful for the thousands of times that I had not been thrown or frightened in the least.

Some years ago a small nephew of mine was discussing with me the uncertainty of life. I dare say his mother had been just talking to him about this important matter and he was sharing with me this important information. He said, "When we go to bed at night, we do not know whether we shall wake up alive or not, do we? We might stop breathing in the night might'n we?" That is true I said. "Well, he said, "I am so used to getting up and not being dead that I intend to keep on doing it." And that philosophy of that child is the philosophy of lots of us. We are used to having friends and loved ones that are considerate, three meals a day and an infinite Father who is willing to share all that he has with us. So accustomed we are to these
blessings that come that we take them as matters of course.

3. The third foe of gratitude and one of the most deadly is conceit.

Did you ever notice how prone we are to blame our faults and failures on others? For instance, if you have a vicious temper that makes it next to impossible to live with you, you seldom face the fact that you are to blame. You are rather to be pitied because your great-grandmother had a vicious temper. We blame our sins on Adam or the best on the Adamses. When we fumble the ball, the quarterback did not hand it to us right. When we strike out it is the fault of the umpire. For our faults and failures, others are to blame.

When we come to virtue and victory that is a different matter. We have nobody to thank but ourselves. Take the matter of physical beauty for instance. That is a generous prize and not to be despised, but it is one for which the possessor deserves no credit at all. That has come as a gift. But so often it does not make those possessing it more gentle and thoughtful and thankful. It tends to make them haughty and proud. One of the most beautiful creatures I ever knew was only happy when she was being complimented. To tell her that another girl was beautiful was little short of insult. Today her springtime has passed and she herself is overweight. Her friends are not as thoughtful as they ought to be.

Here is a man of keen intellect, he is strong in matters of business. Everything that he touches seems to turn to gold. Sometimes such gifts make one grateful. Sometimes we feel we have only ourselves to thank and become haughty and contemptuous toward others that possess lesser gifts and have achieved less success. The rich fool was such a man. He fancied that he was self-made. What he had achieved was due only to himself, therefore he had not the slightest gratitude toward God and man. The Pharasee that went up into the temple to pray was utterly destitute of gratitude. He had nobody to thank for it but himself. There is no greater foe for thanksgiving than plain old God-forsaking conceit.

4. The fourth deadly foe of thanksgiving is our social habit of
comparing ourselves with others and of fixing our eyes upon what we do not have, instead of what we have. You were proud of your Ford till your neighbor bought a Dodge and then you decide that your Ford was no good after all. You appreciate your Dodge till your neighbor bought a Packard and then you had to ditch your Dodge. You rejoiced in your success in business until you found that your competitor had done a little better, then your gratitude turned to envy.

One of the greatest students of human nature is Aesop. He told of a certain dog who had been successful in securing a delightful piece of meet. He was taking it home in triumph. Now it so happened that he had to cross a beautiful deep stream. Over this stream was a foot log. As the dog looked down into the blue water he saw another dog about his own size, but the piece of meet that that dog had was a wonder. It made the one that he had in his mouth seem utterly contemptable. Therefore, he dropped his own piece to spring after that of the other dog to find that it was only a shadow. He went home at the close of the day snarling and cynical. He might have been grateful had he not been so busy comparing himself with what seemed to be someone else.

If you must compare yourself with others, compare yourself with the one you might have been but for the blessing of God upon your life. That will help you to be grateful. Fix your eyes on that which you have that is good, instead of upon that which you have missed. Bishop Hughes tells of visiting an old uncle of his who had lost both eyes through cancer. He went in and spoke to him, the old uncle turned a radiant face to say joyfully, "I cannot see you my son, but Thank God, I can still hear you. Instead of bewailing the fact that one door between him and those he loved was closed, he was thankful for those that were still open. To compare yourself with others, to fix your gaze upon what is not yourself instead of that which is yourself is utterly to destroy you.

5. The fifth aspect of gratitude which I mention is silence. How many
lovely thanksgiving dies because it is never brought into the light. Having to express your gratitude is to increase it. To refuse to express is to lose it. I know what we are what we are accustomed to say "she knows I appreciate it. She knows I am grateful." Maybe so, but if you give no expression to it, sooner or later you will cease to be grateful.

IV.

What is the good of saying thank you?

1. It helps the one who says it. Thankful people are joyous people. People without gratitude are never happy. If you want one of the sweetest arts to enrich your life, without hesitation I give this one. Learn the fine art of appreciation. Seek day by day to find something in yourself, friends and God to appreciate.

2. Thanksgiving is good because it helps others. How much freer the majority of the world would run if it were oiled a little more often with this fine lubricant called gratitude. And our multitudes of folks who feel that it matters very little to anybody whether they sink or swim. Whether they live or die. Life has grown dull and gray, drab and monotonous. But for these the morning would break and springtime with its roses would come if they had just a bit of appreciation. There are times when everybody needs simply to say thank you.

3. Thanksgiving is a joy to the heart of our Lord. He delights in it because it is a mark of bigness in ourselves. He delights in it because he is a lover and loving always yearns for the gratitude of loving. "Let the redeemed of the Lord say so" is a wise word from a Hebrew prophet. By saying so we enrich ourselves. By saying so we hearten others. By saying so we bring joy to him who loved us and gave himself up for us. Therefore, it is good to come into His presence asking for nothing but the privilege of expressing thanksgiving and thanks.

One afternoon a very tired preacher sat in his study talking to a friend. There was a knock at the study door and the weary man placed himself for another drain upon his tired body. But when he opened the door he saw before him the beautiful face
LEST WE FORGET

"Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits."
--Psalm 103:2

I

In looking over the garden of his soul, this ancient singer perhaps found many lovely flowers in bloom. But there was one blossom that he missed. At least it was not growing in the rich profusion that he either expected or desired. The missing blossom was gratitude. Not only did this singer miss this lovely flower, but he decided to do something about it. Therefore, he took himself in hand. He fairly gripped his sluggish soul by the shoulder and shook it awake. He aroused it to the task and to the privilege of gratitude. "Get up," he seems to say. "It is Thanksgiving Day. Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits."

Now it is altogether possible that if we take stock of the garden of our own souls this morning, we shall miss the very blossom that this man missed in the long ago. At least we shall not find it growing so luxuriously as we should like. The truth of the matter is that ingratitude is one of the commonest of all sins. It is said that one day God called two angels to Him and gave to each a great hamper. "Go out," He said, "and gather up the prayers of my people today." To one He said, "You gather up the prayers of petition." To the other He said, "You gather up the prayers of thanksgiving." So they went to their task. When they came home in the evening, one basket was so full that the prayers slipped out as the angel walked up the street. The other basket was so nearly empty that the bottom was hardly covered. Which think you was the full basket and which the empty basket? You know—the full basket was the one that was crammed with
"give-me" prayers, while the almost empty basket contained the prayers of those who realized that they had received and came back to give thanks.

Once when Jesus was on his way to Jerusalem he passed through a certain village where a committee waited on Him. This committee had only one common bond. It was a bond of a mutual heartache. Every man of this committee was slowly dying of the loathsome disease of leprosy. They resolved to appeal to the Master for help. Therefore, when He came in sight, they lifted their cracked voices, saying, "Jesus, Master, have mercy on us." Then what? This tender Christ who could never pass up human need said, "Go show yourselves to the priest." That was what a leper was to do after he was cured. But Jesus told them to do it before they were cured.

In the confidence that He was not sending them on a fool's errand, they set out on the journey. By and by one felt the tides of a new life flowing in his veins. He looked at his once maimed hands and saw the flesh had come back like the flesh of a little child. "I am cured," he shouted. "So am I," said another, and yet another. Then each looked into the face of the other in the realization that the impossible had happened. They were all healed. Thus healed, one of them said, "I must hurry home. I have not seen my wife and children for long, bitter months. Another said, "I must hurry to my place of business. There is not any telling what has happened since I have been away." Soon all had passed out of sight except one man, a Samaritan. He looked wistfully along the road that leads home. Then he said to himself, "It has been a long time since I felt the hug of my baby's arms and felt the kiss of the woman that loves me, but I would not have the courage to look them in the face unless I went back to the Man who helped me and told Him of my appreciation." Therefore, he went back and threw himself in an abandon of gratitude at the feet of Jesus. The Master looked at him with a smile that shone through tears and said, "Were there not ten cleansed? Where are the nine?" Yes, ingratitude is a common sin. This psalmist realized the fact and aroused himself to thanksgiving.
II

Not only do we need to arouse our sluggish hearts to the privilege of gratitude because ingratitude is so common, but we need to do so because gratitude is so important. It would amaze you to take your concordance and find how persistently this wise and inspired Book urges upon us the beautiful task and privilege of thanksgiving. Why is gratitude so important?

1. It is important to its possessor. To be ungrateful is to be joyless. If you have nothing for which to be thankful this morning, your heart has lost its song. This is the case regardless of how rich the bounties that life has dumped into your full hands. If on the contrary your heart is a thrill with thanksgiving, you are still rich and joyous and songful however empty your hands may be of the prizes after which the vast majority of us are grasping so eagerly. Gratitude then is important because it is essential to joyous and abundant living.

2. Then gratitude is important because it is a mark of moral and spiritual maturity. If you have never learned to give thanks, you have never really grown up. All really mature people are grateful. Naturally we do not expect any great appreciation from babies. However much attention you give to a baby, however long the hours you may watch by his cradle, he will not appreciate it. However completely you may give yourself to his care, he will show no more gratitude than the dead. But suppose he keeps this up, suppose having grown to manhood he still never learns to say, "I appreciate, and I am grateful"—that means in the supreme essentials that make a man he is still a baby. He is a pitiful little dwarf, a spiritual runt who never came to maturity.

3. Then gratitude is important because it not only enriches its possessor, but it enriches others as well. Like mercy it is twice blessed. It blesses him who gives and him who takes. There is many a heart this morning that is as dry and parched as a desert that would blossom into lovely flowers if it were once watered by a refreshing shower of gratitude. There is many a man walking with
lagging step who would walk with a new spring and a new elasticity if he were re-
freshed with gratitude. When I realize how much more smoothly the friction-fretted
machinery of every day life would run if it were oiled more frequently and more
abundantly with this fine lubricant, I wonder that I apply it so grudgingly. Here
then is something that the more we give it away the richer we become and the richer
we make our fellows.

III

Now since gratitude is so important, I wonder why we are not more grateful.
I am sure it is not because we have made up our minds that we are never going to
express any appreciation to God or man. I am equally sure that our ingratitude
is not born of the fact that we have nothing for which to be grateful. To make
such an affirmation would be a ghastly falsehood. It would be also to imply that
those with full hands are always grateful while those whose hands are almost
empty are never grateful. But of course such is not the case at all. Some
of the most thankless people in the world this morning are people who seemingly
have everything. Some of the most thankful are those who in the eyes of men have
almost nothing. Why then are we so thankless?

1. We are lacking in gratitude because we are so forgetful. That is what
this psalmist is saying. "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his
benefits." Mark you, he is not asking us to remember all of God's benefits.
He fears that would be far too much to ask. His request is very modest. He
says, "At least do not forget them all." It is significant that the words "think"
and "thank" come from the same root in Anglo-Saxon. To fail to think is to be
thankless.

We have keepsakes, almost all of us. Old letters, old gifts, faded flowers
pressed away in a book perhaps—these we keep to help us to remember. But what
do we see to remember. Sometimes we seem to desire to remember the ugly things,
the slights, the insults, the petty wrongs, rather than the lovely things. "I
never forget an injury," one said vindictively. But how about a kindness?
man was bent on remembering at least some of the kindnesses that had come to him at the hands of God and man. To fail to remember these is to be thankless.

2. A second deadly foe of gratitude is conceit. Jesus told of a farmer who was highly successful. His employees had been loyal. God had sent the sunshine and the rain in just the right proportions. His harvests were so abundant that his barns were bursting with their fullness. In fact, they could not contain them all. Therefore, as he looked over his rich returns he thought within himself saying. What did he say? Not, "How good God has been to me!" He rather seems to have said, "What a keen gentleman I am! How important! I have nobody to thank but myself. If the Lord had not made the world I would have." Naturally that is a bit of an extreme case, yet I daresay there is a touch of that same ugly conceit in almost all of us. It seems to be a law that the larger the treasure that comes into our hands the more likely we are to swagger over it. Some men can make money without boasting, but it is often hard for their children to inherit it without thinking that there is a positive merit in their being able to inherit an estate. We blame Grandma for our ugliness of temper and plainness of face, but if we are beautiful we have nobody to thank but ourselves. If, therefore, we are to be grateful, we must also be humble. We must have sufficient humility to pitch conceit out the door.

3. The third foe of gratitude is taking things for granted. There are few foes so deadly as this. Those most grateful for good health are not the ones, generally speaking, who have never known an ache or a pain. They are the ones who have passed through lean, gray days of suffering where life was a bit of a burden. Those who have been always well take health for granted. Those who have never been hungry take plenty for granted. Those who have never been vastly alone take friends and loved ones for granted. Those who have faced for a whole lifetime the open door of the Church take its privileges for granted. They even come
to take God for granted.

We live in an ordered world. That is a great privilege. We know that spring follows winter. We know that harvest follows seed-time. But often we take it for granted. We know that however black the night the day will dawn. But what of it? It always has. Has it? Did you ever hear of the morning when the sun did not rise? Noon came and it was as black as midnight because there had been no morning. Then came the sunset hour, but there was no sunset because there had been no sunrise. All the millions around the world were awake and aghast with fear. Then another long night wore away. Two thousand million eager eyes were turned toward the east. Then an optimist said, "There is a bit of gray." But others shook their heads and said, "No, just wishful thinking!" But the gray changed into the gold and at last the sun came, and a shout went up to heaven that shook like an earthquake and boomed like a cannonade. Why? Because the sun had risen! No, because it had failed to rise one time.

4. A fourth foe of gratitude is looking at what we have missed instead of what we have found. It is looking on the seemingly finer treasures that are in the hands of others instead of what God has put into our own hands. Sometime ago while driving along a concrete road I saw a cow on both knees with her head run through a fence, nibbling a little sparse grass that grew alongside that concrete road. Behind her were spreading acres of luscious pasture. But she was saying, "If I could only get through this fence what four-leaf clovers I could find growing along the concrete. She was feverish with discontent. There was no gratitude in her kine-ish heart. I imagine her milk soon soured, she was so disturbed over what she had missed. She had no appreciation of what she had.

An ancient genius named Aesop told of a certain dog who went foraging one day. He met with great success. He came home with a roast in his mouth that would have used up about all the points that the modern house-wife has. But on his way home he had to cross a foot-log over a beautiful clear stream. Chancing
to look down into this water, he saw another dog about his own size, but the hunk of meat that dog had in his mouth was so big that the hunk that he carried seemed nothing at all. It was not worth having. Therefore, he threw it away and plunged eagerly after the luscious hindquarter that the other dog had. In so doing, he lost what he had and went home, not only ungrateful, but snarling at all and sundry in self-pity, saying, "Why should this happen to me?"

Did you ever hear of the house with the golden windows? One day a lad stood beside his own beautiful home and looked across a lovely valley to a house upon another mountainside. It was early morning and the sunrise was turning the windows of this house into gold. "Oh," said the lad, "There is a house with golden windows. I wish I had such a house. This in which I live is a commonplace affair. As soon as I am old enough, I am going to see the house with the golden windows. So he passed the next few years in restless ingratitude. Then one morning he set out for a nearer view of the house with the golden windows.

All day long he traveled. At last he came to a very ordinary cottage across the valley. In front of this cottage a little girl was playing. He called to her. "All day long," he said, "I have been traveling in search of the house with the golden windows. I thought it was just about here. Can you tell me where it is?"

"Oh," said the girl, "I certainly can. I have just been looking at it and admiring its beauty." Then she pointed across the valley to the house that the youth had left: "There it is. Someday I am going to see it—it is so lovely." All his life he had been living in the house with the golden windows but he had never found it out. Blessed is the man that recognizes the house in which he lives before he loses it. But so often we fix our gaze so intently on what we have missed that we fail to see what we have found.

5. The final reason for our ingratitude is our silence. Said a wise prophet, "Let the redeemed of the Lord say so." In other words, "Give expression to your gratitude." If I fail to use my right arm it weakens and withers. Any organ that we do not employ turns its feet toward death and not toward life. The same is true
of gratitude. To give it expression is to have it to grow from more to more. To repress it is to cause it to die of a lingering death.

Oh, I know why we are so hesitant. It is because, "He knows I am grateful. She knows how much I appreciate it!" How, I wonder? How do those to whom we owe so much know our appreciation if we never give it expression? They do not know it. Thus, we rob at once ourselves and those who help us most. If you have a word of appreciation to say, say it now. By tomorrow the ears that are hungry for the words that you could speak may be stopped forever.

How fitting then to have a special day set aside to remind ourselves of the goodness of God and the goodness of those whom God has sent our way. How fine to come into His presence sometime not to ask Him for something but to thank Him for what He has already done. Sometime ago a hard-worked minister sat late one Saturday afternoon, talking to a friend. The week through which he had just passed had been especially hard. His energy had been taxed in a peculiar way. Then there came a knock at the door, and the tired man pulled himself together for one more drain upon his energies. "Come in," he said. Then the door was opened and a sunny-faced little girl looked in. She flung the door wide, ran across the carpet, climbed up into the tired man's lap. She hugged his neck and kissed his lips. Then putting her hands upon his cheeks, she said, "Daddy, I didn't come to ask you for a thing. I just came to climb up in your lap and hug you and kiss you and tell you what a good, kind, sweet Daddy you are." Then she slipped down and went away, and the father said to his friend, "That brought me rest." Suppose we look into God's face and tell Him in gratitude what a loving, heavenly Father He has been to us. "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits."
"Bless the Lord, Oh, my soul, and forget not all His benefits." In this wonderful song David grips his soul by the shoulder and shakes it into wakefulness. He is rousing it, stirring it up, to the task of thanksgiving. He is trying to waken it to the privilege, to the glory and joy, of gratitude. With all his might he is inciting it to the big, brainy, heartfelt task of praise. "Bless the Lord, Oh, my soul, and forget not all His benefits."

The reason the Psalmist is bestirring his soul to give thanks to God is because we have so great a tendency to let this side of our nature sleep. It is so easy to become ungrateful. I am sure that no one sin so thoroughly belongs to our everyday as this sin. I am confident that it is the commonest sin in the world. It is said that two angels left Heaven one day, each with a wonderful basket to gather prayers from the lips and hearts of men. One was to gather prayers of petition and the other prayers of thanksgiving. When the day was done and they came home, one had more than he could possibly put into his basket and the other basket was almost entirely empty. Which was the empty basket? You know, - it was the basket that was to gather thanksgiving.

There is a story of a Physician of wonderful winsomeness and marvelous power. He passed through a little field one day and there met Him ten men who were sick, ten ghastly, hideous, loathsome, rotting men. These men were outcasts. They were falling piecemeal into their own graves. They dared not come close to the Physician, but they stood afar off and prayed to Him for the tender mercy of healing. They prayed, for they were men with an earnest longing for healing.

In answer to their prayer, the Physician commanded them to go show themselves to the priest. That they were to do in token of the fact that they were already healed. These ten men were men of faith. They obeyed the commands of their Physician and set out to do His bidding, though at that time they were not healed. But it came to pass as they walked along their dreary and painful way that they felt the coursing of a new life within their veins. New strength came to them. There was a blossoming of the springtime of a new manhood, and they were all healed.

I think I should have liked to have stood face to face with that company just then. I think I should have liked to have walked among them, shaken the hands that just now were sloughing away. I think I should like to have seen and shared their joy, for they were all healed.

But having been healed, they did not remain together long. They soon scattered each to his own home, to his own business, to his own occupation, to his own private enterprises. They went, so far as we know, without ever a thought of the kindly Physician who had put them on the road to recovery, who had brought into their lives the glorious boon of abounding health. There was only one exception. Among those ten, there was one man who was even more of an outcast than his brethren because he was not only a leper, but a Samaritan as well. And this man was so full of gratitude that he said, "Before I go home I want to go back to the One whose power has healed me and tell Him how much I appreciate it." And he went back and fell down at the feet of the Physician and gave Him thanks. And the Physician looked sadly down at him: "Were not ten cleansed? Where are the nine?" He was sad that the nine were not there, but I
think that one kept His heart from breaking and put a song in His soul that day that made even the cross easier to bear.

But you see from this that ingratitude is a common sin. It is common in society. It is common in the Church. It is common in the home. And not only is it common, but it is just as cruel and just as deadly as it is common. This is a sin that comes full-armed into the world. It has the sting of a scorpion. It has the scourge and the rack of the inquisitor. It has the dagger of the assassin. The human heart knows no more exquisite torture than that which it suffers from its bloody hands. The high water mark of English tragedy, and of all tragedy for that matter, is King Lear. What is the tragedy of King Lear? It is the tragedy of ingratitude. Look at him as he faces the darkness, the storm, the biting tempest, the coming madness. Look at his rage, his tears, the bitter heartache. What makes him utterly indifferent to the lashings of the tempest?

"Blow, blow, thou winter wind
Thou art not so unkind as man's ingratitude.
Thy death is not so keen because thou art not seen,
Although thy breath be rude.
Freeze, freeze, thou bitter sky,
Thou dost not bite so nigh as benefit forgot,
And though thy waters warp, thy sting is not so sharp
As friend remembered not."

The frenzy of the man, the rage of the man, comes from the fact that he is in the grip of a miserable-hearted fiend and in the throes of its torture is learning "how sharper than a serpent's tooth it is to have a thankless child."

Now, the Psalmist, I say, is trying to rouse his own sluggish soul to the high task of thanksgiving. He is trying to wake it up to the privilege of gratitude and so he says: "Bless the Lord, Oh, my soul, and forget not all His benefits." Understand, he does not call his soul to the impossible task of remembering all God's benefits. That would be utterly impossible. You might as well try to count the flowers of the springtime. You might as well try to number the bursting buds on the hills. You might as well try to sum up the sands by the sea, or the stars in the sky, or the motes that people the sunbeam. But what he is asking his soul to do is to at least remember some of His benefits. Now, that is reasonable and that is possible. "Forget not all His benefits."

And when he says "forget not" he is laying his hand upon one of the most fruitful sources of ingratitude. Why is this sin so common? Why men, - why are we so ungrateful? It is not because of any deliberate purpose on our part. It is not because we have sat down and thought the thing through and have determined that we are going to shut our eyes to all benefits, to all kindnesses, to all mercies. We have not come to the deliberate determination to pluck up the flower of gratitude from our heart garden altogether. We have not decided that we will never utter a word of praise to man or God for the kindnesses that come into our human lives. Our ingratitude does not grow out of our thoughtfulness. It rather grows out of the opposite. It is a result of our thoughtlessness. One has called attention to the fact that the words "think" and "thank" come from the same root word in Anglo Saxon. Certainly it is true that before people do much thanking they have to do some thinking.
Thoughtlessness, - that is our calamity. That is the mother of so much of our ingratitude.

"And yet it was never in my heart
To play so ill a part,
But evil is wrought for want of thought
As well as for want of heart."

We won't think. That was the charge that God brought against his people Israel. "My people will not consider." That is one of the calamities of today. Men won't think. And how many tragedies come as a result of our thoughtlessness. We kill almost as many people in America every year as we lost in killed in the war. And many of these lives are lost because people won't think. How many social tragedies, how many domestic tragedies, take place every day because people do not think.

We forget the gratitude that is due the father and mother; the kindness that we owe, till they have slipped out of the reach of our hands forever. We forget to be tender and appreciative of the lives that touch us most intimately till we are brought face to face with the final separation.

I knew a great strong man once who had a delicate flower of a wife. He loved her in his rough, rude way with a passionate tenderness, but he was not thoughtful. In his forgetfulness he broke her heart. Then the hand of disease was laid upon her and the man began to think. Such acute suffering I have seldom witnessed. Taking the old cedar bucket one day and going down the winding path to the spring, I heard a noise to make the blood run cold out beside the path in the thick wood. Had it been night I am sure I should have fled, but being daylight, I crept a little from the path and looked toward the sound. And there upon his knees was this strong giant of a man, kneeling, gripping the little sapling that trembled in his brawny hands. And he was sobbing and trying to pray and asking God for another chance to be kind and thoughtful to the delicate little woman whose heart he had broken because he forgot.

Yes, many a disaster, many a heartache, comes in the home circle every year, not because of any deliberate cruelty on our part, but just because we forget. We forget the love that has cradled us and we forget the tenderness that groped into the valley of the shadow of death to lift us into the light. We forget the solicitude that watched over our helpless infancy. We forget the hard, toil-worn hands and the stooped shoulders that have lifted us and given us our chance, and forgetting, we are not grateful. And forgetting father's heartaches and mother's heart is breaking, we come to their graves in after years to find nettles blooming where roses ought to bloom and thorns looking out from the petals of the lilies, all because we remember that we were not thoughtful and not kind. We forgot to be grateful.

But if our thoughtlessness works havoc in our human relationships, it works even a greater havoc in our relation to God, for we find it even easier to forget the kindnesses and the mercies and the benefits that come from God's hand than we do all the benefits that come from the hands of our human companionship. We never set out to deliberately grieve God, or to wound Him, or to crucify Him afresh, or to make Him suffer over our waywardness and wickedness. We just forget. And forgetting, the songful brook of gratitude dies in the valleys of the heart. Forgetting God's benefits, the note of thanksgiving is silent upon our lips.
Why is it that we find it so easy to forget? Why is this ingratitude born of our thoughtlessness such a common evil? One reason, as another has pointed out, is the very constancy of the benefits. The blessings that come to us are such customary blessings. They are so ordinary. They are so usual. We are so used to them that by and by their very constancy, instead of increasing our gratitude, tends to deaden it.

Some years ago a little nephew of mine was talking to me on the uncertainty of life. His mother had been talking to him on this solemn subject. And so he said to me, in the wise way of a small boy, "We don't know when we will die, do we?" And I said "No." And then he said, "When we go to bed at night we don't know whether we will wake up in the morning or not, do we?" And again I answered "No." And then he was thoughtful for a moment and said this wise word: "But you know I am so used to getting up without being dead that I just expect to keep on that way." So he had become entirely accustomed to waking up, feeling the gush of life within him, that he had ceased to be thankful for it.

Such is ever the tendency. Carry your child a little present every day when you go home and by and by the child will not only cease to appreciate it, but it will resent it when you happen to forget, and the gift will overshadow the giver. I feel quite sure that the sense of gratitude is being lessened in the modern child because they get so much. And that is true of mine, as it is of yours. What a rare and wonderful thing was any sort of a gift in the childhood of most of us! And how like the toy department at Kress's or Woolworth's does the nursery of the modern child look! The constancy of his gifts tends to kill his gratitude.

And so it is with God's grown-up children. Suppose the sun had not risen this morning at the usual hour. Suppose at nine o'clock it was still not up, and at ten there was still blackness; and night had blasted all the day. Suppose it had lasted then for a second day and a third and a tenth and for a whole month, and then once more its golden face were to look up from the eastern hills and glance its arrows of light in at our window. What a time of thanksgiving it would be! But because it comes with constant regularity every morning, few of us praise God when we see His face. Suppose the springtime were to fail to come next March and April. And suppose June and July brought snow and frost and icicles instead of roses and harvests, Och, when spring did come again, how grateful we would be!

When I was a boy I used to work a great deal with mules. Now, if you know mules, you must regard it extremely providential that I am here today, but I counted myself as rather an expert rider. I was especially good as a sideways bareback rider. One time I was riding a mule in this fashion when he gave a sudden tremendous jump that came near to throwing me backwards, but I recovered, but not sufficiently to keep from slipping off forwards. As I went down my ankle struck one of the trace chains and it tied itself around it. The mule, wildly frightened, went bucking across the field. I made a grab for the reins and managed to save myself from being torn piecemeal. And there was a light of a sense of gratitude for several days after that, though I had never thought to be thankful for the hundreds of times that I was not only not torn to pieces, but not even frightened.
I had a friend in Fort Worth whose son was in San Francisco at the time of the earthquake. He received his death sentence in the fighting of that fire, for he contracted consumption and came home and died. He told of how the people, shaken into wakefulness, gathered outside the city upon the hills and how preachers were placed at intervals, and people by the thousands gathered around them to hear the preaching, and of the wonderful prayers of thanksgiving for their deliverance. But many a night since then has San Francisco been delivered and today it is one of the most godless cities in America. The very constancy of its mercies has made it ungrateful.

And so it ever is with us. We come to take God's daily mercies, God's hour by hour benefits, as matters of course, just as so often we take the constant tenderness and kindness of those who love us as matters of course. Love was waiting for us in the home this morning when we got up. We were no sooner outside the house than kindly human faces greeted us and we found ourselves among friends, but it was nothing more than we expected and we forgot to be thankful. Paul escaped this insidious tendency. Did you ever notice as you read his letters the constancy of his praise? Did you ever notice how ceaselessly he gives thanks? Writing to the Philippians, he said, "I thank God upon every remembrance of you." And the word is again and again upon his lips. What a fine habit it is! That is when thanksgiving does double duty. It blesses men and it brings joy to the heart of God. A woman, a member of this church, referred me to that passage sometime ago and I read it with keenest appreciation: "I thank God upon every remembrance of you." How we ought to rejoice in our daily human loves and for the blessing of our human friendship, but so often we do not appreciate them till we lose them.

Then, a second cause of our forgetfulness is our conceit. We so tend to believe that all of success, that all of prosperity and victory, that all of kindness and love, that come to us come as a result of our deserving. I have wondered about that man that fell among thieves on the Jericho road. I have wondered if when he God well and began to hobble about, he didn't say, "You can not do a fellow like me." I wonder if he didn't strut about and believe his own cunning and his own courage thwarted the purpose of the robbers. I wonder if he didn't forget that the good Samaritan had anything to do with it. It would have been so like him.

It would have been like him because it is so like us. Yes, there was a farmer once and he made a wonderful crop. There was so much corn and so much wheat that he did not have room to store it away. And what did he do when he looked out upon his waving grain fields? He nearly broke his arm patting himself on the back. That was all. He thought within himself and said: "I, I, I - " and if the parable had been much longer, there would not have been enough capital I's in the alphabet to have printed it. He never thought of the One who had sent the rain and who had sent the sunshine. He never thought of Him in whose hands his breath was and whose were all his ways. He said, "Oh, yes I was there, I am a keen fellow." And he felt that he had nobody to thank but himself.

It is for this reason that success does not always make us better. Great gifts do not always make us appreciate the giver. Sometimes they seem to have the very opposite effect. Take the gift of physical beauty. It is not a gift to be despised. It is one that is rather to be coveted, but my experience is that the beautiful girl is not always the most heartsome and the most appreciative. Oftentimes she is as vain of her
face and of her figure as if she herself had made it. Oftentimes her beauty of person utterly mars her beauty of soul.

Brilliancy, intellectual power, that is a wonderful gift. And great intellects are not always the most grateful. Oftentimes they are the least. Power to get money, power to succeed in business, is a gift, as much a gift from God as any other. But it is not always conducive to gratitude. Oftentimes it is the very opposite. And how strange it is, and how wicked, that we allow the very gifts of God to make us forget Him! What a tragedy that we take his very benefits and smother and utterly crush the sweet flower of thanksgiving!

A third reason why we find it so easy to forget is because of our tendency to contrast ourselves with others. Those laborers, who worked and received at the close of the day a penny, would have been perfectly satisfied with their reward, but for one reason. They had bargained for a penny. They did not expect more than a penny during the day of toil, but at the close they noticed that somebody, who had not worked so long as they, received a penny. And that fact dwarfed their own reward and made it seem paltry and mean, and they went away, not only ungrateful, but soured and embittered, not because they had received less than they expected, but because somebody else had received more.

You would be grateful for your worldly success this year but for the fact that you know of somebody else in the same business who has made a little more than you and who has prospered a little more than you have prospered. You would be a happier and more grateful Christian were it not for the fact that you remember the hardships and the privations through which you have passed this year, while your godless neighbor maybe has seemed to have no trouble at all. And you have blamed God because that when you asked for bread, He did not give you a stone.

The path to gratitude does not lie along this road. You will never learn to be thankful by despising what is your own and setting value on what belongs to somebody else. I know we have a great tendency to do just that thing. "The fool's eyes", says the wise man, "are at the ends of the earth;" that is, we can never appreciate the near simply because it is near and we never value our own simply because it is ours. That is not only not the way to gratitude, but it is the way to wretchedness. The elder son, to whom the father said, "All that I have is thine", was so busy looking at the fatted calf, that was killed for the prodigal, that he entirely forgot the untold wealth that was his own.

Do not allow yourself to be always contrasting your own progress with that of another. It leads to pride if you have outstripped him. It tends to lead to envy if he has outstripped you. If you must make contrasts, contrast yourself as you are with yourself as you might have been, but for the grace of God. That will help you to praise and help you greatly. Whatever you have suffered this year, and some of you have suffered deeply; some of your hearts have been broken, but how infinitely worse it might have been if God had not loved you and had not crowned you with loving kindness and tender mercy. Bishop Hughes tells of visiting an old uncle of his, who had a cancer under each eye. His sight was gone. The avenues to the world were closed there, but when his nephew spoke to him, the old man said with real joy, "I can not see you, but thank God, I can hear you." And he was grateful that he still had this avenue open to the world of loved ones about him.
In the fourth place, we fail in our gratitude so often because we fall into the habit of looking on the dark side rather than the bright. We look toward the west for the sunset rather than toward the east to see the sunrise. When the roses bloom we say, "There is a thorn for every rose" instead of saying "There is a rose for every thorn." Cultivate the habit of searching for the thing in God's world and the trait in your friend for which you can really be thankful.

And, last of all, if you would be grateful, give expression to your gratitude. As the flower dies without the sun, so this sweet flower dies unless we allow it to express itself. If you are grateful, say so. You need it. Those about you need it. They need it beyond all words. And some day the heart is going to break because you did not say the kind thing that was locked in your soul and battered at the door of your lips, but could never find a way out. God desires it. I know it because we are made in His image. He is hungry for our praise, hungry for our appreciation, and ever again and again He is saying: "Let the redeemed of the Lord say so." (The little girl and her father.)
"Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits." Psalm 103:2

This great singer in looking over the garden of his heart misses the very blossom that he values most. It was the lovely flower of gratitude. If this dainty blossom was growing at all, it was not growing in the rich profusion that he desired. He was wise enough to understand that his lack of gratitude was nobody's fault but his own. I shall refer to this later, but gratitude is always an inside job. If you are not grateful, it is your own fault. Realizing this, our wise poet took himself in hand. He literally shook his soul saying: "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits."

Why is this wise singer so bent on observing Thanksgiving day? He had some very good and solid reasons.

1. He is determined to be thankful because gratitude is one of life's finest assets. It is an asset in the first place because it is a mark of moral, of some bit of spiritual maturity. Naturally, we do not expect gratitude of little babies. We do not expect appreciation from the hands of mental defectives. A woman told the other day of losing sight of a certain very brilliant friend, who was a woman of great gifts. One day she chanced to see the woman walk up the steps and into a house. She hurried to ring the doorbell. The woman came to the door. At last when she was allowed to enter, she learned why her friend had dropped out of sight. She was giving all her time to the mothering of an imbecile. "I am glad to give my life to him," she said. Only once did her face cloud over and her eyes fill with tears, as she said, "Even now
he cannot tell me from you." To have no appreciation is to be a moral imbecile.

2. Then gratitude is a moral asset because it puts a song in the soul. If you have no gratitude, you are very short on joy. However much life may have put into your hands, if you never feel like giving thanks, if your heart never overflows with appreciation, then in spite of all you have received, you are still living a drab life. To be short on gratitude is to miss the sunshine.

- II -

Then this man was wise in determining to be grateful because gratitude not only enriches its possessor, but others as well. The human heart hungers for appreciation. Now and then I hear somebody remark that it does not matter to them in the least whether anyone appreciates what they do or not. When they thus speak, I know that they are not only failing to tell the truth, but they are smarting from a sense of ingratitude. Everybody longs for appreciation. If we miss it, life is far more dreary and harder.

How many there are in the church and out of it this morning who are walking with lagging steps because they feel that they are not appreciated. Many are doing poor work for the same reason. When I remember how gratitude can put a new elasticity in our step, a new sparkle in our eyes, when I remember how much more smoothly the machine of life would run if it were oiled more frequently with this lubricant of gratitude, I wonder why I do not make a more liberal use of it.

We should be lavish with our use of appreciation not only because it is needed, but because the more we give it away, the more our own treasure grows. However grateful you may have been in the years gone by, if you have never given expression of your gratitude, the chances are that it is dead like a neglected flower. But if you have used it,
it has grown in richness with the passing years. For the more we give away, the more we have.

3. Finally this man was wise in desiring to be thankful because gratitude not only enriches the possessor and others, but it brings joy to the heart of our Lord. Did you ever notice how often the saints throughout the Bible called us to the privilege of giving thanks. God loves the gratitude of His children, as we love the appreciation of ours. Therefore, the prophet spoke a wise word when he said, "Let the redeemed of the Lord say so." When we give thanks, we help to increase the joys not only of earth, but heaven also.

- II -

But in spite of the fact that gratitude is so worthwhile, this poet found himself strangely lacking in that fine virtue. In confessing his lack of gratitude, he is acknowledging a sin that is not unique. On the contrary, I am persuaded that ingratitude is one of the most common sins of the world. It is one of the most common and most cruel. When Jesus cured the ten lepers, only one came back to express his gratitude. The others were disappointing.

Sometimes ingratitude is invested with cruelty. There are those who pay kindness with unkindness. There are those who use their own freedom to bring desolation and hurt to others. Sometime ago there was a most kindly man killed by a hitch-hiker. He was murdered by one whom he was trying to serve. Shakespeare was right in calling ingratitude "that marble-headed fiend." It is indeed a cruel thing. Why then are we, as this ancient poet, so short on gratitude?

We may be sure that this ancient singer did not become ingrateful of his own choice. Neither have we. Not one of us have thought the thing through and made up our minds that ingratitude is beautiful. Whatever we think of ingratitude in ourselves, we despise and hold it incomprehensible.
in others.

We can readily admit that there are some circumstances in which it is easier to be ungrateful than in others. Yet gratitude is not a child of circumstances. If this were the case, it would be easier to go out into the world this Thanksgiving Day and separate the grateful from the ungrateful. We could do this by finding the successful, those who are strong, those who have social and economical security and put them in one group. Then we could put in the other the sick, the impoverished, the failures, those who are coming close to the end of the journey with little to show for life except tired and tortured bodies. These fortunate folks are grateful we could say, and the unfortunate are ungrateful.

But you cannot fail to realize that such a division could not work at all. Among the sons of good fortune, you would find those who have no gratitude at all. Some who seem to have everything that makes life worth living would be destitute of thanksgiving. Others who seemingly have nothing of which to be grateful, would be abounding in thanksgiving. Gratitude is always a thing of new life. It is not what you have; it is what you are on the inside that determines whether or not you are thankful. Why then, I repeat, is this man short on gratitude?

He puts his failure on the simple reason when he says, "Bless the Lord, O my soul, and forget not all his benefits." The reason he was short on gratitude was because he was so forgetful. John Bunyan said the most dangerous spot on all the road was "Forgetful Green. It is significant that the words think and thank come from the same Anglo-Saxon route. Real thinking leads to thanking. It is a naturally as night follows day. To fail to think, is to fail to thank. The poet then did not set out to be ingrateful and unkind, he just forgot. It is so easy to do that. We have all been guilty of both.
- III -

If then, we are to be as grateful today as we should be, we have to refuse to forget. Memory will be a great aid to our gratitude. What then are we to remember?

1. All His benefits. If you are going to be really grateful today, think of what God has done for you. This amazing world is a gift to you. Did you read that recent article in the Readers Digest where a scientist gives some of his reasons for believing in God. One reason was the fact that there was not a chance in a hundred, of millions, that this world would have been capable of sustaining life, but for a planning God back of it. If the sun had been a bit closer, life would have burned up. If it had been a little farther away, life would have frozen. If the moon were only five thousand miles away instead of two hundred sixteen thousand the tides would have been so high that they would have flooded the world twice every day.

Not only did God give you this world, but He gave you directly or indirectly everything that you possess. "What have you," asks Paul, "that you have not received?" The answer is nothing. One of the greatest foes of gratitude is conceit. We become conceited when we give ourselves credit, instead of giving the credit where it is due.

Did you ever notice how prone we are to blame others for what we do not like, while we congratulate ourselves on what we do like. If we are disagreeable, if we have a vicious temper that makes us hard to live with, for that we blame our grandmothers. But if we are beautiful for witty above the ordinary, we have nobody to thank but ourselves. Did you ever hear of Little Jack Horner? Listen to this lovely poem in his memory:

"Little Jack Horner sat in the corner
Eating his Christmas pie.
He reached in his thumb,
And pulled out a plumb,
And said, 'What a big boy am I.' "
Now just what did he say? Did he look at that plum and say there was no

measure in the thought of the sacrifice of making of this pie of which

this plum is a part. There is no telling how many men through the long
centuries have put their toil into the making of the grain and then into
the mill that made the flour. Then this pie was made possible by the
labor of my father, and immediately, by the skill of my mother. I have
a million toilers to thank, therefore, I will eat it with gratitude.

No, that is not what he said at all. "He reached in his thumb and
pulled out a plum and said, 'What a great boy am I.'" Great because he
could stuff himself on the plums that somebody else had grown, and the
pie that somebody else had made. Great because he could take the bounty
that came from the multitude of human hands and eat and give nothing back.

We can only forgive him because he was Little Jack Horner. If big Jack
Horner does the same thing, he is no more than a pest and a parasite.

"Forget not all his benefits!" All that we have comes to us as a gift.

2. Then if we are to be grateful, we must remember the gifts that
are really ours. There are those that get so busy thinking of the

treasures that they have missed, that they fail to appreciate the treasures
they have. Sometime ago I saw a cow with her head through a fence eating
the grass that grew from the cracks in the pavement. Behind her were
acres of green grass, but she was so taken up with the grass she would
not reach that she had no eye for the grass that was about her.

Last Sunday I mentioned the laborers who were in the vineyard. At
six in the morning the man hired laborers for the full day. That evening
when he paid the laborers, he gave those who had worked for only one hour
the wages for a full day. For that reason the laborers who had received
exactly what they have been promised went home snarling and ingrateful.

What was the matter? Their thoughts were so fixed on the good fortune
of those who had labored but for one hour that they despised their good
fortune altogether. If you are going to be grateful, remember what you have instead of what you have missed, or what somebody else has.

3. If you are going to be grateful, you must remember that the constancy of God's gifts is an added reason for gratitude instead of the opposite. But so often we kill our thankfulness because God's gifts are so constant and so reliable. We live in an ordered world. We live in a world where "whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." We live in a world where night is followed by day, and where the longest winter at last gives way to spring. Because these mercies are so constant, we tend to take them as a matter of course.

It is the unusual that appeals to us. Some years ago I met a most saintly friend who had just recovered from pellagra. He was joyously confident that God had put His hand of healing upon him, therefore, he was one of the most radiant men I have ever known. When he told a good woman about having recovered from such a disease, she said, "Certainly, he should be happy for having recovered from such a disease." But how about us who have never had pellagra at all?

I grew up with mules. Those of you who are acquainted with that son of a donkey will know that it is by the good grace of the Lord that I am here now. One day I was thrown and my ankle got tied by a chain. All that saved me from being torn to pieces was that I made a wild grasp for the reins and thus kept myself from being trampled to death. For many days after that I could not pass my place of danger without a prayer. Yet it never occurred to me to be thankful for not being thrown off on other days.

4. We must remember to keep our gratitude alive by giving it expression. How often there is an impulse to tell others of our appreciation, but we stifle it when the gratitude tends to die. We say, "He knows I appreciate it." How I wonder?
Thomas Carlisle was a great man. In spite of this fact he was not too easy to live with. He was not lavish in expressions of appreciation. By and by when Jean had gone he used to say to himself in despair, "Oh if I had her back for only five minutes to tell her that I love her." But sorrow's crown of sorrows was that he kept his love and appreciation shut up in his heart and she never really knew.

I think some of the saddest funerals I have ever held have been made sad by the memory of ingratitude. There was a husband who packed his wife's room with flowers, but they came a bit too late. If only six months before he had plucked a field flower and carried it home and said, "It made me think of you." That would have done more than all the flowers that ever bloom that came too late. "Bless the Lord, Oh my soul, and forget not all His benefits." The gratitude that you express will be twice blessed. It will bless him that gives and him that takes. Therefore let us give thanks and thus enrich ourselves and other, and even gladden the heart of our Lord.
The Art of Gratitude

FORGETFUL FOLKS

"Bless the Lord, 0 my soul, and forget not his benefits."

Psalms 103:2

Here is a man that has highly resolved that he is going to have a thanksgiving day. He has realized that he is not nearly so thankful as he ought to be. In looking over the flowers that bloom in the garden of his soul, he does not find the winsome blossom of gratitude blooming in as rich profusion as it should. Therefore, he resolves to do something about it. In fact, he lays violent hands on his sluggish soul to shake it into wakefulness. "Get up!" he seems to say with intense purposefulness. "Give yourself to the high task of thankfulness." "Bless the Lord, 0 my soul, and forget not his benefits."

I.

Why is this man so bent upon thanksgiving?

1. He realizes that gratitude is an asset to its possessor. We are richer every way for being grateful. This is the case in the first place because gratitude is a mark of moral and spiritual growth. Wherever you find one who is genuinely thankful you find one who has made some progress toward spiritual adulthood. Naturally, we do not expect any great gratitude on the part of infants. A mother may serve a six months old baby to the laying down of her life, and that baby will not show the least appreciation. There are those who never
learn the fine art of gratitude. However brilliant and gifted such creatures may be, they are victims of arrested development. They remain pitiful runts, ugly dwarfs, who have never really grown up. Gratitude is a mark of growth.

Then gratitude is an asset because it is a source of so much joy. All grateful people are happy people. Gratitude is the mother of song, of laughter, of rich and full living. Ingratitude is the opposite. However rich you may be in things, however gifted and successful you may be, if you have no gratitude you have no joy. If you can find nothing for which to be thankful, then you are living a lean and mean and wretched life. Gratitude is a treasure because it set the best of living to music.

2. But gratitude is not only a boon to its possessor, but to others as well. Here is one of those fine graces that like mercy is twice blessed. It blesses him that gives and him that takes. How much more smoothly the machinery of the world would run if it were oiled more frequently with the fine lubricant of gratitude. Everybody can work better in an atmosphere of appreciation. Gratitude breaks up our drouth, and sets the fields of our heart to flowering like the warm rains of spring. How many of us would serve far better than we are serving if we only had some token of appreciation.

Because gratitude is so helpful to others, to withhold it is one of the deadliest of sins. There is no measuring the evil of ingratitude. There is nothing equal to it for drying up the fountains of benevolence. With eager enthusiasm you undertake to serve your fellows, but nobody ever says I thank you. One man has pictured all the graces meeting together in heaven. There was Love, Joy, Peace, Long-suffering, Patience, Benevolence, and Gratitude. All of them knew each other except two. Gratitude and Benevolence had never met. "I helped him," we say "till I found out he didn't appreciate it and I quit."
Not only does ingratitude dry up the fountain of benevolence, but it inflicts some of the sorest wounds that the human heart can know. That is the reason Shakespeare called it "that fiend." I was talking to a tired and spent mother sometime ago. She had four grown children, all living at home. All of them were working. But they went to work at various hours. Because of this, the mother was seldom in bed before midnight, always up early in the morning. But in a moment of weakness she said to me rather desperately, "I am glad to do it, but it would be so much easier if my children saw what I had done sometimes instead of what I had left undone." But the tears ran down her tired face as she said "There is never a word of appreciation."

II.

Why are we so thankless?

It is not that we do not admire gratitude and set out of set purpose to destroy it from our life. We know that gratitude is a beautiful something. Yet, it is often as rare as it is beautiful.

Nor is our ingratitude born of the fact that we have nothing of which to be grateful. Sometime ago a mother called on her spoiled son to say grace at the table. He looked cynically over the food and said, "I don't see anything to be thankful for." But the presence of spinach and the absence of turkey was not what was hurting him; the disease went deeper than that. Gratitude is not a creature of circumstance. The most thankful people in our city this morning are not simply among the fortunate. Some may be there, but some are among those who, so far as human eyes can see, have nothing for which to be thankful. We find Paul without his books, without his coat, without friends, without freedom, shut away in a prison cell, but we never find him without his song of gratitude.
Why then, I repeat, are we so ungrateful? The Psalmist puts his finger on the difficulty. We are ungrateful because we are so forgetful.

"Yet it was never in my heart
To play so ill a part;
But evil is wrought for want of thought
As well as for want of heart."

Forgetfulness is such a common vice. Because so many of us are forgetful the sin of ingratitude becomes about the most common sin in all the world.

It is said for instance, that two angels were given each a large hamper and sent out to gather the prayers of the saints for a single day. One was to gather the prayers of praise and of thanksgiving; the other was to gather the prayers of petition—the give me prayers. They fulfilled their tasks faithfully. But when they came home at the close of the day, one basket was so full that the prayers were falling out and littering the path behind the angel as he walked along the golden streets. The other basket had so few prayers that the bottom was hardly covered. Which do you think was the full basket, and which do you think was the empty one? The full basket was the "give me" basket.

One day Jesus was to pass through a certain village. It so happened that living near that village were ten desperate men who were outcasts because they were suffering from an incurable disease. They had heard that this amazing prophet could cure leprosy. They resolved to appeal to him for help. So when He came they said "Jesus, Master have mercy on us." And that master who was always so eager to help said "Go show yourself to the priest." "And it came to pass," the story reads, "that as they went they were all cleansed."

What a thrilling scene. There they are going on rather desperately, their bodies being devoured piece-meal by a disease. Then a change takes place. New tides of life flow through them, and their flesh comes back like the flesh of
a child. "Cured, I am cured," they shouted. Then one says "I haven't been home for so many months, I must hurry." Another says, "I haven't been to my business for years, no telling what state it is in." By and by they were all gone except one. "I too," he said, "long to go home. But I wouldn't dare go till I had gone back to the kindly Man that helped me, and tell him of my appreciation." So he hurried back and threw himself at the feet of the Master and said "I thank you." And Jesus looked at him with a mixture of laughter and tears and said, "Were there not ten cleansed? But where are the other nine?" Ten beggars and one thanker. I suppose that is about the average.

If then we are to get rid of this evil of ingratitude we must be more thoughtful. I have reminded you that the word thank and think come from the same anglo-saxon root. We do not find gratitude by sheer force of will. We find it as we find other treasures that are most worthwhile by the indirect route. The right kind of thinking will lead to gratitude as naturally as night follows day.

III.

If we are to think in such a fashion as to be thankful of what are we to think?

1. We are to think on God's benefits toward us. "Forget not all his benefits." You see this is a very modest suggestion. This poet does not tell us to remember all God's benefits. They would be asking too much. We could no more remember them all than we could number the stars of the skies, or the countless flowers that blossom on hillside and field at the coming of spring. But while we cannot remember them all, we ought at least not to forget them all. "Forget not all his benefits."

That is, we are to look at the treasures that are ours now and then, instead of our liabilities. We are to think of our friends a little more
often, and a little less often of our enemies. We are to think of the treasures that life has put into our hands. We are to think of the kindnesses that have been shown us, and not simply the slights. But how often we take the opposite course. I remember a young lady who used to live in our home. She had many fine qualities, but she had one that was desperately vexatious to her, and somewhat so to all who knew her. It was seldom, I think, that she came home at the close of the day without being able to tell us of some slight that had been shown her during the day. She had a genius for passing by rose bushes that were colorful with blossoms, and not seeing a thing but the thorns. She could pass by a million violets without plucking a single one, and come home at the close of the day with only a bouquet of nettles.

Sometimes we get so busy looking at what we have missed that we do not see what we have. We fix our gaze with such concentration upon the treasures in the hands of others that our own seem all-but empty. You remember that dog that went foraging one day and was highly successful. He walked with the stride of a conqueror because he had a splendid piece of meat in his mouth. But when he crossed a clear stream on a foot-log he looked down beneath him and saw another dog. That dog also had a splendid piece of meat. In fact, it was so much finer and bigger than his own that he threw his utterly away while he sprang viciously to seize the meat of his fortunate fellow. Then he went home with nothing in his canine heart but ingratitude.

Do you remember the story of the house with the Golden Windows? A small boy lived in a lovely cottage upon the mountain side. From this mountain side he could see across a beautiful expanse of valley. Early one morning as he looked across this valley, he saw a house whose windows sparkled under the kiss of the sunrise. "Ah," he said, "what a house. It has golden windows. As soon as I am old enough I am going to leave this ugly old shack in which I live and go to find the house with the golden windows."
"Forgetful Folks"

Then the slow years went by. They were slow because they were discontented years. Years devoid of gratitude. At last he was old enough to set out on his journey. So one day he made his way down the mountain side, across the valley, and up the heights where he thought he would find the house with the golden windows. But he found only a very common-place cottage. Far less pretentious than his own. But there was a little girl playing on the lawn so he asked her a question. "Do you know where the house with the golden windows is?" Her face lighted up as she pointed across the valley to where the windows of a house were blazing at the kiss of the sunset. "There," she said, "it is the house with the golden windows." And the young man looked the saddest to find that it was the house that he had left behind. Every one of us can live in a house with golden windows if we will. But we must look at what we have instead of what we have not.

2. Then the thinking that brings thanking is that appreciation of the constancy of the mercies that are ours. We are queer creatures. The very fact that life's choicest blessings can be counted upon, we often cease to appreciate them. One day when the work was done, you decided to carry your small son a present. He was delighted. So much so that you repeated the performance the next day and the next day. Then you forgot. What was the result? That little chap did not have the slightest appreciation for the days that you remembered. He thought only of the one day that you forgot. How easy it is for us to take things for granted, and thus utterly kill all gratitude.

Perhaps I have told you of a discussion my small nephew had with me as to the uncertainty of life. "Uncle," he said, "we don't know how long we will live, do we?" "No" I answered. "When we go to bed at night we do not know whether we will awaken or not?" "No" I answered again. "We might die in the night, might we?" "That's right." Then he added this, "But I am so used to waking up without being dead that I don't expect to die." There you have it!
The mercies of God are so unfailing, so constant, that instead of increasing our appreciation they tend to destroy it.

As the small boy we take life for granted. We take our loved ones for granted. We do not always think to appreciate them till they have passed to "where beyond these voices there is peace." A tired mother slipping away the other day was visited by a son who loved her, but who had taken her for granted and was thoughtless and ungrateful. He thought she was unconscious. But he kissed her tenderly and said, "O mother you are the best mother a boy ever had." That word seemed to call her back from the very gates of death. And she smiled in his face and said, "My boy, why didn't you tell me sooner?"

We often take our great nation for granted, the most richly blessed nation in all the world. We take the church for granted. In many nations today it is closed. Millions who would like to turn their feet toward its holy comforts cannot do so any more. But here the church stands with its open door of welcome for every one of us. That church that has built all the great educational institutions; that church that has been the mother, and the guardian of those fundamental virtues that have made our nation great. But millions today who would not live for the world in a city where the church did not exist, simply take it for granted. They pass it by in thoughtless ingratitude, lend their influence to helping to weaken it and to tear it down rather than to helping build it up.

We even take God for granted, as we take His mercies that are new every morning. How seldom we think to be thankful for the fact that morning follows night, and that every winter changes into spring. How seldom we are thankful that our world is a law-abiding world. A world where we know for a certainty that "Whatsoever a man soweth, that shall he also reap." If we are to be grateful we are to think of the goodness of God in making his mercies so constant. But so often we allow the very constancy to kill our thoughtfulness and thus
to destroy our gratitude altogether.

3. Then, if we are to be thankful we must think how utterly dependent we are upon God and others for the blessings that are ours. Of all the foes to gratitude perhaps none is more deadly than conceit. Jesus told of a rich farmer who raised a bumper crop. The rain and the sunshine had come in just the right proportion. The soil was fertile. His fellow-workers were faithful. "The ground of a certain rich man brought forth plentifully, and he thought within himself saying how good God has been to me." No, that is not what he said. He thought only of his own shrewdness, of his own efficiency. He had no more appreciation of what God or man had done for him than a pig would have for an angel plume. His gratitude was killed by his conceit.

You are acquainted, I daresay, with little Jack Horner. He may be your son. He may even be your husband. Listen to the story of his achievement--

"Little Jack Horner sat in a corner
Eating his Christmas pie,
He reached in his thumb and pulled out a plum
And said -- --

Now what did he say? He said "there is no measuring the thought and the toil that has gone into the making of this one pie. It dates back to those pioneers that cleared the land and far beyond. It dates back to the inventors of the flour mill, and beyond. It dates back to the sun and the soil and to God. It dates back immediately to my mother's hands, or other hands of a maid. Because so many named and nameless toilers have entered into the making of this pie, I eat it with gratitude."

But no, he was not big enough for that. All he did was to get his back sticky as his mouth while he patted himself for being such a great boy. Wherein was he great? He was great because he sat and ate. He made no contribution
whatsoever. He took without giving and robbed himself and his fellows further by doing so without any appreciation. There is no deadlier foe, I repeat, to gratitude than conceit.

But how prone we are to forget this. Did you ever notice how we tend to blame others for what is wrong in ourselves or in the order of our lives? If we have an ill temper, it dates back to some far-off grand dad. But for our assets, nobody is to blame but ourselves. Take physical beauty for example. That is a splendid gift. But it ministers to our conceit a thousand times as much as it ministers to our gratitude. Intelligence, power to make money, they are all gifts. But we take them as due to ourselves alone. There are lots of ungrateful folks, but the last man to be thankful is the chap who swaggered through life in the faith that if the Lord had not made the world he would.

4. Finally, if we are to think in such a way as to be thankful we must realize the importance of giving expression to our gratitude. If I want to save this right arm of mine, I do not do so by putting it into a sling and refusing to use it. If I want the small bit of gratitude that I have to grow and wax strong I do not attain that by refusing to give expression to it. I know quite well the good reasons we can give for our failure to express our appreciation. The favorite is this: He knows I appreciate it, she knows. May be so, but we love to hear it said. As you say it, it grows from more to more. As you refuse to say it, it dies.

We are not to express our appreciation simply in terms of words, but in terms of serving. A chap that went to school to me almost thirty years ago hunted me up sometime ago. After all these years he wanted to tell me of his appreciation. That was vastly helpful to me. I should not wonder if it was not helpful to him even more.

If you appreciate the church that appreciation will die if you give it no expression. How grateful we are for the church. We were dedicated at its altars
in our young and tender years. When love came, it blessed our marriage. When sorrow and death came it whispered its message of hope and of comfort to us saying, "I am the resurrection and the life." We are grateful for the church. But some of us forget to express that gratitude. We do not think enough of it to move our membership when we go into a strange city. We do not think enough of it to give it an adequate support. We fling to the church cheap gifts that we would hardly give to a beggar. Gratitude expressed grows from more to more. Therefore, we read in this holy Book, that "the redeemed of the Lord say so."
They that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters; these see the works of the Lord, and His wonders in the deep."

--Psalm 107:23

The Jews were not a seafaring people. They dreaded the sea. To embark upon a vessel meant for them the giving up of all they loved best, their homes, their friends, their worship in the Synagogue, or in the Temple. It meant facing deadly dangers, to be buffeted by tempests, possibly to die at last far from home, and to be buried among the seaweed instead of in the sepulchres of their fathers. When John thought of heaven, he thought of it as a place that was not marred by dividing oceans and swirling seas. Therefore, he wrote, "There shall be no more sea;" and there was no more sea. And in spite of all this natural dread, the psalmist was forced to concede the fact that there was something to be said in behalf of the man who dared the dangers of the sea. If he had to lose much and to suffer much, he also stood a chance to win even more. If he had to surrender the ease and safety of the sedate and quite village, he won in its place the thrill of seeing the works of the Lord and His wonders in the deep. He made discoveries and passed through glorious and glamorous experiences to which his timid brother living a sheltered life must forever be a stranger. If he ventured much, he also had the thrill of winning much.

I

Now this is a law that runs through all life. To dare nothing is to win nothing. To dare largely is usually to win largely. It is impossible to live in a world like ours without making some bit of adventure. It has been well said that life is
a lottery. The truth of this is evident to the most casual thinker.

It is a risk to be born a human soul. Of course this is one risk about which we are not confronted. But suppose we were? What would we do about it? If it were in your power this morning to be born all over again and to choose whether you should be born a man or born into one of the lower orders of life, which would you choose? There is much to be said on both sides of the question. There are some that would frankly choose the lower road.

"Whatever you do", they would say, "don't be born a man."

And their arguments for such a position would be quite telling. "I have been up and down the roadways of men," they would say, and I have seen something of the deadly risk you will run. I have heard men cry, "O, wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me? I have seen them stained with the deep crimson of guilt, and have heard them cry for deliverance from blood-guiltiness. I have heard also their pathetic wails in the presence of the mystery of death as they cried, 'If a man die, shall he live again?' So often have I seen sin take men in his marring fingers and utterly wreck him. To live as a man in a world like ours is deadly dangerous."

Now there is an easier way. You might, for instance, choose the lower road and be born an oyster. That would save you a world of trouble. Never once have I heard an oyster cry out in wretchedness. Never once have I seen an oyster tortured by guilt or perplexed by the grim mystery of death. I have never known this creature to shed a tear or to pass a night of agony over either his own sin or that of another. Grim tragedy such as we know among men never stalks its ghastly way in oysterland.

But before you decide on this lower road, it is well to ask a few further questions. Since oysters do not suffer greatly, they must be very happy? No, that is wrong. They pay for the
privilege of exemption from wretchedness by giving up their
capacity for any higher happiness. They cannot make a wrong choice
but they pay a terrible price for it, the price of an incapacity
to make a right choice. They cannot descend into the depths of
hell, as men can. But they pay for that by a total incapacity
to climb into the highest heavens. Therefore, they abide there
insolent ease at a price so great that only one who was supremely
cowardly would be willing to pay it.

When we, therefore, face all that is involved we would
all choose to be born into the high order. For if we have great
capacity for pain, we also have great capacity for joy. The very
man who said, "O, wretched man that I am" is the one who a moment
later was saying, "I thank God through Jesus Christ there is
therefore now no condemnation." The very psalmist who prayed
"Deliver me from blood-guiltiness" is soon shouting, "Blessed
is the man whose transgression is forgiven, whose win is covered."
And that other man with the tear-wet face, who is baffled by the
mystery of death, sings triumphantly at last: "I know that my
Redeemer liveth and in the latter day He shall stand upon the
earth." If the adventure of life offers great risk, it also
offers rich reward.

Not only is the business of living a risk, but every
choice in it is fraught with hazard, every turn of the road is a
bit of a gamble. This is true of the choice of a vacation.
How important it is that this shall be a right choice; It means
so much to our happiness, as well as to our usefulness. A miss-
fit can never be really happy, nor in the highest sense useful.
Real success on the other hand is being privileged to do what
you were meant to do and being able to make a living at it.
Marriage is a risk, as many of us know. This is pre-eminently true where the bride and groom are barely acquainted with each other. Some folks marry strangers, but there remains an element of risk however well the contracting parties may know each other. How many hearts have been broken and how many lives wrecked by unfortunate and silly marriages? It is a great danger yet it is one we brave from generation to generation with the same confidence that the gains are far greater than the losses.

Parenthood is another great risk that men and women encounter. How much we dare when we consent to share with God in the creation of another human soul? - How pestiforous our children may be, how annoying, how heart-breaking! - There is no telling what countless of thousands through the years have had to learn "how sharper than a serpent's tooth it is to have a thankless child." Parenthood is a tremendous adventure. But those who dare not cease-in suffer huge loss. They actually stop their ears to about the deepest and sweetest secrets of human blessedness.

But the supreme adventure is that to which we are called by our Lord Jesus Christ. When our Lord hung on the nails, there were some gamblers at the foot of the cross shooting craps for Christ's seamless robe. But as Studdert Kennedy pointed out, these were not the only gamblers present. The dying Christ was a gambler. He was betting His life that man was capable of being saved, that the world could be redeemed, that the kingdom of God could be brought in. He was staking His very all on the high faith that "lifted up on the cross he would draw all men unto Himself." The highest of all human adventures, the supreme gamble, is that to which we are called through Jesus Christ our Lord.
II

Now inasmuch as all life is a gamble, every one of us must stake our lives on something. We must bet on one of two values.

1. We may venture our all on the assumption that the big end of life is self-pleasing. We can stake our all on the faith that the best way to use life is to dodge the difficult, take it easy, stay in the quiet village, refuse utterly to face the dust out on the highways. That is the procession that most are backing today. They believe and act upon it, that the way to save life is to actually save it, that the way to live is to get as much as possible, and to give as little.

When Jesus stood before Pilate, the Governor was in doubt as to know what to do, but he did not have the courage to live up to his convictions. When he was hesitating, a voice shouted at Him: "If thou let this man go, thou art not Caesar's friend." Upon which did he venture the priceless coin of his own soul? You know the answer. He bet on Caesar and lost, as millions have lost since then. But in spite of that fact we rush pantingly to stake our all on him, even as Pilate.

2. But there are some who stake their all on Jesus. They believe that he spoke the truth when He said: "He that seeketh to save his life shall lose it." They believe that the way to win all is to venture all. They listened to the seemingly mad declarations of Jesus about turning the other cheek, about the meek inheriting the earth, about all the laws being fulfilled by love. And hearing Him, they go, as did the Apostle of Old, and bet their lives that He was right.

Now you and I are placing our bets this morning, and every morning. We are venturing our all on the safety first.
type of life, or on that type that puts safety last. We are venturing it upon seeking our own good or on the good of others. We are daring either to hold life for ourselves or to squander it for our brothers. We are betting either on the principles of Caesar or on the principles of Jesus. We are staking life, then, and eternity on the futility of the cross, the utter madness of it, or on its supreme power and sanity. The self-centered life bets its all on Caesar. The God-centered life bets its all on Jesus.

III

What is the difference in outcome?

1. Look at the winnings of the man who pins his faith on Caesar, who holds that while idealism is beautiful, that while loving one's neighbor as oneself self and refusing to take the sword is all well enough, that is—it is a lovely dream. But it is not quite practical in a world like ours. Such a man, they say, would be pushed to the wall, crushed, utterly ruined. He would get nothing out of life at all.

Possibly we will assume, for arguments sake, that they may be right. But what of those that take the way of self-pleasing? Sometimes their winnings loom large. Sometimes they wade through slaughter to a throne. Sometimes they amass vast fortunes. Sometimes their ears thunder with the applause of the multitude. But they miss the thrill of life's supreme discovery. They miss God. There is never a cheap way of finding God. We do not find Him till we surrender everything.

Then, those who miss God miss the joy and zest of living. This is not theory; this is experience. Go out through this congregation, go out through the others of the city, go out through the highways and byways of the wide world and find those who are living on the assumption that Caesar was right and
Jesus was wrong, that selfishness is wise, and unselfishness is foolish, that self-will is rewarding and self-surrender impoverishing, and you will find those who venture upon such belief to be restless, pessimistic, wretched, fed-up. They hardly count life worth living.

2. But how about those who do business in great waters? How about the men and women who venture their all on the conviction that love is better than hate, and that the way to keep life is to lose it? These are the real discoveries. And the measure of the fulness and richness of their discovery is exactly the measure of the fulness of their surrender. Those who dare greatly in the realm of the spiritual always win greatly.

Of course we realize that this is true, in a measure, in every department of life. This physical world a few years ago was largely unknown. But it was a crack-brained man who reached the conclusion that the world was round. His fellows laughed at him. But he bet his reputation on it. He bet his life on it.

"Behind him lay the great Azoas,
Behind, the gates of Hercules,
Before him not the ghost of shores,
Before him only shoreless seas.
The good mate said, 'now must we pray,"
Le, the very stars are calm,
Now speak, brave Admiral, speak and save,
He said, 'sail on, and on, and on.'

When pale and worn he kept his watch,
And peered through darkness,
Ah, that night of all dark nights,
And then a light, a light, a light;
It proved a star-lit flag unfurled,
And grew to be the burst of dawn,
He gained the world, and gave that world,
Its greatest lesson on "Sailing on."

It is by the way of adventure that the scientist makes his discoveries in the laboratory. From the spring-board of the known, he makes a heroic dive for the unknown. And the
man who adventures nothing, wins nothing. But this is supremely true in the realm of the spiritual. All those who have discovered God, who have come really to know Him, have been men with courage enough recklessly to bet their all on Him.

Take Abraham, for instance. When one of the writers of the New Testament wished to tell us of religion at its best, they are constantly turning back to this queer man. In his young manhood, he lived in a great city of Ur of Chaldees. But one day he left it to venture into the unknown. He staked all that he had on the faith that he had heard God's voice, and that God was leading him to a great destiny. Thus adventuring, he came to the thrill of a great discovery. He came to be God's friend.

Think of the few that you know today who seemed most truly to have discovered reality. They are people in every instance who have greatly dared. An earnest physician asked me on one occasion to pray for his two boys. A friend stood by my side and said to the father: "If I were you I would tell God that I would eat nor sleep till those boys were saved, and if you will take such a vow, I will take it with you." In less than twenty-four hours both boys were born anew. But what was more wonderful even than that, if possible, was the new discovery that this man had made of God.

One of the most vital men in the world today is Stanley Jones. From the standpoint of personality and ability, he is not vastly conspicuous. What makes him head and shoulders above the tallest among us is his vital grip of God. How did he come by this discovery? Not by living in a little land-locked village or venturing on a sheltered millpond. He has been out on the highways. He has done business in great waters. One day he was
called home to be informed that if he did not give up his ambitions to be a missionary his mother would surely die. But he stood true and greatly adventuring, he greatly won.

If the vote were taken today on the greatest Christian of the last half century, Kagawa, the Japanese saint would doubtless be elected. He is a man of keen mind and extraordinary ability. But that does not begin to account for him. He is the greatest living discoverer in the realm of the spiritual, because he is the greatest living adventurer. With a life holding out rich opportunities of advancement to him, as to many of us, he buried himself for sixteen years in one of the dirtiest and most wretched slums in all Japan. He came out with a broken body, eyes almost blinded by Trachoma, but with a spiritual vision that has made him the greatest living prophet.

These, therefore, are not mere theories that I am bringing to you. Before you take a casual glance at the principal teachings of Jesus and declare them impractical in a world like ours, please face the fact that all who act on that assumption are disillusioned, disappointed, cheated, embittered. Please face the further fact that all who act on the assumption that they are true are full of poise and peace, and the joy of an abundant life. This is true not in some one instance, but in every instance. Yet, with our eyes wide open, we still venture our all on a mad gamble where loss is absolutely certain.

Here then is the reason why we know so little of God. Here we find the cause of the poverty of our discoveries. We love ease too well. We dare too little. We are too afraid of adventure. We stay smugly in our quiet little villages content merely to be safe. But all the while great and thrilling discoveries are waiting
for us for "They that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters, these see the works of the Lord and His wonders in the deep." So all the saints have found it. It was the road-way of Jesus Himself.

Therefore, while others shrieked, "The strong shall inherit the earth", Jesus declared that it was not the strong but the meek. While others urged the importance of the sword, declaring that it was the only way to survive in a world like ours, Jesus said, "He that taketh the sword shall perish by the sword." While the kings of the earth bet their all on the finality of force, Jesus bet His on the final victory of love. It was not easy for Him any more than it is for us. He read the bitter disappointment in the eyes of His friends. And the most pathetic words, I think, that ever fell from His lips was this: "Don't you know that I could call twelve legions of angels, but I knew that was not the way to win." Had He called them He would have won an immediate victory, but His name would have been forgotten. But betting His all on love, He lost the seconds. He won the centuries. Today he marches conquering on toward that ultimate hour when the Kingdoms of this world shall become the Kingdoms of our Lord and His Christ. How much are you willing to stake on the fact that He was right? God grant that you may be willing to stake your very life.
I'D RISK SOMETHING

"They that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters; these see the works of the Lord and his wonders in the deep."
(Psalm 107:23-24)

The Jews were not a sea-faring people. They therefore had a dread of the sea. To them it was a thing of menace and of ministry. They looked upon the life of a voyager as one fraught with the greatest of peril. To go down to the sea in ships meant the giving up of life in the sedate and quiet village. It meant separation from friends. It meant the missing of worship in the synagogue or the temple. It meant the facing of homesickness, seasickness, deadly danger of death at last, and of lying unconfined amidst the crawling things at the bottom of the sea.

But if the life of a sea-faring man was one fraught with great peril it also had in it the possibilities of high adventure. If the voyager ran the risk of losing much, he also had the possibility of winning great gains. If he dared more than the man who clung to the safety of the shore, he also saw more. Therefore while this poet found it hard to refrain a shudder as he watched some daring man go down to the sea, still less could he withhold his admiration or his courage and his envy for the wonderful discoveries that he stood a chance to make.

Now what this poet is saying is just this: that life is an adventure. We can live it on the basis of safety first if we will, or we can live it
on the basis of high adventure first. He is saying what has been said countless times since then that life is a bit of a gamble, to use that word in its best and finest sense. He is saying that one who ventures nothing is not likely to win anything. He is affirming that the mere we venture, assuming that we make a right choice of the thing worth adventuring for, the greater our gains. The whole business of living is a risk.

1. It is a risk to be born an immortal soul in a world like ours. Of course, it is a risk about which we were not consulted, but had we been consulted some of us might not have dared. Suppose it were up to you even now to choose whether in being born you would be a man or some lower order of life. As one who has lived quite a bit and has witnessed somewhat of the human drama and the human tragedy, I think I can give you some fairly strong reasons for refusing to be born a man. I might speak to you in this fashion:

I have been up and down among the ways of man. I have seen the infant sinking like a stricken flower to the grave; the strong man breathing out his soul on the field of battle. I have seen a miserable convict standing upon the scaffold. But I have seen not only the wicked suffer, but I have seen good men suffer too. Here on the pages of this book I hear a man tangled in his own weakness as a fly in a spider's web crying: "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me?" I hear another conscious of the crimson stain of blood upon his hands praying: "Deliver me from blood-guiltiness." I hear yet another standing by a wide deep grave contemplating the ugly presence of death, questioning pitifully: "If a man die, shall he live again?"

Now if you take the low road you will miss all this agony. Suppose for instance instead of being born a man you choose to be born an oyster. I have never heard an oyster sob in all my life. I have never heard an oyster say: "Out, out, damned spot, out, out." I have never known a single one to weep over his misspent yesterdays or to torture himself with his
tragic presence, even when he is so unfortunate as to be swallowed alive by some human. His suffering is the merest pin scratch.

But if this backward creature escapes much he pays a great price for his escape. He also misses much. If he has no capacity for tears he pays for it by a lack of a capacity to laugh and sing. If he has no capacity to go wrong, he pays for it for an incapacity to go right. If he never suffers the pangs of hell neither is he capable of enjoying the bliss of heaven. Low creature that he is he ventures almost nothing at all but if his ventures are small his winnings are equally small.

But if you are brave enough to risk being a man you may greatly suffer but you may greatly rejoice. You may experience the very pangs of hell, you may also experience the bliss of heaven. The very one who was saying: "O wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me?" was the next moment answering his own question: "God will. I thank God through Jesus Christ." The one who was seeking deliverance from blood-guiltiness was the next moment singing: "Blessed is he whose transgressions are forgiven, whose sin is covered." And the one who was sobbing: "If a man die, shall he live again?" ended by shouting: "I know that my Redeemer liveth and in the latter day he shall stand upon the earth and though after my skin crumble, worms destroy this body, yet in flesh shall I see God." It is a great risk, this business of being born a man, but I think if the choice were up to us it is one that we should gladly take.

2. Then being men every choice is a risk. For instance it is a risk to play a game. I do not know whether I can win or not. It is a risk to go to the bat. The bat may hit me or I may strike out. It is a risk to carry the ball. I may fumble or I may get hurt. Whatever the game I stand a chance of losing it. It is that dread that keeps a great many people from ever playing at all. They are too afraid of the great risk to be run.

3. The choice of a vocation is a risk. Some of the most trying months
and years through which many of us pass are those in which we are trying to decide how to use our lives. There are so many who are misfits, so many square pegs in round holes. There are so many who never find themselves. In the choice of a career we need much common sense. We need especially the guidance of God. "In all thy ways acknowledge Him and He shall direct thy paths." A successful man according to Frank Crane is one who is doing the thing he longs to do and is able to make a living at it. But to choose a vocation is a venture.

4. Marriage is a venture. We have a way of calling it a lottery. It is impossible to know beyond a present adventure that the girl who is to become your wife, that the man who is to become your husband, will be suited to you. This is the case, however careful we are in making that high choice. It becomes doubly risky when we play a kind of blind man's buff and hold and marry whomsoever we chance to catch in the mad game.

There are some folks who do not take time to get acquainted before they marry. I knew a minister several years ago who went to a town to hold a meeting. The meeting lasted three weeks. At the end of that three weeks he married his organist whom he had never seen until the meeting began. Whether the marriage was a success or a failure I cannot say, but even if it succeeded it is no proof of the good of hasty marriages. It is rather an indication of the truth of the Psalmist: "The Lord preserveth the simple."

Sociologists believe that at least one third of all the war marriages will end in divorce. One reason for this is that so many entered into marriage who were strangers to each other and who did not have time after the marriage really to get acquainted. A young woman tried to get me to marry her to a soldier a few months ago when she knew that soldier had another wife that he had married only a few months before. We can appreciate Mandy's answer when her mistress said: "Mandy, now that you are married I suppose you will want the money I have been keeping for you." And Mandy replying in amazement, "Lordy, no. You think I'd risk all that money?
in the house with a strange Negro?" Marriage at its best is a risk. At its worst it is a risk that is likely to end in disaster.

5. What should go with marriage is also a venture. Marriage only comes to its best when husband and wife share with God in the creation of a child. But to bring a child into the world is a great risk. How they can disappoint us, how they can break our hearts, how they can teach us how sharper than a serpent's tooth it is to have a thankless child. I have seen enough heartache looking out from the eyes of a father and mother whose son had gone wrong to increase the anguish of hell. So great is the risk that there are those who dare not take it.

Yet if the risk is great the rewards are also great. If our children as can disappoint us they can also gladden us. But I have seen enough heartache looking out from the tired eyes of parents to increase the anguish of hell, I have seen enough gladness to increase the joys of heaven. Those therefore that deliberately turn aside from this high adventure miss something. To them one of the deepest and sweetest secrets of human blessedness has half whispered itself and then passed by.

6. Finally daring to follow Jesus Christ is a venture. To be a real Christian is to dare greatly. Jesus never appealed for our loyalty on the let grounds that it was easy. He be known beyond a doubt that if we followed him we were likely to get into trouble. He himself was not an exception. He staked his all on the doing of his Father's will. Studdert Kennedy, a chaplain of the first World War pictures the Roman soldier throwing dice for the seamless robe of Jesus. Then he adds daringly: "He was a gambler too, my Christ. He took his life and threw it for a world redeemed." To be a Christian we must risk something.

II

Since all life is a venture, since we must risk something one way or the other, whether we will or not, the choice that is left us is that for
which we are going to adventure. Whether we shall risk or not is not optional. What is optional is that upon which we are going to stake our lives. Broadly speaking you are betting on the supreme worth of God's way or on its opposite.

1. Take for instance the matter of freedom. Everybody longs to be free. But there are two philosophies of freedom. One is this: The way to be free is to live your own life. It is to do as you please. It is to shrug off all restraint. We meet this view on the first page of the Bible. When Mother Eve declared: "We can eat of every tree except one. If we eat of that we die." You shall find a larger life and a fuller freedom. The affirmation that we can find freedom in the violation of law is about the oldest and most ruinous of most lives. To be free in this fashion is the sure road to slavery. How then shall we find freedom. We find it according to Jesus as we walk the path of obedience. The first is free so long as it obeys the law of its being and lives in the water. If it undertakes to cross the desert it fails. How long is an ocean liner free? So long as it obeys the little compass that it carries. If it disobeys that little compass it is likely to end in Davey Jones's Locker. In seeking your freedom you are going to stake your life on the rightness of Jesus or the rightness of the devil.

2. We all want to live abundantly. How can we hope to win? Here again there are two bids. One is the bid of selfishness. If you want to live, look out for number one. If you want to live, say, "Me first." If you want to live, affirm, "Every fellow for himself and the devil take the hindmost." But those that take this road always end in disappointment. Christ's way is the only one that will work. He seeketh to save his life shall lose it, but he that loseth his life shall keep it until life eternal." You have to bet on God's way or the world's way.
Suppose we glance a moment at some who have made the adventure before us. The first two I take come out of a long-gone past. One of them is known as the rich young ruler.

Listen to his story: "As he (Jesus) was gone forth into the way there came one running and kneeled to him and said, 'Good Master, what good thing shall I do to inherit eternal life?' And Jesus said unto him: 'Why callest thou me good? There is none good but one, that is, God. Thou knowest the commandments: do not commit adultery, do not steal, defraud not, honor thy father and thy mother.' And the young man answered, 'All these have I observed from my youth. What lack I yet?' Then Jesus, beholding him, loved him, and said, 'One thing thou lackest. Go thy way, sell whatsoever thou hast and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven: and come, take up the cross, and follow me.' And he was sad at that saying, and went away grieved."

How much there is about this young man that is magnificent. He had wealth, he had position, he had youth, he had courage, he had a passionate longing for what is highest and best, but when Jesus told him how he might win life he went away. The Master did not drive him away. This young man holding his testimony in his own hand even as you and I went away. Why? Because when he was asked to make a choice, when he had to bet his life on the worth of things, he bet on things and lost.

Here is another man who has all the cards stacked against him. He is a traitor to his country, a poor quisling who has sold himself to a foreign power. So low has he become that his church would not even accept his money if he should offer to give it. But one day he looked up from his ledger to find himself looking into the kind and searching eyes that he has ever seen. And a man is speaking to him in a voice at once appealing and commanding: "Matthew, follow me." And Matthew had to choose between
things and Jesus. He bet on Jesus and won. He wrote a gospel that has left a track of light across the centuries.

Here are two men that belong to our day. "I am a minister, what are you?" a gentleman said to a companion on a train. "I began as a minister," came the answer, "but I decided not to spoil a good businessman by making a poor preacher. Therefore I chucked the whole business." "Did it pay?" his companion asked. The one-time minister waited so long to answer that his companion thought he was not going to answer at all. Then the one-time minister looked at his questioner with eyes bitter with heartache and said: "I bet on the wrong horse."

This other young man went away to college to train for a definite profession. His family was proud, especially his mother. When he wrote home a few months later that he had been converted the mother was not thrilled. When a little later he wrote that he was going to be a minister she was genuinely grieved. When he wrote a few months later still that he was going to be a missionary, she was heartbroken. A little later she became desperately ill. A brother who was a physician wired the young missionary to come home at once; his mother was at the point of death.

When this young man reached home his physician brother took him alone and said: "There is but one chance for mother's recovery and that is for you to give up your mad scheme of being a missionary. If you go in there and tell her that you are going to remain at home she will get well. If you do not she will die. That was a test, was it not. And the young missionary answered, "I have given my word to God and can't take it back." What was the result? His mother did not die. She rose into a newness of spiritual life and this young man has become one of the most influential and powerful Christian forces that is in the world today. On what are you going to venture your life? On your own way or God's way? You can't do both. If you take his you run a risk of getting into trouble but you are sure to win. If you take your own you will not altogether avoid the trouble, but you will surely lose.
"They that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters; These see the works of the Lord, and his wonders in the deep."

—Psalm 107:23, 24

The Jews as a rule were not a sea-faring people. They dreaded the sea. It was to them a thing of menace and of mystery. To venture upon the sea was to make a most dangerous adventure. It might involve almost every possible loss. It meant to give up life in a sedate and quiet village. It meant the surrender of the fellowship of friends. It meant the giving up of worship in the synagogue and in the Temple. It meant the departure from their native land. It meant home-sickness, sea-sickness. It might even involve death at the last among the crawling things at the bottom of the ocean. It might mean to lie uncoffined at last far from the sepulchres of their fathers. So great was the dread of the sea that when the Seer of Patmos wrote about that good world that he saw ahead, it was not marred by dividing oceans and sundering seas. So he wrote, "And there was no more sea."

But while the Jew realized that the man who ventured upon the sea in the light craft of that day ran a great risk, he also was honest enough to face the further fact that such a risk might bring great gain. He could not fail to see that while the voyager had to risk more than those who remain quietly at home, he saw more. If he faced dangers that others did not face, he had great experiences in which the others could not share. He had a breadth of view that was impossible to the man that remained in the security of his native village. Therefore, he wrote, "They that go down to the sea in ships, that do business in great waters"—while they live dangerously, they also live gloriously—"These see the works of the Lord and his wonders in the deep."
question through lips white and drawn with pain, "If a man die, shall he live again?" If you dare to be born a man, you run the risk of much suffering, of much heartache.

Now there is an easier way. For instance, you may instead be born an clam. In that case I can assure you that there will be no great suffering. You will never wring your hands, saying, "Out, out, damned spot!" You will never be tormented by a sense of shame. You will never be haunted by ugly yesterdays, misspent and tarnished and thrown away. I have had some acquaintance with systems, but I have never known one to sob or to die of a broken heart.

But of course this clam has to pay a price for his exemption. If he never weeps, neither does he ever laugh. If he never sobs, neither does he sing. If he has no capacity to go greatly wrong, neither does he have any capacity to go greatly right. Being incapable of suffering the pangs of hell, he is equally incapable of enjoying the pleasures of heaven. It is no risk to be born an clam. Even if you end in a hot-skillet, the pain is a mere pin-prick. But if your losses are small, your gains are equally small.

But while to be born a man does involve great risks, it offers great gains. If as a man I might suffer the pangs of hell, I may also enjoy the raptures of heaven. This very man who cried desperately, "Oh wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me?" found an answer to his question. He was saying a moment later, "I thank God through Jesus Christ." This other who was flinging out his prayer for deliverance from blood-guiltiness was a little later, singing, "Blessed is he whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered." Even the man who was sobbing by the grave-side, "If a man die, shall he live again?" was shouting a little later, "I know that my redeemer liveth, and that he shall stand at the latter day upon the earth: And though after my skin worms destroy this body, yet in my flesh shall I see God." To be born a man is to risk much. But we also stand to win everything that is really worth winning.

2. Not only is it a venture to be born, but practically all we do in life
I'd Risk Something - page 4

is a venture. It is a risk to choose our life's work. Nobody knows for an absolute certainty what he can do. When I was thinking of entering the ministry nobody but myself knew my misgivings or the deadly fears that I might be a misfit. Success in life has been defined by Frank Crane as doing what one wishes to do and being able to make a living at it. It is finding your place in the scheme of things. Many fail to do it. The choosing of a life's work is a risk.

Having made our choice, there is risk at every turn of the road. Nobody ever set out to do anything worth doing without having to dare something. There is always a voice, saying, "You might fail. You might fall down. You might make yourself ridiculous. You might earn the laughter and contempt of your fellows. Most of the daring gamblers have done just that. They have ventured in seeming madness while the timid looked on and said, "How silly!"

Here, for instance, is a man named Columbus. He got the idea that this world was not flat but round. How silly! No wonder they called him a crack-brain! No wonder some thought him crazy! But he went on believing it in spite of the fact that he knew it made him ridiculous in the eyes of many. He bet his reputation on his conviction that the world was round. By and by he bet his life. He discovered a new continent because he dared.

About forty years ago two brothers, Wilbur and Orville, made up their minds that they could make a ship that would fly through the air. That was a mad gamble. One sane man declared that nobody would ever make a ship that would fly, but, even assuming that somebody would, that somebody would not be Wilbur and Orville Wright. But they bet their time and their money. They bet their lives on their enterprise. As another has well said, "Every laboratory is a gambling-house in as real a sense as Monte Carlo." Here the scientist bets on a hypothesis and ventures from the known into the unknown. Our life work is a venture.

3. Marriage is a venture. We have a saying that marriage is a lottery. There is an element of truth in it. It is utterly impossible for any young man
or young woman to know beyond a peradventure that they are suited to each other and that they will have the marital bliss of their dreams. This is true even where the bride and groom are honest in their courtship and take time to know one another.

If the risk is real under the best possible circumstances, how much more real it is when we marry recklessly. Some of us, especially in war-time, seem to play a kind of blind-man's buff at the game, gripping and marrying whomsoever we chance to catch. Sometime ago a lovely young girl asked me to marry her to a soldier, though she knew that that same soldier had already been married once during the present war. She was willing to risk her all on the adventure, though she had not given herself a chance to know the one to whom she was giving her all. If we run a risk under the best of circumstances, how much greater that risk when we marry strangers! You remember when Hanna was married, her mistress who had saved her money for her, said, "You will be wanting your money now, won't you?" And Hanna looked at her in utter amazement. "Law no!" she said, "you think I would risk all that money in the house with a strange—men?"

But though marriage is a risk, though we have to dare much, we stand a chance to make great gains. In spite of the high stakes most of us, I am happy to say, are willing to gamble on it. This at least is true when we are young. Let a man wait, however, until he is forty and he is usually pretty hard to catch. He has lost his daring. To lasso him is about as easy as catching a wild jack-rabbit.

4. Just as it is a risk to marry, so it is a risk to follow through on marriage and, that is, share with God in the creation of children. God ran a risk when He created you and me. A husband and wife dare a great deal when they bring a child into the world. This is the case because, shrink from it how they may, they are bound up in a bundle of life with that child. He may disappoint them. He may break their hearts. He may wet their faces with tears. He may teach them "how sharper than a serpent's tooth it is to have a thankless child."
But while parents have to run this great risk and face this terrible danger, they also have the possibility of winning grandly. So often they do! If I have seen enough sadness in the face of parents whose boy had gone wrong to increase the anguish of hell, I have seen enough gladness in the face of those whose boy had gone right to increase the raptures of heaven. It is a risk to share with God in the creation of a human soul, but it is one that is well worth taking. Such an adventure may help us to know one of the deepest and sweetest secrets of human blessedness.

5. Finally, being a Christian is an adventure. It involves daring. Studdert-Kennedy pictures the Roman soldiers shooting dice for the seamless robe of Jesus at the foot of the cross. Then he adds with a kind of reckless reverence,

"He was a gambler too,
My Christ;
He took his life
And threw it for a world redeemed."

The poet was right. Jesus was the most daring gambler that ever lived. He bet all that He had on God and the adequacy of God to save a world gone wrong. He staked His all because He believed in God and because He believed in man. Venturing with a fullness unsurpassed, His winnings have also been immeasurable.

These soldiers and Jesus were all gambling, but how infinitely wide the chasm between them! What is wrong with gambling as we know it? Like so many vices, it is a virtue gone wrong. Humility is one of the most Christ-like of virtues, but when it degenerates into an inferiority complex, it becomes a vice. Gambling as Jesus did it is the finest of virtues. He was betting not on chance but on a reign of law. He was betting not to win for Himself but to win for others. But the ordinary gambler has become so degenerated that he wants to get something for nothing, which is a bit criminal. He thinks that he can get something for nothing which is foolish.

II

Now we are all in a sense gamblers, whether we desire it or not. That is not optional. But what is optional? We can choose that upon which we venture.
In the language of the street, we don't have to bet on the wrong horse! There are varied philosophies of life upon which we can adventure. On some philosophy we must adventure whether we will or not. It is up to us to choose a good bet.

1. Take, for instance, the beautiful price of freedom. We talk much of freedom—freedom for the individual, freedom for the nation and for the world. To be free is a consummation devoutly to be wished. But we are by no means agreed as to the road to freedom. There are two philosophies that are exactly opposite each other. How can you and I be really free?

One obvious answer is this: If I am to be free, I must do as I please. I must live my own life. I must brush all thou-shalt-nots out of my way like so many cobwebs. Many have staked their all on that philosophy. It may sound new to you, but it is the oldest story in human history. Mother Eve looked that horse over in the morning-tide of the world. In the language of poetry, it was stated in this way, "I am to eat of every tree of the garden except one. If I eat of that, death will be the result." "You shall not surely die," was the answer of the tempter. "You will find a fuller life. You won't find bondage— you will find freedom." Eve bet that the way to be free was to break the law. So betting, she lost.

Her story is not unique. It has been the experience of every single soul that has bet on that horse since then. Here is a ship at sea. It is guided toward its desired haven by a little instrument not much larger than my fist. I say to that great vessel, "I am ashamed of you to be dominated by a little instrument like a compass. Toss it overboard and do as you please." If the ship listens and throws the compass away, it does not find freedom; it only finds a place in Davy Jones' locker. Go out and bet on lawlessness, and you will become a slave. If everybody that had found that true were to say "Amen", it would shake the world more than all the cannon that are being fired today.

What of the other philosophy? It says that freedom is found not in rebellion but in obedience, not in violation of the law but in obedience to the law.
How does electricity become our servant? Not by our defying it but by our obeying it. When Joseph faced the great temptation of his life, he steadied himself with this question, "Can I do this great evil and sin against God?" That decision cost him a prison term, but he had a freedom in the midst of his prison that the lawless never knew. You can bet your life that the only way to be free is to be obedient to the law of your being, which is the law of God.

2. Then this same philosophy can be stated in another way. How can I live abundantly? How can I find life rich and satisfying? One answer is this: Look out for Number One! Live up to this motto: "Every fellow for himself and the devil take the hindmost!" Always say, "Me first!" and "Where do I come in?" Millions have bet on that horse. That is true of all the military despots of the world. It is true of countless nameless souls who have their little fling and lost.

But there is an opposite philosophy. Jesus uttered it. "If you want to find life," He said, "You must give it. If you want to live in right relation with your fellows, you are not to try to dominate them but to serve them."

If you want a guiding principle for abundant living, here it is: "All things whatsoever ye would that men should do to you, do ye even so to them." How much are you willing to bet that Jesus was right and that Caesar was wrong?

III

Then before placing our bet I think it might be well to glance at the experiences of some who have played this game before us. Here are two that we meet upon the pages of the New Testament. One of them is at the rear of the procession. He was a Quisling, a traitor to his God and to his country. I daresay he was the best-hated man in Capernaum. He was rich and getting richer, but he had won his money at the price of his honor. He had begun by placing his bet on the belief that the way to live largely was to get abundantly regardless of the method of the getting. Then one day this man looked up from his ledger into the
face of Jesus and Jesus said to him, "Matthew, follow me." And this man bet the fortune for which he had sold his honor. He staked everything on the faith that Jesus was right. He followed him and he won, as every man has won who has truly dared.

Here is another whose character and whose opportunities were almost infinite distances ahead of those of Matthew. We know him as the rich young ruler. One day with a high faith and expectancy, he ran down the road to kneel at the feet of Jesus. He was seeking the abundant life. "What shall I do," he asks Jesus as he looks wistfully into his face, "that I may have eternal life?" "Go thy way," said the Master. "Sell whatsoever thou hast and give to the poor, and thou shalt have treasure in heaven; and come and follow me." But we read of him that he went away grieved. He went away. He bet on the wrong philosophy and lost.

How will you place your bet? Maybe your religious faith has grown a bit vague. Maybe you find yourself at this moment amidst a welter of uncertainties. But you are going to stake your life on some philosophy. Perhaps some of you will say, "I bet that the best way to be free is to destroy the law. I bet that I can come to my best by sacrificing upon every way-side altar. I bet that I can take pleasure where it is offered before marriage and afterward. I bet that the sure way to win is to look out for Number One! I bet that the best way to build the new world is to live in isolation and let every other nation go to hell in its own way.

Even though there are those that may bet in this fashion, I have confidence that there are others that will dare to risk their all on the opposite. Here some young man, some young woman will say, "I bet whatever may be the laxity of the circle in which I move that it is better to be clean than unclean. I bet that this body of mine is the temple of the Holy Spirit and that it ought to be treated with reverence. I bet that marriage is a high and holy relationship instituted of God that is to last until death. I bet that life comes to its best not from getting but from giving. I bet that the only way to build a better world is
unselfishly to recognize myself as a part of the world and my brother's keeper.

In short, I bet on Jesus Christ and His way of life. Upon Him I venture my all.

While others may shrink, while others may say,

"Upon a rock stands prone my soul,
A diver, lean, undressed,
And looks and fears the shock,
And turns and hides its shame,
In some poor sorry jest."

I myself will dare the shock in the firm faith that no life staked on God can ever fail."
"The Man who Used his Head."

Psalms, 119: 59.

The text is found in the 119th Psalm and the 59th verse: "I thought on my ways and turned my feet to thy testimonies." This is an interesting bit of history. It is interesting because it is the story of human experience. There is nothing so abidingly interesting as the experience of an individual like ourselves. And the most thrilling of all interesting human experiences is the experience of a man with God. When you begin to tell me about the dealings of a personal Savior with your own life you are giving me the most abidingly interesting and fascinating story in the world.

Now, that is the story we find in this text. The Psalmist, whoever he is, is telling us how he came to find God. He is telling you how he came one day to set out from the City of Destruction to Mount Zion, crying, "Life, life, eternal life!" He is telling you how he knocked at the wicket gate and how he met the Interpreter. It is a bit of his own spiritual biography. It is the narrative of the red letter day in his history.

I think I met this man; in fact, I am sure I have. I have seen him as a man who has lived much and who has battled much and who has suffered much and who has rejoiced much. He is getting near the Sunset and the Evening Star. His hair is gray. His step is not so elastic as it used to be, but the fire of a quenchless youth looks out from his eyes and the peace of a great discovery rests in his face. There is something fascinating about him. So much is this the case that I can not but ask him for the secret of it all.

"How did you arrive," I ask. And his face only grows the brighter. He is glad to tell me. Whatever the secret is, it is one of which he is not ashamed. And he speaks after this fashion: "Years ago I got to thinking about myself, about my own life. I got to thinking of it in terms of God. I decided that I was not living as I ought to live. I decided that I was going in the wrong direction. So I faced about, and when I faced about God met me. And I have been in His blessed fellowship ever since."

And mark you, he tells you this experience without regret. It is the story of a decision he made at the great crisis of his life, but he does not wring his hands as he thinks of that decision. He does not sob over it. I have seen people sob over decisions that they have made. I have seen them look back upon hours of crisis with sorrow too bitter for tears. But never yet have I seen any single human soul who regretted the day that they pulled themselves together, did some honest thinking and then turned to God.

"I thought on my ways and turned" - I wonder if you have ever made that entry in your diary. I wonder if that is a part of your life's story. I wonder tonight, as you turn over the pages of the history of your yesterdays if you find this blessed sentence recorded. If you do not, the best part of your life's story remains to be written. May God grant that it may be written tonight, and that in the after days you may think with joy unspeakable of this January 23d, 1921, and say, "On that day I thought on my ways and turned to Jesus Christ."

This text is not only interesting because it is a bit of personal experience, it is interesting because it is so full of instruction. The Psalmist is telling us how he came to find God. He is telling us what it was that caused him to turn from the direction in which he was go-
The man who used his head

ing and to travel in the opposite direction. How did it come about? Listen: "I thought." All action is first born in thought. What a man thinks determines what he does. It even determines what he is. "As a man thinketh in his heart, so is he."

Nothing takes place without thought. "I thought", said Shakespeare, and Othello and Macbeth and Hamlet were written. "I thought", said Tennyson, and poems were born that sing like nightingales and glitter like stars. "I thought", said Edison, and thereby banished night around the world. "I thought", said Columbus, and a new continent was born.

Man's conquest is always born of his thinking. That is the secret of the fact that he has dominion over all the beasts of the field. He does not have dominion because he is stronger than all others. He has dominion because he outthinks them.

I saw a boy driving a big horse the other day. Why did not the horse drive the boy? Simply because the boy outthinks him. Man has more sense than the horse, that is, some men have more sense than a horse. Hence man rules. Gulliver, you know, discovered a country, the land of the Yahoos, where the horses were wiser than the men, and there the horses ruled.

God has made it possible for man to trumpet louder than the elephant. He has made him to be stronger than the lion. He has made him swifter than the antelope. He has made it possible for him to outfly the eagle. How? Not simply by giving him colossal physical powers.

God might have fixed it so I could shout loud enough for my friends to hear me over at Baltimore, but had He done so I would jar the window lights out of the houses in Washington when I spoke. But instead of growing a gigantic megaphone to my face, He gave me a brain. And so I use the telephone and whisper round the world.

I might have outrun the antelope. This might have been made possible by making me as tall as Polyphemus, but nobody would have loved me then, nor would there have been a bed large enough for me to sleep on. So God gave me a brain and I ride in an auto. Man thinks.

That is the reason he has been able to conquer the earth and sea and air. That is the reason he is able to speak from city to city and from continent to continent. That is the reason he is even able to get messages across the centuries. And you can go home tonight and take your New Testament and listen to the Sermon on the Mount. You can take your New Testament and hear Paul on Mar's Hill. Man has conquered because he has thought.

"I thought", said the Psalmist. "That is how I came to turn. That is how I came to change my life." You hear men say now and then that the reason they are not Christians is because they choose to think for themselves. With all due respect to these men, as a rule that is the one big reason why they are not Christians. They won't think. At least, they will not do the right kind of thinking. I do not believe there is a man here tonight that would reject God if I could only get him to think, really and truly and genuinely think.

"I thought" - one of the tragedies of today, and of every day,
is our thoughtlessness. How many accidents happened this past year because people would not think! We kill as many people every year from thoughtless-
ness as we lost in the war. The worst wreck that ever occurred on the N. C. & St. L. Railroad came about because somebody did not think.

How many men are failures today, how many young men and women are going on to be failures simply because they will not think. They re-
fuse to look ahead. They refuse to take stock of themselves. They refuse
to equip themselves for a place of usefulness and service. They refuse to
plan their lives. They drift till by and by the hand of stern necessity
thrusts them down into a certain groove. And in that groove they stay,
not because they chose it, not because they are adapted to it, - many
times they are not - they are there because they refuse to think. What

"Yet it was never in my heart
To play so ill a part,
But evil is wrought for want of thought,
As well as for want of heart."

I remember years ago a great strong man who was married to a
fragile flower of a woman. He loved her passionately, but he never
realized that he was breaking her heart. He was rough and rude and un-
couth. But one day this woman came upon a lingering bed of sickness. He
saw that she could not live. And the memory of his neglect came back upon
him and broke his heart. I shall never forget coming upon him one day in
the woods. He thought himself utterly alone. He was kneeling down by a
little tree and gripping it as if he would tear the bark from it, and call-
ing as best he could on God, seeking forgiveness for his thoughtlessness,
thinking and thinking broken heartedly, thinking when it was too late to
think.

Some of you who are listening to me are fathers. Have you ever
thought about the responsibility you owe to your children? Some of you
are husbands. Have you been fair and clean and straight with her to
whom you pledged your all? When I was a small boy my father gave my
sister a handsome wax doll. I found it one time alone. I discovered that
its face was made of wax. And I picked the roses from its cheeks and the
smile from its lips and made it into chewing gum. I was just a small boy
and did not think. Of course I did some very clear thinking a little
later when my father got my head between his knees. But you are older and
you are picking the roses from somebody's cheeks and the smile from some-
body's lips through your thoughtlessness.

But where our thoughtlessness works its supreme disaster is in
our relation to God. It's so easy to forget God. That is your attitude.
You have not hated God today. You have not consciously fought against
Him. You have just forgotten Him. You have not flung an oath of bitter
hate into the face of Jesus Christ this past week. You have not de-
liberately scarred your soul this past week. You have not purposely made
a whole week's journey further from your Father's House this past week.
You have just forgotten Christ and Heaven and your own soul.

I say it is easy to forget. This rushing, busy, noisy world
about us clamors for our attention. Everything we see almost bids for
our attention to the material. As you walk down the street the flaring
show windows holding half nude pictures, the flaring advertisements in
or hell. I believe God's Word is true. I do not believe it because I read it in the newspapers. I do not believe it because it is a popular belief. I believe it because it is the utterance of Him with whom a lie is an utter impossibility.

Now, what did this man do who realized that it was wrong? What did this man do who came to the conclusion that he was not helping as he ought to help? What did he do when he realized the fact that his life was wrong now, disappointing and unsatisfactory now, and was going to bring him to a hated goal when the sunset came? What did he do? What would you do if such a realization came home to you? When this service is over and you start home I could make you believe that death was waiting for you in the next block if you kept on that street, you would turn back. What will you do, you who are traveling away from God toward eternal death?

I tell you what this man did. He turned. He faced about. And that facing about brought him face to face with God. That facing about brought him salvation. It brought him salvation here. It brought him salvation throughout eternity.

Now, the question is this, what will you do? If you are wrong is there anything cowardly, is there anything mean, is there anything weak and contemptible in getting right? If the road you are on is not going to bring you to the haven of your desire, is there anything foolish in changing? Is there anything weak or shameful about it?

And this, heart, is your blessed privilege. If you are wrong you can change. I know that I can not make you change. I know that your best friend can not. I know that God Himself can not. But if you want to change you can. In spite of your sins, in spite of the world, in spite of weakness, in spite of the crowd, in spite of the devil you can change if you want to.

Not only can you turn, not only can you face about and find God, but you can do that right now. You can find Him at this very moment. You can find Him before this service closes. You can turn and be facing towards Heaven before this sermon ends. You can do it before I reach the end of this sentence.

"I thought and turned" - when the Recording Angel writes the history of this service I wonder if that entry will be made opposite your name. I know your own cowardice and pride are telling you to wait a little while. But God and your awakened conscience, your reason, your judgment, your better manhood - all say, "Turn now. There will never be another time when it is so easy. If you fail to turn to God tonight you may fail forever more."

Years ago down in Marietta, Ga. there was a woman who sent to the drug store for some quinine. When it was brought and she took it she soon began to feel drowsy. She hurried the servant who had brought it back to the druggist to ask him if he were sure that it was quinine. And the druggist's face went white as he realized that he had given her enough opium to mean death.

Then followed the hard fight with that terrible drowsiness that yielded to would mean an eternal sleep. Every expedient was resorted to. Cold water was thrown into her face. She was whipped in the palms, led up and down the yard. And now and then she would say to her husband,
"Only let me sleep one minute." And he answered, "One minute may mean an eternity."

And that is what some of you will say tonight. "Let me sleep a while longer. Let me drowse a little more. Let me continue to be consciously wrong a few days longer." But your opportunity is now, and God's call is now. And if you will only claim your privilege, if you will only do your duty, there is not an unsaved man of you but will say when this service is over, "I thought on my ways and turned my feet to thy testimonies."
I'D USE MY HANDICAPS

"Before I was afflicted I went astray: but now have I kept thy word." (Psalm 119:67)

One thing which makes the Bible the most gripping book of all times is that it comes up out of life. It holds the mirror up to nature as does no other book. It is a record of human experiences. It does not deal in theories. It deals in truths that men have hammered out on the anvil of their own souls. As we turn its pages we meet man after man who faces us to tell us frankly what he has learned in the school of life. Here for instance is one who is confessing that he has found the road of life a bit rough. He has been hampered by handicaps but he has so used what might have been as a ball and chain about his ankle as to make him run the race more swiftly.

I

This man had not always been wise enough to use his handicaps. In fact there was a time when he would not even use his advantages. While this is a sermon on out to use our handicaps one might preach a sermon deeply needed on how to use our advantages. While there are those who change their calamities into capital there are others who so use their capital as to make it a calamity. They change their wealth into want, their plenty into poverty, their power into weakness. Not a few allow their own rich gifts to work their own undoing.
"I'd Use My Handicaps"

Take the possession of wealth for instance. Money is power. It is canned sweat. It is condensed energy. It is pent-up personality. It is a bit of a Niagara that may be released to the helping or hurting of men. Other things being equal, those who possess wealth have a real advantage. But how often does this advantage become a disadvantage. Many an ambitious young soul has been hampered by poverty. Of some the poet may truly sing:

But Knowledge to their eyes her ample page
Rich with the spoils of time did ne'er unroll;
Chill penury repress'd their noble rage,
And froze the genial current of the soul.

But I dare say more have been crushed by plenty than by poverty.

There is an old story that when certain pagan hoards sought to win their way into Rome they bribed a girl to unbar the gate. This girl promised to render this service provided each soldier would give her the golden bracelet that was on his wrist. As they passed into the city the story said that each man threw his bracelet at the girl's feet until by and by her wealth so increased that it towered above her head and crushed her to death. The same is a parable. A few years ago a young chap worth millions blew his brains out. He too was crushed under an avalanche of his own wealth.

Years ago a boat sank into the muddy waters of the Mississippi. Its passenger list was made up chiefly of men returning from the gold fields of California. When these men saw that the boat was going down, in spite of the danger that they had braved and the sacrifices that they had made to obtain their gold almost to a man they unbuckled their belts and through their treasure upon the deck of the sinking vessel. They had to swim for their lives and could not be hampered. But there was one exception. He was an excellent swimmer. He thought his companions mad. Therefore he snatched up their belts one by one and buckled them upon himself. When he sprang into the water he sank as if he had been made of gold. When they found his body a richer corpse was never fished out of the muddy waters of
the Mississippi but he was sunk by his too great treasure.

Physical strength is a great asset. A man who is gifted with a strong healthy body has much for which to be thankful. But how many have changed their strength into weakness by over-indulgence and dissipation. About the finest specimen of physical manhood that I ever knew died just out of his twenties. His treasure was immense but he squandered it recklessly. It was such madness as his that led stern old Thomas Carlyle to declare that the way to live to be old was to be afflicted with some incurable disease when young. Any way many a physical weakling has buried his strong brother because that strong man did not know how to profit by his wealth.

Then physical beauty is a great gift. Yet the most beautiful girls are not always the most charming. Many a homely girl has had a charm to which the selfish beauty was a stranger because the one depended on her beauty while the other depended on something finer and deeper. What a poem of a personality Lady Hamilton must have been. She became a lover of the most distinguished admiral England ever had. Yet her life was little more than stark tragedy. We cannot but feel that she would have lived more richly had she been an ugly duckling than the physical poem that she was.

Vast talents, supreme ability, that is a coveted prize. Yet many a man has been the poorer for his great gifts. A year of two ago a man wrote a book called "Good Night, Sweet Prince." To the author this very unheroic man was a hero. It was the story of John Barrymore. That John Barrymore was a man of vast ability no one can deny. Almost every treasure seems to have been dropped into his roomy hands. He had a fine physique, a fine mind. He had ability that enabled him to go in one night from obscurity to stardom. He was perhaps the best Hamlet that ever played on the American stage. Yet what a mess he made of his life. Our biography declares that he drank 640 barrels of raw liquor. How much of wicked and wreckless living it took to blow out the fine light within that brain and to change one of the greatest actors of all time into a peddler of cheap comedy. Far better
would it have been for him we feel if his abilities had been mediocre or low. Even so, the psalmist had at first failed to make use of the treasure that was really his

II

Then something happened. One day like a bolt from the blue came trouble. His easy road became hard. His smooth sea was whipped into rage by a tempest. He found himself possessed of a handicap. That fact makes us feel akin to him. This is the case because almost all of us know something of a handicap. Life has not dealt too harshly with us, and yet few if any of us feel ourselves one hundred per cent fit.

What was the matter of this man's handicap? We do not know. There are times when our handicaps are evident. They are obvious to the eyes of every passerby. At other times few know about them. Perhaps only our intimate friends and loved ones. At times perchance no one knows fully but ourselves.

This man may have lost his wealth. The wolf of want may have begun to howl at a door wherein once was plenty. He may have lost his health. His strength may have become weakness. Pain may have begun to walk with fire-shod feet along every nerve of his body making every day a struggle and every night a tragedy. Maybe he had to give up some long cherished hope or bury out of his sight some dear dead dream.

As we do not know just what his handicap was no more do we know how he came by it. Since he declares that before he was afflicted he went astray. It is often assumed that his handicap came as the result of his own wrongdoing. But of this we cannot be sure. Of course handicaps are often brought on that way. Sin always involves suffering. That fact is as fixed as the law of gravitation but while that is true all the suffering that we endure is not borne directly of our sin. Some men suffer because
they are bad, others because they are good. Had Jesus been less good he
would have suffered less. Then there are those who suffer through the
sin of others. There are those who suffer because they are bound up in a
bundle of living with someone who goes wrong. There are others still who
suffer who can give no reason for their agony. They can only cry as Jesus
once cried: "My God, why?" But no, we do not know this man's handicap
now just how he came by it. We know that he had his handicap, that there
was something that he felt hampered in in the running of the race of life.

III

When he found himself thus hampered by a handicap what did he do about
it? We do not all react to our handicaps in the same way.

1. First, there are those who seek to ignore their handicaps. I knew
a brilliant young minister years ago who in his early thirties almost com­
pletely lost his hearing. It was a source of painful embarrassment. But
what made it more painful was that he was too proud to acknowledge his
defauness. He would pretend to understand when he did not understand at all.
Thus his ministry was greatly hampered. I have always felt that it
would have been so much better had he confessed his handicap and acted ac­
cordingly.

I am thinking of another friend who had a veritable genius for knowing
everybody. He was one of the most popular pastors that I have ever known.
It fell to my lot to follow him. Santa Claus was not in his class when it
came to popularity. But something went wrong with his eyes. He became so
nearly blind that he could not recognize folks as he once did. But instead
of facing it squarely and telling his friends he could not see he let it
break his heart and give him a nervous breakdown, and thereby worked his
undoing. As a boy at school I had some friends that came from homes of
wealth. My father was a farmer with other children to help besides myself.
Therefore money for me was not plentiful as it is since I've got rich. So what? Two ways were open. I could pretend that money was just as plentiful with me as it was with my companions and thus be in a constant state of embarrassment or I could make poverty light by acknowledging it.

Here is another pitiful thing that I have seen under the sun. If we live long enough we have a way of getting old. That is inevitable. Yet I meet folks here and there who are trying to kid the calendar. Now I am not urging anybody to run ahead to meet old age but I think far and ahead the best way to stay young is to relax. When they asked an old colored aunty how she managed she said, "When I work I work hard and when I set I set loose." The really youthful people are not those who are clawing at the embankment to keep from slipping down. They are those who are willing to be their age. If therefore you have a real handicap don't try to shut your eyes and duck it. Face the fact with open and honest candor.

2. Then there are those who do face their handicaps but who are frightened but of their wits by them. Because they feel that they can never play the game as well as their fellows they excuse themselves from playing at all. There is a story of a man engaged in battle in the long ago. But when he saw that he had only a broken sword in his hand he despaired. "What can I do with this poor equipment," he said, and when he answered, "Nothing," he threw down his broken sword and slumped from the field. But another man came who had no sword at all and found that broken blade and rallied his defeated forces and won the day.

I am thinking now of a girl once beautiful, brought up not in a home of luxury but in a home of plenty. She never knew a want. She was the spoiled pet of the family. Early she began to fancy herself sick. That has grown with the passing of the years. Today if she would find herself as strong as Joe Lewis she would never suspect it. She has been a burden upon those who loved her for a whole lifetime with never a faintest suspicion that her handicap is due not to her misfortune but to her surrender.
3. A third something we may do with our handicap—we can refuse to ignore it, we can refuse to be defeated by it, we can even use it. We can treat it in such a way that we will come to thank God that it has come to us. Countless thousands have had just that experience. Many of you are older-grown, thank God at this moment as much for your dark days as for those that were bright. You thank God as much for those experiences that you thought were going to work your undoing as for those you thought were going to be the making of you. The worst has become the best. As the mountains hard by look jagged and scarred but in the distance repose in their soft mellow robes of purple and haze so the rough present fades into the past tender, sweet, and beautiful. You do not simply enjoy and endure your handicaps in a stoical fashion, but you use them, change them from weights into wings.

IV

How can we do this?

1. First we can make our handicaps into a kind of punching bag for the development of our strength. That has been done times without number. Years ago a young fellow was so badly burned that his physicians said he would never walk again, but that boy could not accept the physicians' verdict. He worked with his stiff legs and kept on working and did not give up. By and by he could not only walk but run. By and by this boy whose name was Glenn Cunningham came to run about the fastest mile of any runner we know. He used his handicap to gather strength to walk.

I am thinking now of two brothers, both ministers. The older had poise and self-assurance. He had endless magnatism. His younger brother was timid and retiring, wanting in magnatism and in self-assurance. When the two were together the younger had no reputation except in his brother's name.
But as the years went by the older depended more and more on his personal charm to get him by. He was slovenly in his preparation while the younger knew that if he got anywhere at all it must be by the good grace of God and hard work. At the close of the journey the younger was as far ahead of the older as the older had once been ahead of the younger. Whatever your handicap you can make a punching bag out of it and grow the stronger because of it.

2. Not only can you use your handicap to increase your own strength and courage but you can use it in such a fashion as to enable you to give courage and strength to others. I have been made to marvel many a time at the sterling grit with which some face handicaps that seem to lay life in ruins. Beethoven inspite of his deafness wrote marvelous music. In fact it is conceded that he would never have written such masterpieces but for his deafness, but if possible more stirring than his music is the fine courage of him that carried bravely on in the face of what seemed like bleak impossibilities.

Not only do those who deal well with their handicaps bring courage but they are also gifted with a healing sympathy. Those who help us most, those who are able to put heart in us when we have lost our courage, are not those generally speaking to whom life has come right-side up. The most sympathetic and tender souls are those who themselves have suffered and have lived grandly in spite of their handicaps.

3. The final and all-inclusive thing you can do with your handicap is to let it drive you to utter dependence upon God. About the last barrier that God has to break down in order to get into your life and mine is that of our own pride and self-sufficiency. If we are well and strong so often we feel that we can get on without him. Of course this is never the case. But while everybody needs God the hampered and the handicapped know they must have him. No one else will do.

Now if we meet our handicaps in the will of God he will always make
them into helps. There is simply no loss that we can make into gain, no tragedy that we can make into triumph. When Paul found himself hampered by a thorn he hurried with it into the presence of God. He was so sure that God was going to deliver him but God did not see fit to remove his thorn. Instead he said to his servant, "My grace is sufficient for thee."

What them? Paul no longer asked for the removal of his thorn, instead he came to thank God for it. "More gladly therefore," he sings, "will I rather glorify in my infirmities that the power of Christ may rest in me." So God took that hampering thorn and touched it with the finger of his power and made it blossom into beauty as violets bloom at the kiss of the spring. This is what God will always do, he affirms. We know that all things work together for good to them that love God.
"It is good for me to have been in trouble"
Psalm 119: 71 (Moffatt)

Here is a man looking back over the road along which he has come. He is a man, I take it, who has lived much and thought much. As he looks back at his yesterdays he realizes that they have not all been sunny days. Some have been black and full of storms. He realizes that the road along which he has come did not always lead through green pastures and beside still waters. There were times that that road dipped into dark canyons or climbed on the rugged morelands where the going was hard. He has found life a bit of a battle. As he takes stock of himself today, he realizes that he wears a good many scars.

Yet as he looks back this is his joy. The tragic experience through which he has passed have not resulted half so disastrously as he though they would when he was passing through them. In fact, he discovers that the very experience that he thought would work his undoing has been the making of him. He realizes that the trouble that he feared would leave him completely impoverished has made him rich. His crosses have been strangely changed into crowns. Now looking back from the heights he has gained he knows that the darkest days of his life have really been the brightest. As the mountains hard by look jagged and scarred, those in the distance repose in their soft mellow robes of purple and haze. So the rough present has faded into the past tender, sweet and beautiful. Gratefully, therefore, he sums up what life has taught him: "It is good for me to have been in trouble."

I

Now we are separated from this man by seas, centuries and continents. He lived in a far simpler day than ours. Yet as we look at him we realize what George Elliott
calls the broad sameness of human life. For the heart of humanity is the same through the years, ever pulsating to the same great needs, the same great loves and longings. Therefore, this we have in common with this singer of the long ago. All of us know sooner or later the experience of trouble. Sooner or later our faces are to become wet with tears. We come to know through personal experience the pain of a aching heart.

In Ecclesiastes, the most pessimistic book in the Bible, we read this word, "All things happen to all." By this the author means that nobody escapes the disappointments, the loneliness, the tears that are involved in the business of living. As to the nature of this man's trouble we do not know. It may have been the loss of his health. It may have been the wrecking of his home. It may have been the surrender of some dear dream that could never come true. As I do not know his trouble, no more do I know yours. Yet the fact remains, to all of us sooner or later trouble comes. Nobody entirely escapes. In saying this I am not talking the language of pessimism but the language of human experience.

II

Now since trouble is the experience of all of us, how are we going to meet it when it comes? This is a question of supreme importance. I realize that it is hard for some of us to understand this. It is hard for us to get away from the conviction that what life does to us is of supreme importance. We have a feeling that everything depends upon whether our dreams come true, everything depends upon whether we carry through the cherished purposes of our lives or fail to carry them through. It is hard for us to escape the conviction that there are some things that could happen to us that would make life so lean and mean as to not be worth living.

But in reality this is never the case. It cannot be said too often that it is not what life does to you that matters most, it is your response. There are those by the thousands into whose roomy hands life has emptied her choicest treasures who are yet finding the business of living lean and mean. On the other hand, there are thousands who seem to have been cheated of almost every treasure who are living richly and abundantly. It is, therefore, not what happens to us that counts but our response
to those happenings. Generally speaking, we make one of three responses:

1. First some meet trouble with abject surrender. Those walk jauntily forward until some calamity trips them then they fall flat. Instead of getting up and starting afresh they lie in self-pity, making their defeat fatal and final. Having come to the bat once and struck out, they never try again. Having made one effort to walk and having fallen, they lie in self-pity like spoiled babies and whine for the rest of their lives.

All of us know some who have met trouble in this fashion. This was the tragedy of Miss Havenshan in "Great Expectations." After a romantic courtship, Miss Havenshan is to be married. All arrangements have been made. She is decked in her bridal attire. The wedding cake is on the table. The attendants are all present, along with the minister. In fact everybody is present who was expected except one - that is the groom. He never came. Naturally the bride was both humiliated and heartbroken.

So what? She stopped every clock in her great roomy house at the hour of her disappointment, twenty minutes til nine. She left the wedding cake on the table until it became wrapped about with cobwebs, til it was the home of spiders and mice. She drew the blinds so that no natural light was ever allowed in her home. Everyday she wore her wedding dress until the once beautiful white silk became little more than yellow dirty ribbons. She met one sorrow and surrendered to it. Life to her was changed finally and completely into a disappointed whine.

Now while Miss Havenshan acted in this fashion, we all know that such reaction was not a necessity. She might have met this trouble in a far more heroic fashion. While realizing this, we know also that such final surrender is always possible. I boarded in a home when I first went away to school where there were two sons and a daughter. The daughter died. The mother seemed to utterly forget her husband and her other two children while she locked herself in and let her sorrow make of her a bitter and defeated woman.

Perchance heartache has come to you. You have known trouble. How have you treated it? How will you respond when it comes? Did you tackle the trouble that came
your way with a resolute heart and cheerfully, or hide yourself from the light of day
with a craven soul and fail?

In trouble, a ton of trouble or an ounce of trouble,
is what you make it;
It is not the fact that you are hurt that counts,
but only how you take it.

You are beaten to earth, well that then?
Get up with a smiling face;
It is nothing against you to fall down flat,
But to lie there, that is disgrace.

The harder you fall, the higher you bounce,
Be proud of your blackened eye;
It is not the fact that you are licked that counts
But how did you fight and why.

And if you're beat down to the death, what then,
If you battled the best that you could;
If you played your part in the world of men,
The great Master will call it good.

Death comes with a crawl or comes with a pounce,
But whether he is slow or sly
It is not the fact that you are dead that counts,
But only how did you die.

2. The second way of meeting trouble is to allow it to make you hard and harsh and
unsympathetic. There are those who meet calamity, struggle with it in their own strength,
overcome it in a measure but they lose all tenderness in the process. This is the surrender
of the strong while the one just discussed is the surrender of the weak. One of the
saddest losses is a lost sorrow. How tragic to win over your handicap only to become
proud and hard and contemptuous of those who lack your strength. Some men through
suffering become rock-like but they are like the hidden weath against which your ships
\textit{crash} to their death instead of being like the shadow of a great rock in a weary land.

Here is a man who has met tragedy and has refused to surrender. Yet his victory is
only a sham victory. It has brought him no abiding joy. We sing this song often in
church as if it were Christian, but it is utterly pagan.

\textit{Out of the night that covers me,}
\textit{Black as the Pit from pole to pole,}
I thank whatever gods may be
For my unconquered soul.
In the fell clutches of circumstance,
I have not winced nor cried aloud;
Under the bludgeonings of chance,
My head is bloody, but unbowed.

Beyond this world of grief and tears,
Blooms but the horrors of the shade
And yet the menace of the years,
Finds and shall find me unafraid.

It matters not how strait the gate
How charged with punishments the scroll
I am the master of my fate;
I am the captain of my soul.

But it is a poor captain that cannot bring his ship to a better fate than this.
At present the night about him is as black as the Pit from pole to pole, the future
has no promise except the horrors of the shade. We can so handle our troubles as to
allow them to make us hard and bitter.

3. But there is a third response we can make. It is the response of this psalmist.
He refused to surrender to his troubles. He refused merely to submit to it and to under-
take to conquer it by his own two hands. Instead he used his troubles. He made the ad-
verse winds of misfortune and calamity to fill his sails and carry him toward his desired
haven. He changed his calamity into capital, his losses into gain, his want into wealth.
This is what you and I can do. Everyone of us, if we will, can so respond even to our
losses as to change them into everlasting gain.

III

How is this to be done?

1. I think it is well to begin the answer to this question by frank recognition of
the fact that in all that happens to us in this world is not in accordance with the will
of God. As another has pointed out, there is a great deal of loose thinking as to the will
of God. A few weeks ago, out in California a jealous dog bit a small baby to death.
Certainly the death of that baby was not in accordance with the will of God. Neither is
the death of any baby when that death is borne of ignorance or neglect, or by the mass
sin of the city that fails to clean out its slums.

In thinking of the will of God, this wise author to whom I referred suggests that we
think of it under three heads: first, God's intention; second, His circumstantial will; and third, His ultimate will. Often we speak of the crucifixion of Jesus as the will of God. But surely that was not God's primary purpose and intention. When Jesus began His ministry God certainly willed that all men hear and obey Him. But when they refused and when Jesus had to die or be untrue to His mission, then and only then did His death become the will of God. That is meant by God's circumstantial will. It was what God willed under the circumstances.

Many of us can understand this by an appeal to our own experience. You have sons in the Army or the Navy. Why are they there? It is not because that when your son was born you dedicated him to the service of Mars. Not one of you raised your boy to be a soldier. You intended him perhaps to be a physician or a teacher or a merchant or a minister but certainly not a soldier or a marine. Yet when the war broke out and when all we hold most dear was at stake, it became your will that your son enter the service of his country. That was your will under the circumstances.

Unless we candidly recognize the fact that much that happens to us is contrary to the will of God, we will find ourselves accusing God of doing things that no decent man would do. When the brothers of Joseph took him captive and sold him into slavery, it made a vast difference whom Joseph held responsible for that wicked deed. Had he blamed it on God, it might have embittered him for life. But he was too wise for that. He put the responsibility where it belonged - on his brothers. "Ye meant it unto evil," he told them, "but God meant it unto good." God cannot always prevent the trouble we inflict on each other because He has left us free. But what this psalmist has found is that while there is evil that God cannot prevent, He is never defeated by evil, unless we fail to avail ourselves of His help.

What does this mean? It means that everything that touches your life whether it brings laughter or tears may be made to work for your good. Paul lived a most effective life. He went to the whipping post so many times that there was scarcely a square inch on his body that didn't bear a scar. He perhaps knew the inside of more Roman jails than any criminal in the empire. He tells us frankly that he has suffered the
loss of all things. What has he learned through these harsh and hard experiences? This, we know - that all things work together for good for them who love God.

2. The second fact that we need to face is that while all troubles that come to us in not according to the will of God, if we meet them within His will God can make every one of them to work to our good. What is it to love God in the sense in which Paul uses the word. It is not a mere fondness. It is a love that leads to obedience. "If you love me," said Jesus, "keep my commandments."

When Jesus locked up His carpenter shop one day and set out on the mad adventure of saving the world, He was for a time followed by enthusiastic crowds. But by and by the crowds dwindled. Opposition increased until at last Jesus was arrested, given a sham trial and sentenced to death. On the cross He suffered just as the robbers who died beside Him suffered. In spite of His perfect life, evil men did to Jesus the very worst that they could possibly do.

Having done this worst, then what? We are faced with the strange paradox that the worst that could possibly happen to Jesus proved to be the best that could have possibly have happened. Why so? There was nothing inevitable about it. This lesser robber who had died by the side of Jesus died in bitterness and rebellion. The worst turned out to be the best because Jesus met this worst within the will of God. Thus a crucified Christ has done and is doing for the world what He could have done in no other way.

What a wonderful gospel is ours! Yes, and what a wonderful Saviour! Whatever life brings if we meet it within His will, it will work for our enrichment and for the enrichment of the lives of those whom we touch. More and more we will be able to shout out of our own experience, "We know that all things work together for good for those who love God." Remember it is not merely some things but all things, the things that make for laugh and the things that make for tears, the things that seem to enrich us and the things that seem to rob us of all our treasure. Thus however black the night through which you may be passing today, if you keep in His fellowship you too will win sooner or later. "It is good for me to have been in trouble."
"It is good for me to have been in trouble." (Moffatt)
Psalm 119: 71

Here is a man who is looking back over the path along which he has travelled. As he looks, he realizes that all the road has not been smooth, neither has all of it been bathed in sunshine; some has been rough and stony, some has been dark with black shadows. More than once have rude tempests burst upon him, more than once have cruel winds pounded him with their brutal fists. He has known bitter losses, he has had his face wet again and again with hot and blinding tears.

But now as he looks back upon those tempestuous days, they have not resulted half as disasterously as he thought they would. When he was passing through them, there seemed little hope, but the very blows that he thought were going to send him down to rise no more have somehow steadied him and helped him to stand more firmly on his feet. The very disaster that he thought would be his undoing has been the making of him, the thing that seemed an irreparable calamity has become his capital. What he believed would bring incurable poverty has really made him rich. His darkest days have come to be his brightest. As the mountains hard-by look jagged and scarred in the distance, the rose and purple hues of a glorious sunset come into prominent view, so the rough present has faded into the past, tender, sweet, and beautiful.

I.

Now we are separated from this ancient Psalmist by seas, and centuries,
and continents. We are separated by widely differing customs and widely differing
modes of life. He lived in a primitive, simple world. We live in a world that
is scientific and complex. But this we have in common - we have both been in
trouble. Life has not been all of shatter for any of us, thank God, neither has
it been all sunshine. Most of us have known losses, most of us have felt pain,
most of us have had some of our dearest hopes wither and fall about us like
autumn leaves. Many have seen the setting of a great hope that is like the setting
of the sun.

If this has not been true already, sooner or later it is likely to be true. None of us get entirely through life without realizing that there is
something more than pessimism in the sob of Job, "Man is born to sorrow, as the
sparks fly upward." There is much in this life to make us laugh and there are
also things to make us sob.

Just what was the nature of this man's trouble we do not know. It may
have been some outward and visible calamity that left its abiding mark upon his
life. It may have been the loss of his wealth. It may have been the loss of
his health. It may have been the loss of one dearer to him than life. It may
have been to him as to the Prophet Ezekiel who had come through that soul-tearing
experience of having the light of his eyes taken from him at a stroke. Perhaps
his sorrow was one that is even more tragic because it was secret and inward.
Maybe it was a sorrow that hung crepe upon the doorway of his heart. Maybe that
he was not able to wear his sackcloth without it, he wore it as did one of
Israel's kings with it "upon his flesh." But whatever the nature of his sorrow,
it was a fact in his life as it has been and is a fact in the lives of many who
are here present. A calamity is something for which we are all called upon to reckon sooner or later.

II.

Now what are we going to do about it? We are likely to take one of three courses.

1.) We may surrender. There are those who go blithely ahead as long as the skies are blue and the road is smooth and the music of success is ringing in their ears, but as soon as the skies overcast, then the sweet music of victory changes to the harsh discords of failure, then they collapse and give over the fight. They walk forward cheerfully until something trips them up, then they fall. Having fallen once, instead of getting to their feet and bravely continuing the battle, they lie prone upon their faces and give way to perpetual spiritual infirmities.

When I first went away to school, I boarded in a home where there were a father and mother and three children, but a cruel disease put it's hands upon the one daughter who was just blossoming into womanhood and she faded like a flower. Of course, the Mother's heart was broken, as was that of the Father, that was only natural. But the most tragic part of the story seems to be that the Mother forgot the two children that were left her, she forgot her husband who was suffering almost as much as she, she withdrew from the world, she locked herself up with her sorrow and let it eat her heart out. That is, at the first crash of tragedy, she went down in utter surrender.
That was the case with Miss Havisham in Dickens' story *Great Expectations*. Miss Havisham, you remember, was to be married. She was dressed in her wedding attire, the guests were gathered, the minister was present, the wedding cake was on the table, but the bridegroom never came. Therefore, the disappointed bride had her watch and all the clocks stopped at the hour of her disappointment - 20 minutes to 9. The blinds at the windows were never lifted, no sunlight was allowed in the house. Her white wedding gown was allowed to grow yellow and worn upon her shrunken figure. The wedding cake became the habitation of spiders and mice. All the machinery of life stopped for her at 20 minutes to 9. -- The hour of her tragedy.

**It is thus that you may treat your sorrow.** You may let it defeat you. You may give over and resign yourself to your fate and become a burden to yourself and all who love you. You may act like a spoiled child who having fallen down makes no effort to get up, but simply lies there, bawls, and waits for somebody else to lift him to his feet. There are a few things more pitifully cowardly than to quit the fight at the first wound and sneak away complaining that nobody ever suffered as you suffered and nobody ever was dealt with so harshly by life as you have been.

2.) Then we may allow our calamities to harden us. There are those that when tragedy comes, fight back. They meet such opposition with clinched fists. Sometimes these over-develop their pugnacity - they become strong with a fierce, rugged strength. But they allow the "milk of human kindness" to freeze within their souls. They have no sympathy with weakness. They say in the presence of the failure of others, "Why don't they stand up and fight like I did?"
To take this course is to surrender in another way. The first is the surrender of weakness, this is the surrender of strength. Sorrow sweetens some people, but it makes others harsh and bitter and there are very few sadder losses than a lost heartache. In Hawthorne's Scarlet Letter, there are three outstanding characters - Hester Prynne, the unfaithful wife; Arthur Dimmesdale, the unfaithful minister; and Roger Chillingworth, the betrayed husband. Naturally, this betrayed husband suffered in the unfaithfulness of his wife, but he allowed his sorrow to make him unspeakably bitter. Day after day, week after week, month after month, and year after year, he hung upon the crack of the threshold of the betrayer of his home like a terrible bloodhound. At last, he tracked him down and forced him to stand on the pedestal of shame where Hester had stood. It is awful to be the victim of a hate like that, but it is far more awful to be the possessor of such a hate. Hatred for another may cause the one hated great pain, but it causes the possessor of such a hate the very pangs of hell.

3.) A third course we may take is this. We may refuse to surrender, we may refuse to become imbittered, we may capitalize our calamities. We can change our losses into gains. You know how a pearl is formed? A grain of sand or some foreign particle gets into the shell of an oyster and wounds it. Nature, in an effort to heal that wound, creates a pearl and this is a high art that through the Grace of God we can learn. We can change our very wounds into pearls, our very wants into inexhaustible wealth.

III.

How is this to be done?
1.) The first step, I think, is the realization of the possibility of it. It has been done over and over again, times without number. Years ago, there was a young physician in England who eagerly sought a position of apothecary on a certain British vessel. He was rejected and the coveted place was given to another. It stands written in the records today like this, "So and so accepted as an apothecary on ship, Oliver Goldsmith rejected for ditto." But Oliver Goldsmith lived to realize that fate had lifted a few pills from his hands to fill them up with poems.

Here is a man of wide vision who decides that it is necessary for the spread of his Gospel so he goes to Rome. But he is arrested and thrown into jail. The months pass, but now he is writing from another prison cell in Rome, "I would have you know that the things that have happened unto me have fallen out to the furtherance of the Gospel." What things had happened to him? Only a series of tragic calamities, only a lot of ugly mishaps that would have broken the spirits of some men and soured others, but he made them to bring him to his desired goal. And this Paul did not once, but again and again until it became the habit of his life so that we hear him saying, "To them that love God, all things work together for good."

2.) A second step toward the realization of this high goal is this, we must face the fact that not everything that happens to us in this world is according to the will of God. We used to say at funerals, "For in as much as it hath pleased God in His all high Providence to take out of the world the soul of this our deceased Brother or Sister...." Now sometimes that was altogether a right word, at other times, it was tragic mockery, at other times it was little less than insult and a slander against God. How would such a word have sounded over the grave of that baby that froze to death at the community camp? Worse still, how would it have sounded
Capitalizing our Calamities

at the grave of the Mattson boy?

Let us face the facts. There are endless tragic happenings that are taking place in this world day by day that are flatly contradictory to the will of God. If you want to go from this church to waste your life, to blacken the heart of one who loves you best, God cannot prevent it. Thoughtless folks during the tragic days of the World War used to ask foolishly, "Why does not God stop the War?" There was only one answer - there can be only one, "Because He could not." If God had His way, there would never be another murder or another mass murder in all the coming centuries.

While I was pastor in Memphis, my associate pastor was one of the most gracious and winsome saints I have ever known. He had a son on whom he doted. He was a fine and worthy man. One Sunday that splendid young man was run down and killed by a drunken driver - it was a terrible tragedy, but it would have been more terrible still if this old saint had blamed God for it. Suppose he had railed at God for something that grieved God far more than it grieved him. Yet that is what men are constantly doing.

A young woman came to me some time ago with a terrible story. She had been betrayed and her betrayer was a churchman. Since then, she had been against the church. Since then, she had been bitter and antagonistic against God. How utterly unreasonable and how utterly unfair. Remember this always that God never inflicts an injury on any human soul. Whatever you have suffered, He is not to blame. If you have been the victim of injustice or cruelty, He has suffered in your suffering far more than you have. Face the fact, then know that not every calamity that comes into your life is according to the will of God and there are some that He cannot prevent.
3.) But while God cannot prevent our calamities, I rejoice to tell you that He is not defeated by them. There is absolutely no pang, no loss, no tragedy that can come to you that He cannot change to gain. This He will do not once but every time on one condition and that is that you stay within the circle of His will.

But it is literally true that all things - the joy things and the sorrow things, the things that make you laugh and the things that make you sob, the things that sow the gardens of our hearts with flowers and the things that seem to make those gardens as parched and barren as the desert - "all things work together for them who love God."

Take the story of Joseph for example. When he was a little more than a boy, he was sold into slavery - it was a tragic and terrible experience. Years after, when his brothers, then within his power, came whining to him, begging for forgiveness, this was his answer, "Am I in the place of God? Ye meant unto me for evil but God meant it unto good." He did not excuse them, he knew they had done him a deliberate and malicious wrong, but he found it possible to forgive them because he knew that God was working in the midst of the wrong to change it into good. But if Joseph had taken the matter into his own hands and sought vengeance upon his brothers, the evil intended could never have been changed into good.

This then is our gracious gospel, that everything lost can become a gain. What life does to us is not of supreme importance, what counts is our response. If we make the response of faith, then our victory is sure. Perhaps some of you have read The Sky Pilot. If you have, you remember the red-headed little spit-fire called Gwen. She was wild and willful creature, a lover of the plains and the canyons, and
the great out-of-doors. But one day while assisting in a round-up, her horse fell and she became a cripple for life.

Now she lies in the "Old timers Cabin" at the head of the canyon restless, wretched, raging against her fate. The Sky Pilot made his way to see her one day, he rode down through the canyon that she loved and when he came into her presence he told her a story. "Once," he said, "there were no canyons, but a wide spreading prairie and when the Lord of the Prairie walked over his domain, he missed the flowers that he loved the best. He sent the birds and winds to scatter these seeds of his favorite flowers, but they no sooner sprang up then they withered. At last, with seeming anger, he sent a great thunder-bolt that cleft the prairies at the heart. For a long time, he groaned with his black wound, but then flowers began to bloom and trees began to grow and a spring began to send it's silver way toward the sea and the canyon became the place the Lord of the Prairies loved the best, for a sweet place it was with all of its sights and sounds and silences."

"Now the flowers of the spirit love joy, peace, long-suffering, gentleness, goodness, meekness, self-control - and some of these flowers grow at their best in the canyon and whatever you may have suffered today, however harshly life may have dealt with you, if you bring your wounded heart to Him, He will change your calamities into 'capital.'" Paul had such a wound. He was pierced with a thorn. He ran with hot eagerness into the presence of God and asked to be restored. Thrice he said he sought the Lord that he might be whole, but the Lord did not grant his request, but He did something better - He touched that forbidding thorn and it burst into blossom and Paul became so that he declared, "Will I rather glory in my infirmities that the power of Christ may rest upon me."
So He will do for all thorn-pierced souls that have the faith to give Him a chance and who too will sing with the Psalmist, "It is good for me to have been in trouble."