"He also helping together by prayer." Paul was engaged in a great enterprise, he wanted helpers. He was pressing a gigantic campaign, he needed fellow soldiers. He was committed to a colossal task, he seeks fellow laborers. The task that has enlisted all his unmeasured powers is one that is altogether worthy. He is not spending himself uselessly. He has committed himself to the very highest possible. He is seeking to carry out the last command of his Lord to disciple the nations. He is seeking to bring about the answer to that mighty prayer, thy kingdom come, thy will be done. And this is the dearest longing of the heart of God. This is an undertaking worth the blood of Christ. And it is the one big business of the church of Jesus Christ in the world to-day.

Paul worked at this stupendous undertaking hopefully. He believed that it was possible of accomplishment. He believed it because he knew that God never set us to the doing of tasks that he knew could never be accomplished. In the beginning when God put this world into the hands of a man his word to him was, "have dominion." At that time he was a long way from dominion. He seemed almost at the rear of the possession. But all the needed resources were at his command. He had all the electricity then that he has to-day. He had all the steam power then that he has to-day. The same heavens through which we fly hung over him. And little by little he learned to use what God had put at his disposal till to-day he is in some measure the master of earth and sea and air. He has conquered. He has taken possession. He is having dominion. I am sure that infinitely greater conquests are ahead of us, but we have already triumphed beyond our dreams. If you had said twenty years ago that by now we would be flying in comparative safety few would have believed. We have been slow to believe in our possibilities.

You remember how centuries ago Daedalus, made wings for himself and Icarus with which they were to fly home. When they were fitted on and they were ready to start, you recall how the father warned the son that he was not to fly too high. Else the sun would melt the wax and his wings would fall to pieces. He warning was disregarded and the daring young aviator fell to his death in the sea. Man was not to look too high. He was not to expect too much. He was to take a safe middle course.

If this has been our tendency in the material realm, it has been double so in the realm of the spiritual. We have been afraid to believe the great promises that God has left us. We have been afraid to utilize the resources that he has placed at his disposal. We have not dared to possess our possessions. God has committed to our hands the gigantic task of carrying out his purposes in this world. He has called us to bring the kingdom to be a reality. That means that he has made it possible for us to do exactly that great thing. And our danger is, not that we will fly too high, but that we will fly so low that the dust and dirt will clog our machinery and blind our vision.

Now, I am rejoicing that just at this time our two great Methodisms are setting themselves to the great task of carrying out the commands of our Lord with a seriousness and earnestness that we have never known before. We are seeking to enroll thousands of intercessors and tithers. We are seeking new missionaries and preachers. We are seeking a new and fuller service. We are seeking millions of money to be put at the disposal of our Lord. The movement is well timed. Peace has just come. Many have looked upon the coming of peace as the panacea for all ills. Many have thought that it would bring Utopia. Many have dreamed that with the laying down of our arms the New Jerusalem would come at once down to men. But that is destined to prove a vain hope. On the contrary, we are going to find more of restlessness and dissatisfaction in the days that are just ahead than in the days that are just behind. The future is going to be full of disappointment and disillusionment and danger. A mighty, spiritual, Christ-led Church is going to be needed in the near tomorrow as almost never before. Such a church, I believe, God is going to provide for himself through the Centenary Movement.
Now, you are members of the Church. You are committed to the task to which the church committed. You have accepted the Lordship of Jesus. What is to be your attitude toward his plan of world conquest? What are you going to do with this plan that seeks to make Christ## the universal King. There will be those who will oppose it. There will be those who will think that they are doing enough by keeping up their own home church. Whenever a church begins to confine its interests within its own four walls that church is already on the way to the cemetery and deserves that the procession move lively. No church can live simply for itself.

Then there are those who will simply be indifferent. They will only stand on the sideline and look. Possibly they will contribute a little criticism. But the enterprise will rise and rush and sweep like a mountain torrent and they will lie high and dry like an elevated piece of driftwood and will never know the thrill and the joy of having a part in it.

But there are those who will join the fine comradship to which Paul is summoning us in the text, they will become helpers. "Ye also helping isn't that a fine word, helping. Unless we have utterly spoiled ourselves we all want to help. It is an instinct of humanity. Did you ever notice how eager your little child is to help when there is a task to be done about the house. How often have you allowed him to be in the way as you were lifting something because you saw the passion to help was upon him and you did not want to disappoint him. We want to help. We want to bless. "Make use of me."

Paul not only summons them to the high task of helping, but he tells them how they may help. Now, there are many ways in which we may help in this great task that confronts the church. There are many ways in which we can assist in the bringing in of the kingdom. But I want to speak to you of this mighty weapon that Paul recommends. I speak of it because, first, I think it is the most mighty that was ever put into human hands. Ye also helping says the great apostle by prayer.

Then prayer is a help. Then prayer is a means of doing good. Jesus Christ thought so. He believed it so strongly that he gave the best energy of his earthly life to just that task. His real battles in this world were prayer battles. Whenever you see the face of Christ in the crowd it is a face full of peace and calm. He is never disturbed, never perplexed, never tempest tossed are worried. But alone in prayer we find conflict. He does not sweat when he raises the dead. He sweats when he wrestles in prayer. He does not weep as he opens blind eyes. But he prays with strong crying and tears. Yes, his big battles were prayer battles. And now that he has gone up into glory. And now that all authority in heaven and in earth is committed to him he still fires himself to the task of intercession. Christ believes that prayer helps.

And this was the belief of Paul. He never wrote to but one church and that the backslidden church of Galatia that he did not ask their prayer. He believed that the prayer of the most lowly slave could help to anoint his lips with grace and power. Peter believed that prayer helped. Wesley believed it. Gladstone believed it. Lincoln believed it. Our President believes it. The great generals that won the war believe it. Yes, there are millions today who really, vitally believe that prayer helps. They believe it not as a theory simply. They believe it because they have tried it. If you want to be convinced that prayer helps ## I have a test that will prove it beyond a peradventure. Pray. That will convince you just as sure as God lives.

And so Paul calls upon these Corinthian saints to help by prayer. But Paul, they live in a most corrupt city. I know, but they can pray. But many of them are ignorant. I know, but they can pray. But some of them are down trodden slaves. I know it, says Paul, but they can pray. But they can't sing, some of them. They can't preach. They can't teach. I know, but there is not one but can pray. How wonderful that the greatest means of helping that even Christ has ever been able to discover has been put alike into the hands of
All men, whoever I am God will give me the key to his eternal treasure house, as he gave it to Paul if I will only pay the price. Here is a weapon you can wield without wealth, without eloquence, without learning, without health. And it is a help, an infinite help.

In what way does prayer help? First, it helps the man who prays. Is there a man who doubts it? If every one who knew that to be true would say amen at once it would boom like a cannonade and shake like an earthquake. That amen would fall from the lips of kings, it would also tremble upon the lips of a million faded and fading grandmothers. My mother would say amen. Your mother would say it. They have tried it when the rain was on the roof and the night was full of tempest. They have tried it when hands they loved were growing cold and pulse were getting still. They know that prayer helps.

But how does prayer help? I tell you, Prayer makes God a reality. I wonder if you have been so long prayerless that you God is a dream God. I wonder if he seems afar from you to-day. I wonder if the only proof you have of his reality is when you see his foot prints in the rocks are among the stars. I wonder if you find him only in the round world and the blue sky and the living air and not in the heart of man. What do you need more than a new sense of God? Did you ever know the joy of an answered prayer? What was the joy of it? Not so much that you had got what you sought. The big thing was that it made God real to you. When I go away I always try to bring my life something when I return. But I do not expect the joy of my homecoming to be locked in the present.

Yes, prayer makes God real. You are feverish and tossed and rest­less, you need his touch. Prayer would help you. It was prayer that made Paul quiet in the midst of the storm. He had a sense of God. The night before Peter was to be executed he slept in the prison in his chains. How did he do it? Prayer had brought him a sense of God. Daniel was at rest among the lions. Nebuchadnezzar's thrones and chariots had been stripped of their splendor, but prayer had brought him a sense of God. I saw my mother shout in the frosting hour that ever came to a woman's soul when she had prayed till she had a sense of God. Prayer makes God real to you.

Prayer brings you into sympathy with the plans and purposes of God. The men who see through God's eyes are the men who pray. Why does that struggling man yonder in Scotland say, give me or I die. He has come to share in the passion of Christ. What is the secret of Brainerd, of Carey, of all the men who have entered into God's plans. They were praying men. All of them. It is as they minister to the Lord, that is as they pray that the Holy Ghost gives orders for the sending forth of the first missionaries. Prayer brings us into sympathy with the mind and purpose of God.

Prayer brings power. The Spirit is given in answer to prayer. It is the well worn path to spiritual greatness. As Jesus prayed the fashion of his countenance was altered. He was transfigured. And I have seen transfigured faces and transfigured lives that have resulted from prayer. Yes, prayer helps the man who prays. And in helping him it helps the world. For the first step in doing more to save the world is in being more. Christ said I pray not for the world, but for them. But the end sought in his prayer was what the world might believe.

But prayer helps others. There is no greater service you can render a friend than to really pray for him. More things are wrought by prayer than this world dreams of. Let thy voice rise like a fountain etc. Is your friend unsaved? You can help him by prayer. I have seen it tried. Are more workers needed? God will raise them up in answer to prayer. When he looked upon the multitude that had not a shepherd he said pray ye. God sends laborers, toilers, men who give themselves without stint, in answer to prayer. Where do we get our missionaries, where do we get our preachers, as a rule? From homes and church that are vital and warm through prayer.

Then prayer brings the blessing of God upon the laborer. If you want your preacher to be a man who will be to you and to the church and to the community a blessing unspeakable, pray for him. You can do nothing greater or higher. If you want God's soldiers to triumph anywhere,
pray for them. Their energies of God are left loose to answer to prayer. God's
will is shown and testified by which I have spoken.

Now there is a weapon that you can use and use effectually.
And are you going to do about it? You can help if you will. You can help
in prayer. You can help your friends to help God. You can help
that growth to do good and do it not by the help of the
ancient prophet, when he said, "Let me ask one thing of God
against the hold in rearing the earth for you. And this is our aim to-day, the
which we have been guilty or yesterday that are we going to do about
it tomorrow? Will you come to terms with God and your own and conscience
and seriously to begin living up to your privileges and responsibility?
I am not saying that you ought to because it is easy. It is not easy. I am not saying
that you ought to because it will not take any of your time. I will take
me. I am not urging this upon you because it will cost you nothing. I am
urging it upon you because if you will use it as you can it will make you an
unsurpassed blessing, that you can do you ought to do. That
courage to do you must do not stand, guilty before God of having opened
your mouth to violate his commands.

I am talking to men in many different walks of life. Some of
you are in business, some of you are in the halls of Congress. I ask
you this question: who are you and to whom does your life belong? You
are your own. Your life was given to you that you might serve the
highest service of prayer. That right here you find a single man of you, in the church or
outside the church, what right have you to refuse to help simply because you
are unwilling to put yourself in the forefront. You are not refusing, I am
sure, because you think the enterprise is small and unimportant. Remember we are
upon for the conquest of a world. It will cost you something to help
in prayer, but it is the goal at which you aim worth it. It will cost you something
to assist in leading that unsaved brother into the kingdom.
AN AMAZING BOAST

Hence I never lose heart. II. Corinthians 4:16 (Moffat)

"I never lose heart." It is not necessary to define that word.

We all know what it is to lose heart, both from our own experience and from that of others. When a boy we had a neighbor, Zan Pigg by name, who eked out a meager existence on a little hillside farm at the head of White Oak Creek. Though Zan could calculate interest with the accuracy of a computer, he could neither read nor write. Zan explained the tragedy of his ignorance in these words: "I went to school for three days but I just couldn't get the blank stuff in my head". There you have it. Zan had failed because he lost heart.

Part I

Why does this boast of St. Paul amaze us?

1. It amazes us because losing heart is so nearly universal. All sorts and conditions of men lose heart. It is the experience of the dull and stupid. They don't know any better. Some time ago I read of a moron who spent all his time spinning tops. The wise author said that there were days when this dull worker went home with a sense of defeat because his top had failed to spin aright.

But if the stupid lose heart, so do the wise and understanding. They know so much to lose heart about. The man who calls himself the Preacher in Ecclesiastes holds a secure place among the intelligentsia. But that fact did not keep him from losing heart. According to his own confession it made him the more hopeless. In spite of his great gifts, he looks with dull-eyed pessimism at his utterly crooked situation declaring that it can never be made straight.

Weaklings lose heart. It would be hard to find anyone who does not sometime look toward the heights and long to climb. These often
make a beginning but fail to arrive because they lose heart. That scribe who came to Jesus with such charming enthusiasm, when given to understand that discipleship might make him more homeless than the foxes and more destitute than the birds, so completely lost heart that we hear of him no more.

But the strong also lose heart. One day I came upon a man who was tearfully telling God that he himself was the only good man in the world and that he hoped he would not be in the world long. What was the matter with Elijah? Certainly he was no weakling. On the contrary he seemed made of reinforced concrete. He had even dared to defy Jezebel. He had also put his mighty hand on the shoulder of a tottering nation and so steadied it as to save it from disaster. What is wrong with Elijah? He has lost heart.

Then we lose heart over all sorts of things. There seems nothing too big or too little to cause us to lose heart. We are depressed as we look at our present world. We are faint hearted about our own nation, about our schools, about our homes. Many husbands and wives are so disappointed in each other that they are ready to quit. Parents are disappointed in their children. The rebellion of youth is world wide. In our colleges and universities the faculty is called upon to sit at the feet of the students. Naturally these youths are desperately disappointed in parents and teachers. Surely ours is not a day of radiant hope.

Too often we are most keenly disappointed in ourselves. Life hasn't worked out for us as we dreamed that it would. Some who became members of the Church with high hopes, confess bitter disappointment. Many in the pew have lost heart about the pulpit. This is true of the pulpit. Sadder still the pulpit seems to have
An Amazing Boast

How did he manage?

2. If Paul amazes us because his claim is so nearly unique, he also amazes us because of its importance. In never losing heart, Paul is claiming a treasure that is a fundamental necessity. I dare say that more people fail in every kind of human endeavor from losing heart than from any other cause. If we keep a stout heart, victory may be possible in the most unfavorable circumstances. But if we lose heart, defeat is sure whatever our circumstances.

This is the case for a variety of reasons. First, losing heart slows us down. It makes us walk with lagging steps. I was driving the other day and my car came to a slow stop. There was nothing wrong with the machinery. It had simply run out of power. To lose heart is to lose driving power.

Then losing heart is a killjoy. A discouraged man is a wretched man. "The joy of the Lord is our strength." Joy helps us to keep going. That is vastly important. Sometimes this loss of joy becomes so oppressive that we fling out of life altogether. Looking one yesterday into the face of a suicide I questioned in my heart, "Why did you quit before the whistle blew?" The answer from his dumb lips was this, "I lost heart".

To lose heart is to change from an asset to a liability. On board a storm battered little merchant vessel of the long ago, there were 376 men. Of these, 375 had lost heart. One who was present writes, "All hope that we should be saved was taken away". But one man stood up with a courage born of faith and shouted, "Be of good cheer". So what? His courage was so grandly contagious that he saved every man on board".

But if courage is contagious, so is cowardice. Chicken Littlem
in that very wise and silly story, was no great personality. But she was so obsessed by panic that she was able to stampede every fowl in the barnyard. So contagious was her cowardice that she ushered every member of her fear-filled company into the pantry of Mr. Fox-Lox. To lose heart is to become a liability.

Part II

But if Paul kept a stout heart, how did he do it? Naturally he did it not simply because of, but also in spite of. What were some of the foes he had to face?

1. He was pitted against a hard day. Every day is difficult. But Paul's day was conspicuously so. This keen-eyed man was not blind to the grim ugliness of his world. At times he sounds like the rankest of pessimists. In the first chapter of his letter to the Romans, for instance, he gives a glimpse of the rotten and rotting society of his day. The sight was so ugly that three times over he affirms of these depraved souls, "God gave them up".

It is not easy to be optimistic in our day. In some areas we have made amazing progress. Yet a glance at the newspaper any morning tends to take the heart out of us. Ours is the day of the "new morality". But the horror of this new morality is that it is impossible to distinguish its order from that of the old immorality which yesterday flung whole nations onto the cinder pile of burnt-out and blasted things. Such has been its uplift that our crime rate is appalling. And more appalling still, 48% of those arrested for major crimes in 1965 were under eighteen.

Ours is also a day in which many confess their loss of faith seemingly with gleeful boldness. How amazing is the fact that when one displays for the millionth time that slick old chestnut,
fingered by countless centuries, "God is dead", so many seem to accept it as a new revelation. After the manner of the angels of the long ago they shout to all bewildered souls "Behold I bring you glad tidings of great joy. God is dead". Indeed we too are pitted against a difficult time.

2. Paul refused to lose heart in spite of opposition, in spite of the bitterest of criticism. Not only so, but this opposition broke into violence again and again. Look at this bit from his diary. "Five times I have received at the hands of the Jews forty lashes less one. Three times I have been beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times have I been shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been adrift at sea; on frequent journeys.... Through many a sleepless night and hunger and thirst. Knocked down, but never knocked out." By this time Paul's body was little more than an empty shell.

3. Paul kept heart in spite of physical handicaps. He had a thorn in the flesh. What that thorn was we do not know. Perhaps it was epilepsy. Think of the embarrassment of preaching a Christ of infinite power and being gripped by a seizure even during such a sermon.

Added to his sickness was the handicap of the calendar. Paul speaks of himself as "Paul the aged". Now while I do not look upon old age with the slightest horror, I hasten to confess that the years, while giving us much if we are willing to accept, also take something from us. "Maintain the spiritual glow," urges Paul. Certainly, since that is necessary to our highest usefulness. But such is not so easy when one is old. Yet Paul the sick and aged declares "I never lose heart".
4. He refused to lose heart in spite of failure. Paul had many amazing victories, but he did not win every battle. "I read with keen interest your letters to Corinth and also that thank-you note to the Church at Philippi," I said to him one day. "But I failed to find one letter in which I am especially interested, that is the one to the Church at Athens".

"There is no such letter," Paul answered sadly. "I went to that intellectual capital with high hopes. I especially sought to appeal to the intelligentsia. But while there was some fruit, it was so meager that no Church was established."

But Paul's greatest failure was with his own people. The fact that he had been such a strict and zealous Jew perhaps led him to believe that he would be especially fitted to reach the Jews. But that was not the case. Generally they rejected both him and his message. This so broke his heart that he tells us frankly that he sometimes caught himself wishing that he might become accursed from God for his brethren, his kinsmen according to the flesh. But in spite of all he declared, "I never lose heart".

Part III

Then above all Paul did not lose heart because of...Why?

1. He had a genuine and growing experience of God. He declared that the same God who had said in the beginning, "Let there be light," had shined into his own heart "to give the light of knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ". This tremendous experience became a growing experience. "Rise and stand upon thy feet for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose to make thee a minister and a witness both to these things which thou hast seen and of those things in which I will appear unto thee." Paul was constantly passing from "these things" to "those things". He was
There was also another, best beloved.

One day by chance I met him on the street, if not in the street, then in some room, where he was sitting, smoking tobacco, and said, "You should not have come to me today."

"By all means," I answered. So we sat out, and the next day I failed to meet him. "I am going to see you again in a few days," I told him.

Rest my dear friend. The beautiful soul and the high name you loved and honored, I want, see him today. So we parted. Four months later, suddenly there came to me a personal letter from our friend. "And these words, The Lord gave me money to the thousand, two hundred thousand for me to refresh. I was not ashamed of my shame, but when he arrived in Rome he searched for me eagerly and found me. "The fact that my name was written made my face burn, I saw it once a burning face, and I am sure of it, that though some slept, he heard Paul, even from the least friends, even from the most.
heartened by a vivid and growing experience of God through Christ.

2. Paul kept up heart because he was being constantly renewed and reinforced. "Though our outward nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed every day." Paul had learned both to give, and what is equally important, to receive. Having given all to God, he was constantly receiving from God.

Sometimes God sent this reinforcement through human hands. When Paul found himself suspected and rejected by the saints of Jerusalem, he met this man on the street whom he knew. Barnabas came to him as a son of encouragement. Then Paul was constantly being reinforced directly by the Power of God, especially through prayer. It was Jesus who said "men ought always to pray and never lose heart". He was sure that prayer and losing heart were never long-time roommates. To this Isaiah utters a firm "Amen." "Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted; but they that wait for the Lord shall renew their strength." Paul kept heart through daily renewal.

3. Finally Paul refused to lose heart because he was sure of victory. He was sure that he was not fighting a losing fight. His final word, even about his own rebellious people, is this, "So all Israel shall be saved". Was he right or wrong? That remains to be seen. But he was the stronger and braver for believing it.

Years ago in the Middle West a father was overtaken by a blinding blizzard. For desperate hours he fought his way toward home. At last in utter exhaustion he fell on his face for his final sleep. When they found his frozen body next day his outstretched hand was only three or four feet from his own door.

Thus it was not the blizzard that killed him. He lost heart. If we by the grace of God defeat this face we are absolutely sure to reach home.
Why were they so surprised that this king was wearing sack cloth? They were surprised because of who he was. They thought of a king, he was lifted above their ills. He lived in a palace, and they were living in hovels. He doubtless had plenty to eat, and they were starving. He was of royal blood, and they were not even related to royalty. They did not feel that one so highly placed in power and position could suffer even as they suffered. They forgot what we sometimes forget, that we are all human. That however high placed we man be, however lofty our position, and however great our wealth, however much we may surround ourselves by abundance, there is no fencing out heartache. Everybody has his own bit of sack cloth. This king had his. These people did not realize that he was as human as they themselves; that if one pricked him he would bleed; that if one broke his heart he would sob. They were surprised because of who it was that was wearing the sack cloth.

Second they were surprised because up to this time he had hidden his sack cloth. Why he hid it, we are not told. I think we can easily guess. He hid it because he did not wish to add to the burden of his already heartbroken people. They were suffering enough without being made to enter into his suffering. And so in order to keep up their morale, in order to make their load a little lighter, he hid his sack cloth within upon his flesh. He never reminded them when they were whining or complaining or finding fault that he himself might be suffering with and for them. He wore his sack cloth out of sight.

Now there is something fine about that. We There is a certain type of character who delights in displaying his sack cloth. It
is a bit childish. I was raised on a backwoods farm. For about half of the year it was my privilege to go bare footed. It has been worth much to me, I think, across the years. My feet are still as good as they were at sixteen. I toughened them up by this process, of using them and them alone in my younger years.) Now this going bare foot is not all a bed of roses. Sometimes I would have a stone bruise. Always I would be stubbing some particular toe. That stubbed toe was not an asset, except in times of crisis.

Some days when we would have company and I felt that the conversation was lagging somewhat, I could always bring back a little life by displaying my own suffering. I could show the guests my wounded toe. That would break the monotony and start the conversation off in a new vein. Later on I outgrew that and no longer had stubbed toes, but I soon had the privilege of an operation. So, of course, across the years I have been still been able to make more or less conversation by a display, verbally at least, of my wound.

Now displaying my wounded toe was not so bad, because I was a child. But it does become a bit pathetic if we keep it up. I have known a few invalids whose lives were sweet and beautiful with the beauty of the Lord. Then I have known others who were as intensely suffering as selfish as any gambler at Monte Carlo. Their one claim to distinction seemed to be that they suffered more than anybody else. Any indication that they were not the greatest sufferers in the world met with resentment. A bright young chap said to one such in my congregation, one day, "You are looking very well this morning." And it was an insult. She said, "I just feel terrible." There are those who love to display their wounds.
But there are others, thank God, who hide their own sorrows for the sake of others. They will not bid for sympathy. They will not tell how harshly life has treated them. I have even known public speakers to fall into this vile habit, to begin a speech, for instance, by telling what a tooth ache they had last night, or how the baby kept them awake, or how some other evil fell upon them. And it does two things. They are saying first of all, don't expect anything. If you came out expecting me to say anything you are going to be disappointed. A second thing it meant was pity me. I am worthy of pity. Be sorry for me. There is something cowardly and childish about that. And yet there is an element of that in almost all of us. This king would not add to the burden of others by calling on them to carry his. He did not say to them, "don't you talk about your suffering. You're not the only one that suffers." He was one of those souls that we meet from time to time, one of those hearts that break and give no sign save tightening lips and whiteningresses.

They were amazed when they saw the sack cloth because he had never mentioned it.

Third, they were amazed because up to this time it would seem that he had given them no offering of bread. That he had let them satisfy their hunger as best they might. This he had done in all probability because it was the best he could do. He was as poverty stricken as themselves. And so because he had not made them any material gifts, because he had not satisfied their hunger for bread, they no longer expected any help from him. They thought that his refusal to help them was possibly because he was not greatly concerned. That he could help them if he cared enough, but he simply did not care enough.
And now they saw this badge of care within upon his flesh, that he was wearing sackcloth. And they said that in spite of the fact that he has given us no material food, yet he does care.

Part III  
What did this sight of the sackcloth do for these people? Well, it still did not give them a crumb of bread. After they had seen that sackcloth, hunger still gnawed like a rat at the pit of every empty stomach. And yet the king had fed them with another kind of food. There is a hunger that is not of the belly kind that is banished by bacon and beans. There is a hunger of the heart. There is a hunger that is satisfied by having somebody stand with you who has an understanding heart.

As they looked upon this hidden sackcloth they became sure for the first time that their king really did care, that he was suffering with and for them. That his failure to help materially was not born of a lack of interest, or the lack of sympathy. That was in itself a lift. That was the very bread of life for their hungry hearts.

Lowell had the idea when he pictured his highly placed knight going in search of the Holy Grail. There was only one blot on the landscape, and that was an old leprous beggar that asked him for a bit of crust. The knight did not spurn him. He did not spit upon him. He did not say "I have no money to throw away." Instead he gave him a coin that would have passed as legal tender anywhere, real gold. But the beggar left the coin in the dust. "Better to me the poor man's crust, though he turned me empty from his door." He gave me only the material. There was no heart in his gift. It is the gift with heart in it that counts. That is what made the deed of Mary so priceless and so eternally beautiful. Jesus is being given a feast in the home
An Amazing Discovery

Once upon a time, in a certain redeemed city. Among those present were his intimate friends. Martha, that greatest of all waitresses, is superintending the feast. Mary, who has no skill in such matters, feels shut out. But her heart is too full not to have a part and she hurries away to bring the one treasure, a bottle of priceless perfume. And she breaks that bottle and pours the contents upon the head of this Lord, to the utter indignation of His disciples who find an expression of their resentment in the words of Judas, "This was a waste. It might have been sold for three hundred dollars and the contents given to the poor". What was the matter with Judas? He had no scales for weighing such delicate wealth. He knew no way of helping except through material gifts; through material bread, and material clothing. But Jesus said it was no waste, that to him it was priceless, that it was so beautiful that Mary would walk, in a sense hand and hand with Him, through all the centuries, that what she had done would never by forgotten because she had given a gift that led Him to the cross and made the burden of crucifixion less hellish and less bitter.

These people found help in the sympathy of their king. Not only did this revelation of the sack cloth do something for the people, but it did something for the king himself. I am sure that he received more from it even than those whom he was seeking to help, and those whom he was seeking to serve. In taking on the burdens of others, he did not find his own burden more crushing. He rather found it the lighter. That is always the case. If we take on our brother's burden, we find in that very act that we have been relieved of our own.

That beautiful story of the chap that was hot and restless and he was out in search of the lovely little blossom called Heart's Ease. He searched for it diligently, but he went down a dirt road hopefully
but he soon barked his shins on the other man's burden, and so he turned and travelled another road. And again he came to that objectionable obstacles, his brother's burden. This he did for days until by and by in sheer desperation he said, "I am going to continue this road and that I may continue it I am going to lift my brother's burden." And low as he lifted it, to his utter amazement, he found right where that burden had rested the lovely blossom which he sought, the blossom of Heart's Ease.

One of our levier poets found that in his own experience.

How often, of how often in the days that had gone by
Had I stood on the bridge at midnight and gazed on the wave and sky.

Oftentimes, oh how often had I wished that the ebbing tide
Would bear me away on its bosom out of the ocean wide and wide.
But my heart was hot and restless and life was full of care,
And the burden that lay upon me seemed greater than I could bear,
But now it has fallen from me, it lies buried in the sea,
And only the sorrow of others cast a shadow over me.

How had this man got rid of his burden? Not throwing it down and then taking up the burden of his brother. It was the other way in around. As he took up the burden of his brother, his own fell in the sea. As we dry the tears of another, it is amazing how our own cheeks lose their painful rain. As we undertake to heal the wounds of another, it is amazing how our own cease to bleed.

Years ago I read this story. A gentleman said he watched a little company coming out from the mud and blood of the trenches in the First World War. They had been in it a long time, longer than was expected of them. So now they were utterly exhausted. He said there wasn't a sound among them as they struggled through the mud, except
the sloshing of the mud about their feet. But by and by there was a change as some man in the distance began to sing, and he had a fine lilting voice. And he said, "I was curious to see who it was that was singing when everybody else was silent." And he said, "I moved down the line until I got sight of him. And there he was. He was carrying his own soldier's kit and also the kit of his comrade whom he assisted now and then. In addition he had draped about him his neck a half starved yellow dog that he was carrying out to give a chance. All others were utterly silent. The one man who sang was the man who was carrying the heaviest load.

This king who wore his hidden sack cloth was stronger and better than himself because he was sharing the suffering of his people. Though this old story may seem ancient beyond your interest, it tells an event, of course, that never occurred but this once. Yet there is a sense in which it is not ancient at all. It is more modern and up to date than the last newscast to which you listened. It is something that is taking place in our day. Because, as these ancient people, we are all under siege. We are all shut in by some kind of foe. The foe that haunts me and dogs my steps, may not be the one that's dogging yours. But we are all hampered. We are all hungry of heart.

It's a significant fact that possibly the best known English Psychiatrist, in telling the reason for his paying us a visit, stated it this way. "They are the most wealthy people in the world, the best fixed financially, and physically, and yet the most perplexed and worried, and the most unhappy." We are under siege by a sense of Godlessness, and the anxiety and the weakness, and the sense of thwarted purpose that comes with a loss of religious faith.
AN AMAZING BOAST

Hence I never lose heart. I. Corinthians 4:16 (Moffat)

"I never lose heart.

It is not necessary to define that word. We all know what it is to lose heart, both from our own experience and from that of others. When a boy we had a neighbor, Zan Pigg by name, who eked out a meager existence on a little hillside farm at the head of White Oak Creek. Though Zan could calculate interest with the accuracy of a computer, he could neither read nor write. Zan explained the tragedy of his ignorance in these words: "I went to school for three days but I just couldn't get the blank stuff in my head". There you have it. Zan had failed because he lost heart.

Part I

Why does this boast of St. Paul amaze us?

1. It amazes us because losing heart is so nearly universal. All sorts and conditions of men lose heart. It is the experience of the dull and stupid. They don't know any better. Some time ago I read of a moron who spent all his time spinning tops. The wise author said that there were days when this dull worker went home with a sense of defeat and failure because his top had failed to spin aright.

But if the stupid lose heart, so do the wise and understanding. They know so much to lose heart about. The man who calls himself the Preacher in Ecclesiastes holds a secure place among the intelligentsia. But that fact did not keep him from losing heart. According to his own confession it made him the more hopeless. In spite of his great gifts, he looks with dull-eyed pessimism at his utterly crooked situation declaring that it can never be made straight.

Weaklings lose heart. It would be hard to find anyone who does not sometime look toward the heights and long to climb. These often make a beginning but fail to arrive because they lose heart. That
experience. It is also a tragedy of middle life. The prophet knew that when he prayed the Lord to revive his work in the midst of the years. It is also the experience of youth in life's green spring. Ours is a day when pessimism is popular, but is not the burden of the elders alone. In proportion to their number, I dare say one would find more who have lost heart that are still on the sunny side of twenty than on the shady side of eighty. All sorts of condition of men lost heart."

Then we lose heart over all sorts of things. There is nothing too big or too little for us to lose heart over. We are depressed as we look at our present world. It seems to hang over hell every morning. We are faint hearted about our own nation, about our Church, about our homes. Many husbands and wives are so disappointed in each other that they are ready to quit. Parents are disappointed in their children. Children are desperately disappointed in parents. The university is not always a place of radiant hope. The students, usually the most satisfied, find the going too hard.

Then we are often most keenly disappointed in ourselves. Life hasn't worked out for us as we dreamed that it would. Some who became members of the Church with high hopes, confess bitter disappointment. The pew has lost heart. This is also too often true of the pulpit. There are ministers who no longer believe in the worth of preaching. They have forgotten that in the New Testament preaching and salvation are related to each other as cause and effect. Many of our leaders might receive a new charge.

That packs no surprise because there is nothing more common in our day than faded hopes. Yet here stands this tremendously honest and earnest man making this bold assertion, "I never lose heart". How did he manage?

Part II

Paul kept up heart both because of and in spite of. If we learn
scribe who came to Jesus with such charming enthusiasm, when given to understand that discipleship might make him more homeless than the foxes and more destitute than the birds, so completely lost heart that we hear of him no more.

But the strong also lose heart. One day I came upon a man who was tearfully telling God that he himself was the only good man in the world and that he hoped he would not be in the world long.

what was the matter with Elijah? He was so strong that he seemed made of reinforced concrete. He had even dared to defy Jezebel. He had put his mighty hand on the shoulder of a tottering nation and so steadied it as to save it from disaster. What is wrong with Elijah? He has lost heart.

2. If Paul amazes us because his claim is so nearly unique, he also amazes us because of its importance. In never losing heart, Paul is grasping a treasure that is a fundamental necessity. I dare say that more people fail in every kind of human endeavor from losing heart than from any other cause. If we keep a stout heart, victory may be possible in the most unfavorable circumstances. But if we lose heart, defeat is sure however favorable our circumstances.

This is the case for a variety of reasons. (1) Losing heart slows us down. It makes us walk with lagging steps. I was driving the other day and my car came to a slow stop. There was nothing wrong with the machinery. It had simply run out of power. To lose heart is to lose driving power.

(2) Then losing heart is a killjoy. A discouraged man is a wretched man. "The joy of the Lord is your strength." It helps us to keep going. That is important, because it is our strength for winning others. This loss of joy sometimes becomes so oppressive that we fling out of life altogether. Looking one yesterday into the
face of a suicide I questioned in my heart "Why did you quit before the whistle blew?" The answer from his dumb lips was this, "I lost heart".

(2) To lose heart is to change from an asset to a liability. On board a storm battered little merchant vessel of the long ago, there were 278 men. Of these, 275 had lost heart. One who was present said, "All hope that we should be saved was taken away." But one man stood up with a courage born of faith and shouted, "Be of good cheer". So what? His courage was so grandly contagious that he saved every man on board.

But if courage is contagious, so is cowardice. Chicken Little, in that very wise and silly story, was no great personality. But she was so obsessed by panic that she was able to stampede every fowl in the barnyard. So contagious was her cowardice that she ushered every member of her fear-filled company into the pantry of Mr. Foxy Lox. To lose heart is to become a liability.

Part II

But if Paul kept a stout heart, how did he do it? Naturally he did it not simply because of, but also in spite of. What were some of the foes he had to face?

1. He was pitted against a hard day. Every day is difficult. But Paul's day was conspicuously so. This keen-eyed man was not blinded to the grim ugliness of his world. At times he sounds like the rankest of pessimists. In the first chapter of his letter to the Romans, for instance, he gives a glimpse of the rotten and rotting society of his day. The sight was so ugly that three times over he affirms of these depraved souls, "God gave them up".

It is not easy to be optimistic in our day. In some areas we have made amazing progress. Yet a glance at the newspaper any
morning tends to take the heart out of us. Ours is the day of the "new morality". But it is impossible to distinguish the order from that of the old morality which yesterday flung whole nations onto the cinder pile of burnt-out and blasted things. Such has been the uplift that our crime rate is appalling. And more appalling still, 48% of those arrested for major crimes in 1964 were under eighteen.

Ours is also a day in which many confess their loss of faith with gleeful boldness. How amazing is the fact that when one displays for the millionth time that slick old chestnut, fingered by countless centuries, "God is dead", so many seem to accept it as a new revelation. After the manner of the angels of the long ago they shout to all bewildered souls "Behold I bring you glad tidings of great joy. God is dead". Indeed we too are pitted against a difficult time.

2. Paul refused to lose heart in spite of opposition, in spite of the bitterest of criticism. Not only so, but this opposition broke into violence again and again. Look at this bit from his diary. "Five times I have received at the hands of the Jews forty lashes less one. Three times I have been beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times I have been shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been adrift at sea; on frequent journeys.... Through many a sleepless night and hunger and thirst. Knocked down, but never knocked out."

3. Paul kept heart in spite of physical handicaps. He had a thorn in the flesh. What that thorn was we do not know. Perhaps it was epilepsy. Think of the shame of preaching a Christ of infinite power and being gripped by a seizure even during such a sermon.

Added to his sickness was the handicap of the calendar. Paul speaks of himself as 'Paul the aged.' Now while I do not look upon
old age with the slightest horror, I hasten to confess that the years, while giving us much if we are willing to accept, also take something from us. "Maintain the spiritual glow," urges Paul. Certainly, since that is necessary to our highest usefulness. But such is not so easy when one is old. Yet Paul the sick and aged declares "I never lose heart".

4. He refused to lose heart in spite of failure. Paul had many amazing victories, but he did not win every battle. "I read with keen interest your letters to Corinth and also that thank-you note to the Church at Philippi," I said to him one day. "But I failed to find one letter in which I am especially interested, and that is the one to the Church at Athens."

"There is no such letter," Paul answered sadly. "I went to that intellectual capital with high hopes. I especially sought to appeal to the intelligentsia. But while there was some fruit, it was so meager that no Church was established."

But Paul's greatest failure was with his own people. The fact that he had been such a strict and zealous Jew perhaps led him to believe that he would be especially fitted to reach the Jews. But that was not the case. Generally they rejected both him and his message. This so broke his heart that he tells us frankly that he sometimes caught himself wishing that he might become accursed from God for his brethren, his kinsmen according to the flesh. But in spite of all he declared, "I never lose heart".

Part III

Then above all Paul did not lose heart because of. Why?

1. He had a genuine and growing experience of God. He declared that the same God who had said in the beginning, "Let there be light," had shined into his own heart "to give the light of knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ." This tremendous experience
became a growing experience. "Rise and stand upon they feet for I have appeared unto thee for this purpose to make thee a minister and a witness both to these things which thou hast seen and of those things in which I will appear unto you." Paul was constantly passing from "these things" to "those things". He was heartened by a vivid and growing experience of God through Christ.

2. Paul kept up heart because he was being constantly renewed and reinforced. "Though our outward nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed every day." Paul had learned both to give, and what is equally important, to receive. Having given all to God, he was constantly receiving from God.

Sometimes God sent this reinforcement through human hands. When Paul knew himself suspected and rejected by the Saints, Barnabas came to him as a son of encouragement. Then Paul was constantly being reinforced by the Power of God directly, through the Word, and through prayer. It was Jesus who said "men ought always to pray and never lose heart". He was sure that prayer and losing heart were never long-time roommates. To this Isaiah utters a firm "Amen!" "Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted; but they that wait for the Lord shall renew their strength." Paul kept heart through daily renewal.

3. Finally Paul refused to lost heart because he was sure of victory. He was sure that he was not fighting a losing fight. His final word, even about his own rebellious people, is this, "So all Israel shall be saved." Was he right or wrong? That remains to be seen. But he was the stronger and braver for believing it.

Years ago a father in the middle west lost his life in a blinding blizzard. When they found his frozen body, the outstretched hand was not three feet from his door. Thus it was not the blizzard that killed - he lost heart.
AN AMAZING BOAST

Hence I never lose heart - 2 Corinthians 4:16 (Moffat)

"I never lose heart." It is unnecessary to define that word. We all know what it is to lose heart, both from our own experiences and from that of others. When a boy we had a neighbor, Zan Pigg by name, who eked out a meager existence on a little hillside farm at the head of White Oak Creek. His fields were so steep that one felt they had set out to be perpendicular but had decided on a compromise at the last moment. Though Zan could calculate interest with the accuracy of an adding machine, he could neither read a word nor sign his name. Why this ignorance? Zan explained the tragedy in his own words. "I went to school for three days, but I just couldn't get the blank stuff in my head." There you have it. Zan had failed because he lost heart.

Part I

This boast of St. Paul is a thrill with surprise.

1. It amazes us in the first place because losing heart is so human. It is so nearly universal. All sorts and conditions of men lose heart. It is the experience of the most brilliant. The Preacher in Ecclesiastes held a firm position among the intelligentsia. But that fact did not add to his optimism. According to his own claim, it made him the more hopeless. In spite of his great gifts, he completely lost heart, declaring that his utterly crooked situation could never be made straight.

But this experience is not confined to the brilliant and gifted. The stupid, the mentally unfurnished, also lose heart. Sometimes ago I read of a Moron who spent all his time spinning a top. The wise author said that there were days when this dumb worker went
home with a sense of defeat and failure because his top had not spun well. Even this moron lost heart.

Weaklings lose heart. It would be hard to find anyone who did not sometimes look toward the heights and long to climb. Such often make a beginning, but they lose heart. That chap who came to Jesus pledging that he would follow Him at any cost, when given to understand that such dedication might make him more homeless than the foxes and more destitute than the birds, so completely lost heart that we hear of him no more.

But the strong also sometimes lose heart. One day I camp upon a great prophet who seemed made of reinforced concrete. This man had sprung into the light that plays about a throne at a single bound. He had even defied Jezebel and her hen-pecked husband. He had put his hand on the shoulder of a whole nation and so steadied it as to save it from disaster. When therefore I came upon this man and heard him declaring even to God that he himself was the only good man in the world and that he hoped he would not be in the world long, I knew that even Elijah had completely lost heart.

Old people lose heart. If they remain in the thick of the fight, they do so often with enthusiasms that have grown cold and with a strength that has become weakness. Worse still, too often they withdraw from the fight and thus increase their sense of failure. One of the surest ways to lose heart is to quit fighting. It is amazing how often depression melts away in the warmth of an effort to do some good in the world. It is just this loss of heart on the part of the aged that often makes them a burden, both to themselves and to others.

But if the aged lose heart, they have no corner on such a grim
his secret, we shall have to do the same. Look at some of the "in-spite-ofts" that Paul had to meet.

1. He kept up hope in spite of the fact that he was pitted against a difficult day. Every day is difficult, but Paul's day was conspicuously so. This keen eyed man was not blind to the grim facts of life. The writers of the Bible never were. No book faces up to the grim and awful in human nature with a greater candor. There are times when Paul himself sounded like the rankest of pessimists. In the first chapter of his letter to the Romans, he gives a glimpse of the rotten and rotting society of his day. Three times over he affirms of these depraved people "God gave them up". By this he does not mean that God in his anger had flung them away. But rather that God could not but reject them since they had turned their backs on Him. God himself can not give what we refuse to take.

It is not easy to be optimistic as we look at our own day. In some ways we have made amazing progress. We have not won in the field of race relations a complete victory, but we have gone in a very brief period since we began to take the matter seriously to heights that I would have thought impossible. Yet a glance at the morning paper any day tends to make one lose heart. God has pitted you and me against a difficult time. Paul kept courage in spite of the evils of his day.

2. He kept courage in spite of strenuous opposition. He had to endure the bitterest of criticism. He had to endure insults and slander. He had to endure cruel persecution. Listen to this bit out of his diary: "Five times I have received at the hands of the Jews forty lashes less one. Three times I have been beaten with rods; once I was stoned. Three times I have been shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from
rivers, in danger from robbers, in danger from my own people, danger from gentiles, danger in the cities, danger on sea, danger from false brethren; in toil and hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst,..."

3. But in the face of all this he refused to lose heart. Paul kept up heart in spite of physical handicaps. He had to carry on in spite of a thorn in the flesh. What that thorn was we do not know. Perhaps it was epilepsy. Think of the shame of preaching a Christ of infinite power and being gripped by a seizure during his sermon.

Then added to his sickness was the handicap of old age. Paul spoke of himself as aged. Now I am not one that looks upon youth as a supreme blessing. Bernard Shaw was in some measure right in saying that youth is wasted on young people. It is a privilege to be young, but we have talked so much sentimental rot about that privilege that we have largely convinced ourselves that having ceased to be young we may as well throw the rest of life into the ash can. I can testify that that is utterly false.

Years ago when I was just turning forty, I went to visit a greatly gifted and lovable minister who, in spite of the fact that he was some thirty years older than I, had taken such an interest in me as to win my heart. I honored him greatly and thought him the most joyous of men. Yet he in the course of our conversation said to me with desperation, "It's awful, it's awful for a man who has lived his life in the thick of things as I have to get old and get where he can't work any more".

His assertion, with his obvious wretchedness, took me completely by surprise. When I left him I had the first conversation with myself about getting old that I had ever had. "That," I said, "is
coming to you some day. When it comes I want you to meet it more gallantly than that". By the grace of God, I can say I think I have. At least I never spend a single moment fighting with the calendar.

But having said this, I hasten to confess that the years, while giving us much if we are willing to accept it, also takes something from us. "Maintain the spiritual glow," urges Paul. That is necessary to our highest usefulness. But that is not so easy when one is old. Old age also means the lessening of our powers, certainly physical, many times mental. Yet Paul defied these foes: and declared "I never lose heart".

4. He did not lose heart in spite of failure. Paul had many an amazing victory, but he did not win every battle. In a conversation with him one day I said, "I read with keen interest your letters to the Church at Corinth and also that lovely thank you letter to the Church at Philippi, but I failed to find one letter in which I am especially interested, and that is the one to the Church at Athens".

"There was no such letter," Paul answered sadly. "I went to Athens with high hopes. Knowing it to be a city of culture, I sought to appeal especially to the intelligentsia. But while there was some fruit, no Church was established".

As a pastor of a college church, I have known more than one visiting minister who seemed to say to himself as he entered the pulpit, "Here I am in this academic atmosphere. I am going to show that I, too, have read a book". Then he would proceed to give a new angle on some scientific subject with the result that everybody was bored except the professor of that subject. He remained alert just to see how far the minister was behind the times. It would seem that something akin to this happened to Paul. At least when he
went to his next appointment he confined himself to his speciality, the preaching of Christ, and a crucified Christ at that.

But Paul's greatest failure was with his own people. The fact that he had been such a strict and zealous Jew perhaps led him to believe that he would be especially fitted to reach his own people. But such was not the case. They hated him and rejected his message. This so broke his heart that he tells us frankly that he sometimes caught himself wishing that he might become accursed from God for his brethren and his kinsmen according to the flesh. But in spite of all these foes he declared "I never lose heart".

Part III

But above all else Paul did not lose heart because of:

1. He did not lose heart because he had a genuine and growing experience of God. He declares that the same God who had said in the beginning, "Let there be light", had shined into his own heart to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

This tremendous experience that had taken place as he journeyed from Jerusalem to Damascus, was a growing experience. "Rise and stand upon your feet; for I have appeared to you for this purpose to appoint you to serve and bear witness to the things which you have seen and to those in which I will appear to you." Paul was constantly passing from "these things" to "those things". He was strengthened and heartened by a present and growing experience of God through Christ.

2. Paul kept up heart in the face of opposition and in spite of his failing powers, because he was being constantly renewed and reinforced. "Though our outward nature is wasting away, our inner
nature is being renewed every day." Paul had not only learned how to give, but what is just as important, he had learned how to receive. Having given all to God, he was constantly receiving from God.

This was in accordance with the word of our Lord - "He spoke a parable to them to this end that man ought always to pray and never lose heart". It was the conviction of Jesus that real prayer and loss of heart do not walk hand in hand. To this Isaiah utters a firm "Amen!" "Even youth shall faint and be weary, the young men shall fall exhausted, but those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength." Paul kept heart through daily renewal, a sure antidote against losing heart.

3. Then Paul, being sure of God and constantly undergirded by the power of God, was sure of victory. He was a dauntless optimist. Now optimism is hardly regarded as a virtue today. Of course there is a superficial optimism that is at once discouraging and silly. But the superficial optimist is certainly no worse than the superficial pessimist. Paul was sure that he was not fighting a losing battle. His final word about his own people whose rebellion seemed to make them utterly hopeless, is this: "So all Israel shall be saved" (Romans 11:26).

The optimism of Paul is akin to that of our Lord himself. Of all the optimists that ever lived, Jesus was the most dauntless. He saw the horrors of human failure with a clearer eye than any other who ever lived. He saw back of the tragedy of human suffering and cruelty the deeper tragedy of sin. But the ringing call from His lips that comes over and over again is this, "Be of good cheer". He said it amidst the upheavals of nature. He said it in the face of ruin that sin had wrought. He said it as he faced the cross.
What was the secret of his optimism? He had an unshaken faith in God, His Father. Second, believing in God, he believed also in man as God's child. Nobody was beyond the pale of confidence. He told a certain man whose outstanding characteristic was fickleness, that he would become a rock. He spent much of his time with outcast men and women with whom nobody else would associate. He never doubted that the worst could become the best. Such was the faith of Paul. Such may be our faith. If it is, we can not only hold on our course, but we shall have a contagious courage that may lead us into many a conflict, but never into defeat or despair. We too can say, even in our difficult day, "I never lose heart".
AN AMAZING HOAST

Hence I never lose heart. II. Corinthians 4:16 (Moffat)

It is not necessary to define that word. We all know what it is to lose heart, both from our own experience and from that of others. (When a boy we had a neighbor, Zan Figg by name, who eked out a meager existence on a little hillside farm at the head of White Oak Creek. Though Zan could calculate interest with the accuracy of a computer, he could neither read nor write. Zan explained the tragedy of his ignorance in these words: "I went to school for three days but I just couldn't get the blank stuff in my head". There you have it. Zan had failed because he lost heart.)

Part I

Why does this boast of St. Paul amaze us?

1. It amazes us because losing heart is so nearly universal. All sorts and conditions of men lose heart. It is the experience of the dull and stupid. Of course they lose heart. They can't know any better. Some time ago I read of a moron who spent all his time spinning tops. The wise author said that there were days when this dull worker went home with a sense of defeat and failure because his top had failed to spin aright.

But if the stupid lose heart, so do the wise and understanding. They know so much to lose heart about. The man who calls himself the preacher in Ecclesiastes holds a secure place among the intelligentsia. But that fact did not keep him from losing heart. According to his own confession it made him the more hopeless. In spite of his great gifts, he looks with dull-eyed pessimism at his utterly crooked situation declaring that it could never be made straight.

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scribe who came to Jesus with such charming enthusiasm, when given to understand that discipleship might make him more homeless than the foxes and more destitute than the birds so completely lost heart that we hear of him no more.

But the strong also lose heart. One day I came upon a man who was tearfully telling God that he himself was the only good man in the world and that he hoped he would not be in the world long. What was the matter with Elijah? He was so strong that he seemed made of reinforced concrete. He had dared to defy Jezebel and her hen-pecked husband. He had put his mighty hand on the shoulder of a nation and so steadied it as to save it from disaster. What is wrong with Elijah? He has lost heart.

2. If Paul amazes us because his claim is so nearly unique, he also amazes us because of the greatness of his claim. In never losing heart, Paul is grasping a treasure that is a fundamental need. It is safe to say, I think, that more people fail in every kind of human endeavor from losing heart than from any other cause. If we keep a stout heart, victory may be possible in the most unfavorable circumstances. But if we lose heart, defeat is sure however favorable our circumstances.

This is the case because losing heart slows us down. It makes us walk with lagging steps. I was driving the other day and my car came to a slow stop. There was nothing wrong with the machinery. It had simply run out of power. To lose heart is to lose driving power. Then losing heart is a killjoy. A discouraged heart is a wounded heart. The joy of the Lord is our strength. It not only helps us to keep on, but it is our strength for winning others. Sometimes this loss of joy becomes so oppressive that we fling out of life altogether. Looking into the face of a suicide yesterday
I questioned in my heart "Why did you quit before the whistle blew?" from his lips; the answer of the numb lips was this, "I lost heart".

(3) To lose heart is to be changed from an asset to a liability.

On board a storm battered little merchant vessel of the long ago, there were 275 men. Of these 275 had lost heart. One who was present said, "All hope that we should be saved was taken away. But Paul stood up with a courage born of faith. His courage was so grandly contagious that he saved every man on board".

But if courage is contagious, so is cowardice. Chicken Little, in that very wise and silly story, was no great personality. But she was so obsessed by fear that she was able to stampede every fowl in the barnyard. So contagious was her fear that she succeeded in ushering every member of her fear-filled company into the pantry of Mr. Foxy Loxy. To lose heart is to become a liability.

Part II

But if Paul kept a stout heart, how did he do it? Naturally he did it not simply because of, but also in spite of. The same must be true of ourselves if we refuse to lose heart. What were some of the foes he had to face?

1. He was pitted against a hard situation.

"On that hard pagan world disgust and secret loathing fell; Deep weariness and sated lust made human life a hell."

Every day is difficult. But Paul's day was conspicuously so. This keen-eyed man was not blind to the grim ugliness of his day. At times he sounded like the rankest of pessimists. In the first chapter of his letter to the Romans, for instance, he gives a glimpse of the society of his day. Three times over he affirms of these depraved souls, "God gave them up". (By this he
An Amazing Boast

Page 4

does not mean that God in His anger had lost heart and had flung them away. What he did mean was that since they had turned their backs on God, God could not give them what they refused to take.

It is not easy to be optimistic in our day. In some areas we have made amazing progress. Yet a glance at the newspaper any morning tends to take the heart out of us. Our crime rate is appalling; more appalling still is the fact that 48% of those arrested for major crimes in 1964 were under eighteen. (Equally appalling is the ugly fact that these gigantic evils stagger before us while we seemingly have no power to destroy them.)

Ours is a day in which an utter loss of faith is declared with gleeful boldness. What pathetic poverty is indicated by the fact that when one displays a sick chestnut, figured by countless centuries, "God is dead", so many take it seriously, as if it really might be true. Some enthusiastically tell of the services this prophet has rendered. Scores, even of the so-called saints, proclaim with the angels of the long ago, "Behold I bring you glad tidings of great joy. God is dead." Indeed, as was Paul, we are pitted against a difficult time, but we are not to lose heart.

1. Paul refused to lose heart in spite of opposition, in spite of the bitterest of criticism. Not only so, but this opposition broke into violence again and again. Look at this bit from Paul's diary.

"Five times I have received at the hands of the Jews forty lashes less one. Three times I have been beaten with rods. Once I was stoned. Three times have I been shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been adrift at sea; on frequent journeys... Through many a sleepless night and hunger and thirst. Knocked down, but never knocked out."

2. Paul kept heart in spite of physical handicaps. He had to-
carry on in spite of a thorn in the flesh. What that thorn was we do not know. Perhaps it was epilepsy. Think of the shame of preaching Christ of infinite power and being gripped by a seizure even during such a sermon.

Added to his sickness was the handicap of the calendar. Paul speaks of himself as Paul the aged. Now while I do not look upon youth as a supreme blessing, it is not of such superlative value as having passed through it we may well throw the rest of life into the ash can. I can testify to the fact that that is utterly false.

But having said this, I hasten to confess that the years, while giving us much if we are willing to accept, also take something away from us. Maintain the spiritual glow, urges Paul. Certainly, but there is not so easy when one is old. Old age also means the lessening of our powers. Yet Paul, defied these fees and declared, "I never lose heart".

4. He refused to lose heart in spite of failure. Paul had many amazing victories, but he did not win every battle. One day I said to him, "I read with keen interest your letters to Corinth and also that thank you note to the Church at Philippi, but I failed to find one letter in which I am especially interested, and that is the one to the Church at Athens."

"There is no such letter," Paul answered sadly. "I went to Athens with high hopes, knowing it to be a city of culture, I especially sought to appeal to the intelligentsia. But while there was some fruit, it was so meager that no Church was established."

But Paul's greatest failure was with his own people. The fact that he had been such a strict and zealous Jew perhaps led him to believe that he would be especially fitted to reach his own people. But that was not the case. They heard him as a turncoat and they
An Amazing Victory

Both him and rejected his message. This so broke his heart that he tells us frankly that he sometimes caught himself wishing that he would become accursed from God for his brethren, his kinsmen according to the flesh. But in spite of all these times he declared, "I never lose heart".

Part III

Then above all Paul did not lose heart because of... Why?

1. He did not lose heart because he had a genuine and growing experience of God. He declared that the same God who had said in the beginning, "Let there be light," had shined into his own heart to give the light of knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. This tremendous experience that had taken place as he journeyed from Jerusalem to Damascus was a growing experience. "Rise and stand upon your feet for I have appeared unto you for this purpose," he said. "You serve and bear witness that which you have seen and to those in which I will appear to you." Paul was constantly passing from "these things" to "those things". He was strengthened and heartened by a vivid and growing experience of God through Christ.

2. Paul kept up heart because he was being constantly renewed and reinforced. "Though our outward nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed every day." Paul had not only learned how God to give, but what is equally important, he had learned to receive. Having given all to God, he was constantly receiving from God.

Sometimes God sent this reinforcement through human hands.

When Paul knew himself suspected and rejected, Barnabas came to him, as a son of encouragement. To meet such a man on the street is to have our batteries recharged. To shake hands with him is like getting the handclasp of spring. I doubt if I could have stayed in the ministry but for the reinforcement of such sons of encouragement.
Then Paul was constantly being reinforced directly by the Power of the Word, through prayer and God. It was Jesus who said "Men ought always to pray and never lose heart". He was sure that prayer and losing heart were never long-time roommates. To this Isaiah utters a firm "Amen!" "Even youths shall faint and be weary, and young men shall fall exhausted; but those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength." Paul kept heart through daily renewal.

3. Finally Paul refused to lose heart because he was sure of victory. He was a dauntless optimist. I am aware that optimism is hardly regarded as a virtue today. Of course there is a superficial optimism that is at once discouraging and silly, but even this is certainly no worse than the superficial pessimist. Paul was certain that he was not fighting a losing battle. His final word, even about his own people whose rebelling so broke his heart, is this, "So all Israel shall be saved". Was he right or wrong? That remained to be seen. But he was the stronger and braver for believing it.

This optimism of Paul is akin to that of our Lord. Of all the optimists that ever lived, Jesus was the most dauntless. He saw the deeper tragedy of sin. But the ringing call from his lips is this, "Be of good cheer". He said it amidst the upheavals of nature. He said it in the midst of the ravages that sin had wrought. He said it as he faced the cross. The secret of his optimism was just this. He was sure of God. Being sure of God, he had a firm faith in man as God's child. Such was the faith of Paul. Such may be our faith. Girded with this certainty we may meet many adventures, but not that of defeat and despair. We too can shout with Paul, "I never lost heart".

His frozen body,
AN AMAZING BOAST

Hence I never lose heart. II. Corinthians 4:16 (Moffat)

It is not necessary to define that word. We all know what it is to lose heart, both from our own experience and from that of others. When a boy we had a neighbor, Zan Pigg by name, who eked out a meager existence on a little hillside farm at the head of White Oak Creek. Though Zan could calculate interest with the accuracy of a computer, he could neither read nor write. Zan explained the tragedy of his ignorance in these words: "I went to school for three days but I just couldn't get the blank stuff in my head". There you have it. Zan had failed because he lost heart.

Part I

Why does this boast of St. Paul amaze us?

1. It amazes us because losing heart is so nearly universal. All sorts and conditions of men lose heart. It is the experience of the dull and stupid. Of course they lose heart. They couldn't know any better. Some time ago I read of a moron who spent all his time spinning tops. The wise author said that there were days when this dull worker went home with a sense of defeat and failure because his top had failed to spin aright.

But if the stupid lose heart, so do the wise and understanding. They know so much to lose heart about. The man who calls himself the Preacher in Ecclesiastes holds a secure place among the intelligentsia. But that fact did not keep him from losing heart. According to his own confession it made him the more hopeless. In spite of his great gifts, he looks with dull-eyed pessimism at his utterly crooked situation declaring that it could never be made straight.

Weaklings lose heart. It would be hard to find anyone who did not sometime look toward the heights and long to climb. These often make a beginning but fail to arrive because they lose heart. That
scribe who came to Jesus with such charming enthusiasm, when given to understand that discipleship might make him more homeless than the foxes and more destitute than the birds so completely lost heart that we hear of him no more.

But the strong also lose heart. One day I came upon a man who was tearfully telling God that he himself was the only good man in the world and that he hoped he would not be in the world long. What was the matter with Elijah? He was so strong that he seemed made of reinforced concrete. He had dared to defy Jezebel and her hen-pecked husband. He had put his mighty hand on the shoulder of a nation and so steadied it as to save it from disaster. What is wrong with Elijah? He has lost heart.

2. If Paul amazes us because his claim is so nearly unique, he also amazes us because of the greatness of his claim. In never losing heart, Paul is grasping a treasure that is a fundamental necessity. It is safe to say, I think, that more people fail in every kind of human endeavor from losing heart than from any other cause. If we keep a stout heart, victory may be possible regardless of the most unfavorable circumstances. If we lose heart, defeat is sure however favorable our circumstances.

This is the case because losing heart slows us down. It makes us walk with lagging steps. I was driving the other day and my car came to a slow stop. There was nothing wrong with the machinery. It had simply run out of power. To lose heart is to lose driving power. Then losing heart is a killjoy. A discouraged heart is a songless heart. "The joy of the Lord is our strength." It not only helps us to keep on, but it is our strength for winning others. Sometimes this loss of joy becomes so oppressive that we fling out of life altogether. Looking into the face of a suicide yesterday
I questioned in my heart "Why did you quit before the whistle blew?"
The answer of the numb lips was this, "I lost heart".

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Part III

Above all Paul did not lose heart because of.

1. He did not lose heart because he had a genuine and growing experience of God. He declared that the same God who had said in the beginning, "Let there be light," had shined into his own heart to give the light of knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ. This tremendous experience that had taken place as he journeyed from Jerusalem to Damascus was a growing experience. "Rise and stand upon your feet for I have appeared unto you for this purpose. You serve and bear witness that which you have seen and to those in which I will appear to you." Paul was constantly passing from "these things" to "those things". He was strengthened and heartened by a vivid and growing experience of God through Christ.

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Sometimes God sent this reinforcement through human hands. When Paul knew himself suspected and rejected, Barnabas came to him, that son of encouragement. To meet such a man on the street is to have our batteries recharged. To shake hands with him is like getting the handclasp of spring. I doubt if I could have stayed in the ministry but for the reinforcement of such sons of encouragement.
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This optimism of Paul is akin to that of our Lord. Of all the optimists that ever lived, Jesus was the most dauntless. He saw the tragedy of the world with the keenest of eyes. He also saw the deeper tragedy of sin. But the ringing call from his lips is this, "Be of good cheer". He said it amidst the upheavals of nature. He said it in the midst of the ravages that sin had wrought. He said it as he faced the cross. The secret of his optimism was just this. He was sure of God. Being sure of God, he had a firm faith in man as God's child. Such was the faith of Paul. Such may be our faith. Girded with this certainty we may meet many adventures, but not that of defeat and despair. We too can shout with Paul, "I never lost heart".
II. Corinthians, 4:16 - Hence I never lose heart (Moffatt)

"I never lose heart." It is completely unnecessary to define that word. We all know what it is to lose heart, both from our own experiences and from that of others. When a boy we had a neighbor, Zan Piggby name, who eked out a meager existence on a little farm at the head of White Oak Creek. His fields were so steep that one felt they had set out to be perpendicular but had decided on a compromise at the last moment. Though Zan could calculate interest with the accuracy of an adding machine, he could neither read a word nor sign his name. Why this ignorance? Zan explained the tragedy in his own words. "I went to school for three days, but I just couldn't get the blank stuff in my head." There you have it. Zan had failed because he lost heart.

Part I

This boast of St. Paul is a thrill with surprise.

1. It amazes us in the first place because losing heart is so human. It is so nearly universal. All sorts and conditions of men lose heart. It is the experience of the most brilliant. The teacher in Ecclesiastes held a firm position against the intelli­gence. But that fact did not add to his optimism. According to his own claim, it made him the more hopeless. In spite of his great gifts, he completely lost heart, declaring that the crooked could never be made straight.

But this experience is not confined to the brilliant and gifted. The stupid, the mentally unfurnished, also lose heart. I read of a Moron some time ago who spent his days spinning a top. The wise author said that there were days when he went home with a sense of defeat and failure because his top had not spun well.
An Amazing Boast

Even a moron can lose heart.

Thus this moron lost heart.

Weaklings lose heart. It would be hard to find anyone who did not sometimes look toward the heights and long to climb. They even make a beginning, but they lose heart. That chap who came to Jesus pledging that he would follow Him at any cost, when given to understand that such dedication might make him more homeless than the foxes and more destitute than the birds, so completely lost heart that we hear of him no more.

But the strong also sometimes lose heart. One day I came upon a great prophet who seemed made of reinforced concrete. This man had sprung into the light that plays about a throne at a single bound. He had even defied Jezebel and her hen-pecked husband. He had put his hand on the shoulder of a whole nation and so steadied it as to save it from disaster. When I came upon this man declaring even to God that he himself was the only good man in the world and that he hoped he would not be in the world long, it was hard to believe that Elijah had completely lost heart. STOP

Old people lose heart. If they remain in the thick of the fight, they do so often with enthusiasms that have grown cold and with a strength that has become weakness. Worse still, too often they withdraw from the fight and thus increase their sense of failure.

The surest way to lose heart is to quit fighting. It is amazing how depression melts away in the warmth of an effort to do some good in the world. It is just the loss of heart on the part of the aged that often makes them a burden, both to themselves and to others.

But if the aged lose heart, they have no corner on such a grim experience. It is a tragedy of middle life. The prophet knew it when he
prayed the Lord to revive his work in the midst of the years. It is the experience of youth in life's green spring. Ours is a day when pessimism is not popular. In proportion to their number, I dare say you would find more who have lost heart that are still on the sunny side of twenty than you would on the shady side of eighty. All sorts of condition of men lose heart.

Then we lose it over all sorts of things. There is nothing too big or too little for us to lose heart over. We are depressed as we look at our present world. It seems to hang over hell every morning. We are faint hearted about our own nation, about our Church, about our homes. Husbands and wives are disappointed and ready to quit. Parents are disappointed in children. Children are desperately disappointed in parents. The modern home is not always a place of radiant hope.

Then we are, most keenly disappointed in ourselves. Life hasn't worked out for us as we dreamed that it would. Some who became members of the Church with high hopes, confess bitter disappointment. The pew has lost heart. This is also too often true of the pulpit, for there are ministers who no longer believe in the worth of preaching. They have forgotten that in the New Testament preaching and salvation are related to each other as cause and effect. That packs a surprise because there is nothing more common in our day than faded hopes. Yet here stands this tremendously honest and earnest man making this bold assertion, "I never lose heart". How did he manage?

Part II

Paul kept up heart both because of and in spite of. If we learn his secret, we shall have to do the same. Look at some of the
"in spite of" that Paul had to meet. First, he kept up hope in spite of the fact that he was pitted against a difficult day. Every day is difficult, but Paul’s day, as well as ours, was conspicuously so. This keen eyed man was not blind to the grim facts of life. The writers of the Bible never were. No book faces up to the grim and awful in human nature with a greater candor.

There were times when Paul himself sounds like the rankest of pessimists. In the first chapter of his letter to the Romans, he pictures the rotten and rotting society of his day. "Three times over," he affirms, "God gave them up." By this he does not mean that God in his anger turns them away. But daringly turning their backs on Him, He could not but reject them. God himself can not give what we refuse to take.

It is not easy to be optimistic as we look at our own day. In some ways we have made amazing progress. We have not won in fully wrestling the state out of the hands of God. That God in the field of race relations a complete victory, but we have gone on with it. Since we began to take the matter seriously, the morning paper any day tends to make one lose heart. God has pitted you and me against a difficult time. Paul kept courage in spite of the evils of his day.

2, Second, he kept courage in spite of strenuous opposition. He had to endure the bitterest of criticism. He had to endure insults and slander. He had to endure the bitterest of persecution. Listen to this bit out of his diary: "Five times I have received at the hands of the Jews forty lashes less one. Three times I have been beaten with rods; once I was stoned. Three times I have been shipwrecked; a night and a day I have been adrift at sea; on frequent journeys, in danger from rivers, in danger from robbers,
danger from my own people, danger from gentiles, danger in the
cities, danger on sea, danger from false brethren; in toil and
hardship, through many a sleepless night, in hunger and thirst,..."

But in the face of all this, he refused to lose heart.

Third, Paul kept up heart in spite of physical handicaps.

He had to carry on in spite of a thorn in the flesh. What that
thorn was we do not know. Perhaps it was epilepsy. Think of the
shame of preaching Christ of infinite power and being gripped by a
seizure during his sermon.

Then added to his sickness was the handicap of old age. Paul
spoke of himself as aged. Now I am not one who looks upon youth
right as a supreme blessing. Bernard Shaw was in some measure in saying
that youth was wasted on young people. It is a privilege to be
young, but we have talked so much sentimental rot about that
privilege that we have largely convinced ourselves that having
ceased to be young we may as well throw the rest of life into the
ash can. I can testify that that is utterly false.

Years ago when I was just turning forty, a brother minister
some thirty years older than myself, a greatly gifted and lovable minister
in youth. The fact that he was some thirty years older than I
men, who had taken a deep interest in my in spite of our differences
yet he turned in the course of our conversation to me and said, "I have
in age said to me with a desperation of a cornered animal, "It's
awful for a man who has lived his life in the thick of things, to
get old and get where he can't do his work any more".

His assertion, with his obvious wretchedness, took me completely
by surprise. When I left him I had the first conversation with
myself about getting old that I had ever had. "It is coming to you
some day. When it comes I want you to meet it more gallantly
than that." And humbly, and yet by the grace of God, I can say I
have. I have never fought one moment with the calendar.
But having said this, I hasten to confess that the years, while giving us much if we are willing to accept it, also take something from us. "Maintain the spiritual glow," urges Paul. That is necessary to our life's usefulness, but it is hard to do that when one is old. Old age also means the lessening of our powers, certainly physical, many times mental. Yet Paul defied these foes as you and I may and declared "I never lose heart."

Fourth, he did not lose heart in spite of failure. Paul had many an amazing victory, but he did not win every battle. In a conversation with him one day I said, "I read with keen interest your letters to the Church at Corinth and also that lovely thank you letter to the Church at Philippi, but I failed to find in which I can discover, unless it be the Church at Athens, that in the one letter to the Church at Athens there was no such letter," Paul said sadly. "I went to Athens with high hopes. I sought to appeal to the intelligentsia. But while there was some fruit, no Church was established."

As a pastor of a college church, I have known more than one visiting minister who seemed to say to himself, "Here I am in this academic atmosphere. I am going to show them that I have read a book," etc. Then he would proceed to give a new angle on some scientific subject with the result that everybody was bored except the professor of that subject. He remained alert just to see how far behind the minister was behind the times. It would seem that something akin to this happened to Paul. At least when he went to his next appointment he confined himself to Christ, and crucified Christ at that.

But Paul's greatest failure was with his own people. The fact that he had been such a strict and orthodox Jew perhaps made him to
believe that he would be especially fitted to reach his own people. But such was not the case. They represented him and hated him. This broke his heart. So true was this that he tells us frankly that he sometimes caught himself wishing that he might become accursed from God for his brethren and kinsmen according to the flesh. But in spite of all these blows he declared "I never lost heart".

Part III

But above all else Paul did not lose heart because of:

1. First, he did not lose heart because he had a genuine and growing experience of God. He declares that the same God who had said in the beginning, "Let there be light", had shined into his own heart to give the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Christ.

This tremendous experience that had taken place as he journeyed from Jerusalem to Damascus, when he became obedient to the heavenly vision, was a growing experience. "Rise and stand upon your feet; for I have appeared to you there for this purpose to appoint to serve and bear witness to the things which you have seen and to those in which I will appear to you." Paul was constantly passing from "these things" to "those things". He was strengthened and heartened by a present and growing experience of God through Christ.

2. Second, Paul kept up heart in the face of opposition and in spite of his failing powers, because he was being constantly renewed and reinforced. "Though our outward nature is wasting away, our inner nature is being renewed every day." Paul had not only learned how to give, but what is just as important, he had learned how to receive. Having given all to God, he was constantly receiving from God.
I happened to meet a feverish Christian named Onesiphorus. "Pamphylia, in one of the prisons here, life is very hard," he suggested. "They are always demanded;" so we set out. But we failed to find him in the first prison, so I said I was going to be in Rome again before long; we look him up then, but this man of the ugly voice and beautiful soul said, "Swear to lose your company, but I must see him first now." So later when Tertullus allowed me to read a letter that he had just received, I knew my face turned as my heart ached as I read these words: "The Lord give mercy to the household of Onesiphorus, for he often refreshed me; be was not ashamed of my chains;" my name was missing.

(2) He was constant in praying for me directly.
This was in accordance with the word of our Lord - "He spoke a parable to them to this end that man ought always to pray and never lose heart". It was the conviction of Jesus that real prayer and loss of heart do not walk hand in hand. To this Isaiah utters a firm "Amen!" "Even youth shall faint and be weary, the young men shall fall exhausted, but those who wait for the Lord shall renew their strength." Prayer is a sure antidote against losing heart.

3. Then Paul, being sure of God and constantly undergirded by the power of God, was sure of victory. He was a dauntless optimist. Now optimism is hardly regarded as a virtue today. Of course there is a superficial optimism that is at once discouraging and silly. But the superficial optimist is certainly no worse than the superficial pessimist. Paul was certain that he was not fighting a losing battle. His final word about his own people whose rebellion seemed to make them utterly hopeless, is this: "So all Israel shall be saved (Romans 11:26)."

The optimism of Paul is akin to that of Jesus. Of all the optimists that ever lived, Jesus was the most dauntless. He saw the horrors of human failure with a clearer eye than any other who ever lived. He saw back of the tragedy of human suffering and cruelty the deeper tragedy of sin. But the ringing call from His lips that comes over and over again is this: "Be of good cheer". He said it amidst the upheavals of nature. He said it in the face of ruin that sin had wrought. He said it as he faced the Cross.

What was the secret of his optimism? He had an unshaken faith in God, His Father. Second, believing in God, he believed also in man as God's child. Nobody was beyond the pale of confidence. He told a certain man whose outstanding characteristic was fickleness,
that he would become a rock. He spent much of his time with outcast men and women with whom nobody else would associate, and never doubted that the worst could become the best. Such was the faith of Paul. Such may be our faith. If it is, we can not only hold on our course, but we shall have a contagious courage that may lead us into many a conflict, but never into defeat or despair. We too can say, even in our difficult day, "I never lost heart".
Subject: Bridging the Chasm.  
2d Corinthians, 5 chapter 5 vs.

"God was in Christ reconciling the world unto Himself." What the Apostle is here saying is this: that when Christ came into this world God came into it. He is repeating that insolvable mystery, that the babe lying yonder in the manger of the donkey is the very and eternal God. He is giving us to understand that though that little Son of Mary is but an infant of an hour, He is also from everlasting to everlasting; that though He is as young as the last morn of dawn, He was living eternities before the morning stars sang together and the suns of God shouted over a finished world. He is simply telling us again that infinite millenniums before a sunrise burst in splendor upon the hills of this world, or before ever a bird sang in morning meadows, or the wind's skilled fingers made a harp of the pine boughs, that this Child lived, for this Child is God.

"God was in Christ." He is telling us that these baby hands, though far too weak to hold the presents that the wise men have brought, are yet the hands that laid the foundations of the earth, and the Heavens are the work of His fingers. "For all things were made by Him and without Him was not anything made that was made." He piled high the rugged mountains and threw around their lean and brawny shoulders the softening robe of eternal whiteness. The breath of His might kindled every sun, the light of every star that will tonight shine through Heaven's open window that cast its anchor of beauty in earth's shimmering seas. He also painted Paradise upon the wing of the butterfly and the petal of the rose and the cheek of the child. He stills the sea's rage and makes the frown of the storm cloud to soften into the colorful smile of the rainbow.

Yes, God was in Christ. Christ's coming to us was God's coming to us. And when Christ died on Calvary, it was God dying. For in Him, that is in Jesus, dwells all the fulness of the God-head bodily.

And the purpose of God in Christ's coming into this world, we are told, was to reconcile the world unto Himself. Now, reconciliation implies estrangement. It implies alienation, separation. Reconciliation between two who have never been in any sense alienated from each other is an impossibility. So that the fact that God is seeking to reconcile the world unto Himself clearly implies another fact, and that is that the world is alienated from God. There is an old story of how countless centuries ago man lived in a wonderful garden home. All nature was friendly to him. He was unruffled by passion, unbleclouded by prejudice, unmarked by disease and unscarred by sin. He was on intimate terms with Heaven and his friendship with God was close and sweet.

But the story says that sin one day stole into this garden home, and that after its coming man's relation to God was changed; that when His footsteps were heard walking in the garden, he ran no more to meet Him. He no more sought His company. In fact, he turned his back upon Him and hid. And love was turned to fear and confidence was changed into unbelief. And for that man every rose faded and every fountain became muddied and every bird hushed its song, and the garden faded for him like the mirage of the desert and he found himself in a strange and changed and death-infested world.

Now, you may regard this story as nothing more than an ancient
myth, or you may regard it as an allegory, or you may regard it as a fact. However you regard it, there is this much about the story that remains eternally true: a man who has come to rejoice in His presence or to seek His friendship. A man may sin and ignore God and be indifferent to Him or he may fear Him with a fear that gradually hardens into hate, but no man can live in rebellion against Him and at the same time delight in Him or enjoy His fellowship. However dearly you may love your father, his coming brings no joy to you if you know that during his absence you have been living in rebellion against his wishes. Now, what effect does the fact of God have upon you? To think of God as He is revealed in Jesus Christ ought to be the most joyous thought that could ever come to a human soul. To many that is the case. To have His friendship and His fellowship was "to rejoice with joy unspeakable and full of glory." To realize Him as closer than breathing and nearer than hands, and that was to live in the warmth and beauty of an eternal springtime. To hear His voice saying, "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee" is music sweeter than dream bells chiming upon the sloping hills of sleep.

But what emotions does the thought of God stir within you? Some of us do not like to think of Him at all. Some of us refuse to think of Him, and others of us think of Him only with fear, distrust and hate. "The carnal mind," says Paul, "is enmity, - hatred, against God." So that whether the story of the fall is historically true or not, this much is true: that man has become separated from God, and that the grim power that separated him is his own sin. This fact is stated over and over and over again in God's Word. This fact is also proven by every page of human history. Unmistakable proof of it is to be found in the daily papers of today and of yesterday. The truth of this fact is also borne out by the conscience of every unspoiled man. When God's Word says that sins have separated between you and God, we know with terrible certainty that that statement is true.

So that Christ came to reconcile men to Himself because man has become estranged. His coming is the coming of the father seeking for his lost child, and His hope in bringing about a reconciliation is based upon the conviction that man will respond to God when he sees Him as He really is. And so Christ, through His living and more especially through His dying, comes to show us the very heart of God. We can never know God apart from Jesus Christ. What is music? Go look in the dictionary, but if that is all you do you will never know anything about it. You can sit down on the grass under an apple tree and learn more from the mocking bird in five minutes than you can from all the lexicographers that ever lived in a thousand years. What is love? I asked a group of little children the other day if they ever saw any love and they held up their hands, and they were not mistaken. They had seen love incarnate in a mother's face and in a father's hand. Love had cradled them, had cared for them since the first moment they had opened their eyes on this world. What is God? Answer: Look at Calvary. Look at the Christ of the Cross. Here is one who loves me with a passion stronger than death. Here is one also who hates my sin as profoundly as He loves me, for we must never forget that the cross is as real a protest against sin as it is a declaration of infinite love. In the presence of this cross I sing:

"Oh, Love that will not let me go,  
I rest my weary soul in thee;  
I give thee back the life I owe,
And this reconciliation between God and man means also reconciliation of man with himself. Man is by nature at war. The Psalmist prays: "My soul cleaveth unto the dust. Quicken thou me!" He is conscious of a divided self. Where could you find so dramatic a picture of this tragic fact as Paul's description of himself in the 7th of Romans? The battle rages in terrible and agonizing bitterness till it reaches its climax in that wild cry: "Oh, wretched man that I am, who shall deliver me?" Then comes the answer: "I thank God through Jesus Christ there is therefore now no condemnation." For Paul is at peace with himself. (The man in India seeking peace.)

Jesus Christ on the cross not only reconciles man to God and man to himself; He also reconciles man to his brother. And believe me, my friends, real brotherhood will come in no other way. I have no hope of the world being ultimately saved by treaties and compacts and agreements apart from the power of Christ. As long as men remain unregenerated; as long as men refuse to surrender to the Christ of the Cross, just so long will they remain selfish and just so long will they remain unbrotherly. But surrender to a common Lord does make men brothers. If your Christianity has not made you brotherly, it is not the Christianity of Christ. The world of today is hate torn to a degree that is tragic beyond words. And there is but one hope and there is but one remedy, and that is a crucified Christ. Men become brothers at the foot of the cross and they do not become brothers anywhere else. (Jesse).
A STRANGE FAVOR

Begging me most earnestly for the favor. (Moffatt)

II Corinthians 8-4

Paul has just paid a visit to a church over at Corinth of which he had once been pastor. He has poured the wealth of his rich personality into this men congregation. Now he has given himself the thrill of paying them a visit. Going back to a congregation that a minister has loved and served is always a delight. It is as joyous, many times, as going home after a long absence. Paul, therefore, is naturally elated over this visit.

But that which thrilled him above all else is the fact that these friends of his, these men and women who he has led to Christ, have asked him for a favor. They have gathered about him with an insistence that would not brook denial. "Begging me earnestly," he says, and as he says it, he is as enthusiastic as a cheer leader whose team has just made a touch-down. There is a lilt in his voice and a sparkle in his eyes that indicates that he is elated beyond words.

How strange, we do not like to be besieged by beggars as a rule. Why some people do not come to church is because the pastor is always begging. It is always money, money, money. They do not like to be begged, so they stay away. I stepped off the boat in Port Au Prince, hardly had I set foot on land till a couple of beggars approached me. The further I walked the more they accumulated. I felt like a snow-ball rolling down the hill.
The experience was not pleasant. Even a patient mother grows tired of her children pulling at her skirts always asking for something. But these beggars have delighted Paul beyond all others. Why was this the case? It was because of the favor they were asking.

I.

What was this favor?

1. They were not asking the Apostle for a donation. He was accustomed to such requests. I am quite sure that he was not irked by them. Such requests are at times legitimate. They are at times absolutely necessary. Very few of us have not had to ask for help at some time in our lives. When I was away at college I received money upon which to come home. It was a little too much, therefore, I decided to visit the sea. When I got back I had just enough for my railroad ticket. I had to make the journey on an empty stomach. I was too timid and tired to ask for help. But if I had it to do over, I would ask. There are times when all of us need help, and when such requests are right. These were not asking for money.

2. No more were they asking for position. They were not even asking for a chance to work. That too, of course, is a legitimate request. There is no surer sign that an economic order is diseased than the fact that several millions of people willing to work have no chance. The right to earn an honest living is what we all might legitimately expect. But these were not even asking for the right to work.

They were neither asking for some position in the church. I rejoice in that. Those who scramble for position in the church do harm to themselves, and always they lose something fine out of their lives. Yet, we have always had those with us who were set on official position. Their ambitions range
from a desire for the Episcopacy on down to being the fifth recording secretary of the Church of Jacob. This is, of course, not criminal. James and John fell into that snare at one time. But it always proves ugly and disappointing. These were not seeking position.

3. No more were they seeking exemption. They were not asking to be excused. That would have been quite a reasonable request under the circumstances. These people had passed through a depression that would make ours look like a wave of prosperity. The Apostle tells that they had been reduced to the depth of depression. Therefore, it would have been natural for them to appeal to the great Apostle.

We are not going to ask you for help, but we are going to ask you to excuse us from making any sort of contribution.

Now there are those who find themselves in just that position. I remember a most excellent couple who belonged to my church in Birmingham. They were always in their places, both morning and evening. Once they had been good contributors, but now the wolf of want was howling so loudly at their door that they found it impossible to keep up with their finances. One day they said to me, "We are a bit ashamed to come to church. We are wondering if it would not be best to give our places to someone else." "By no means," I answered. The fact that you cannot give money does not mean that you cannot give anything. You can still give your sympathy, your prayers, and your presence. These are all valuable. Sometimes, the best of us have to be excused from giving money. But these friends of Paul were not asking for exemption.

4. What then were they asking? They are asking the privilege of giving. "Begging the most earnestly for the favor of contributing to the saints." No wonder the Apostle was thrilled. No wonder he could not tell that fascinating experience without a new sparkle coming into his eyes and a new tenderness coming into his voice. He was glad to hear this request, not simply because he needed the money for the poverty stricken saints of Jerusalem. That of
course was the case. But his supreme joy was born of the fact that these friends of his were the kind of men and women that looked upon the privilege of giving as a great favor. That he should rejoice does not surprise us when we realize the secret of their eagerness to give.

II.

Why were they so eager to give?

1. It was not because such eagerness was universal in that day. It was not universal, it never has been. If their desire were universal the Kingdom of God would have come long ago. This does not mean, of course, that there is not some bit of eagerness to help in the here and now. We are surprised again and again at the kindness of certain folks from whom we expected no kindness. When Paul was shipwrecked in the Mediterranean he said, "The inhabitants of the island where we landed showed him great kindnesses." All human nature is not altogether bad. Therefore, the favor of being allowed to give is not one that is always greeted with eagerness.

2. Neither did these folks look upon the privilege of giving as a favor because they were prosperous. I have just reminded you that they were anything but prosperous. They were desperately poor. Then, prosperity does not always promote liberality. The poorest church I ever served was the church whose finances were the easiest. Prosperity tends toward stinginess as a rule, rather than the opposite. It is, generally speaking, far easier to get a man to tithe when he is getting twelve hundred dollars a year than it is when he is getting twelve thousand dollars. There is something quite benumbing about prosperity to the average man. Too often it chokes the best out of him; he puts his own comfort above everything else, and thus misses the best.
"She built herself a little house, all walled around with pride,
Tried prudence for her servant, and shut herself inside."

"She pulled the blinds down tight as tight when sorrow chanced to roam,
Experience called, she sent down word, that she was not at home."

"Then wherefore should she now complain, and wherefore should she sigh
If life and love and laughter have forever passed her by."

3. Why then did they look upon giving as a favor? Paul lets us into the secret. They dedicated their own selves to the Lord. Their giving of their substance was born of their giving of themselves. They had dedicated themselves to God. That is Christianity. All else falls short. What is God asking of you and me this day? Not for our work primarily, not for our money, not for our prayers and tears. He is asking for ourselves.

They gave themselves to the Lord. That is Christianity, the whole of it. It is Christianity in its beginning, in its consummation. Years ago when my first born was a little chap, he came into my study with a piece of cake that his mother had given him. We had a slight misunderstanding. He gave vent to his indignation against his father by crumbling the cake upon the carpet, and then looking at me with considerable defiance. "Son," I said, "did you do that?" "Yes," was the prompt answer. "Well you will have to pick it up." "I feel bad," was the reply. "I am sorry that you are sick," I continued "but you will have to pick up the cake." "I will be a good boy," was his next reply. In fact, he was willing to do almost anything except the one thing that was the issue between us. That may be the case with ourselves. But there is no substitution for the giving of ourselves to God.

Now having done this, we become partakers of the divine nature. We come to look upon life through the eyes of our Lord. To feel about service and giving somewhat as he felt. How did he feel about it? He was eager to give.
A Strange Favor

He declared "It is more blessed to give than to receive." No wonder Paul's heart sang when these beggars besieged him asking for the privilege of giving. Such begging was a badge of real Christ-likeness. Of course, one may be liberal after a fashion and not be a Christian. But no man can be a Christian, and at the same time be grasping and greedy for self.

III.

Being thus Christian, they naturally had a unique attitude toward giving. What is Christian giving? How does a genuine Christian give? Look at the giving of these humble and poor saints.

1. They gave voluntarily. There are some folks who never give at all. Those who do give are divided into two classes. First, there are those who have to be conscripted. It must be sought. Somebody must take time to call upon them. To explain and to conjure. But there are others who volunteer. They go on the assumption that your time is as valuable as theirs, they are self-starters.

I shall never forget my first experience with a car that was a self-starter. I had recently become the proud owner of my first automobile. After a three mile drive I had become so proficient that I drove this car into my garage and right on through. One day while it was being repaired, a call came for a wedding out in the country. The garage man was kind enough to lend me his car that was a self-starter. While crossing a shallow creek with a very muddy bottom, I killed my engine. At first this struck terror to my heart. I was thinking of the figure I would cut at the wedding after wading in this muddy stream to crank my car. Then I remembered that it was a self-starter. I touched my toe to the mechanism and off she went. Thank God for
those who give under any circumstance. But thank Him especially for the self-starters.

2. They gave proportionately. Paul said, "They gave in accordance to their ability." That is as beautiful as it is rare. I have read some thrilling books, but few are more thrilling than a handful of pledge cards. Some of these, of course, are depressing. They fill the heart of an earnest pastor at times with hot indignation and positive shame. Then others bring mist before his eyes and a warm glow to his heart. So many of us are not willing to do our part. What is it to give adequately as a Christian? It is to do our best. The man with five talents is expected to give more than the one with one. But both are expected to be faithful.

3. Finally, they gave sacrificially. That is the most beautiful way of all. "According to their ability, and beyond their ability." Ah, that is beauty to its superlative degree. Why is much of our modern religion so tame and dull? Why is it so often lacking in charm and fascination? Because there is so little of heroism, so little of courage, so little of the spirit of the cross.

Most of us are afraid of such living and such giving. That is the reason that we miss the best. We persuade ourselves that He has come to give us an easy time instead of to make us great. That He is out to give us comfort rather than character. We thus forget that our religion is one that has a Cross red with blood at the center of it. Some of us see in it no beauty that we should desire it. I saw a bit of a letter from a chap the other day who was telling how much happier he was since he threw all faith in God away. Why was this the case? He did not have the kind of grit to live a life that he knew a holy God would expect of him. He was trying to content his soul with a road that is low and easy.
"A Strange Favor"

"She set a rose to blossom in her hair -- the day faith died,

'Now glad,' she said, 'and free I go' -- and life is wide,

Then through long nights she stared into the dark --

and knew she lied."

How then shall we think of this Christian giving? These saints who gathered about Paul were right. Giving is not a hardship. It is not a way of narrowing life and making it lean and mean. It is a way of expanding it. To give sacrificially, both of yourself and your substance is the only way true to living. That will not be the way simply in some far off tomorrow. That is the way in the here and now. Only those who live sacrificially experience real living. "She that liveth is dead while she liveth."

Then such sacrificial giving is a means of taking what is material and temporal and changing it into something that is spiritual and eternal. We have a chance here in St. Luke's Church of changing our material substance, at least some bit of it, into eternal good that shall never pass away. When I go to the Holy Land I am going to look for the barns in which the rich fool stored his corn--No, I am not. Those barns have been dust and ashes long centuries. But there was an investment that would have conserved every bit of his wealth had he invested it in human personality. Such an investment would last as long as God. Therefore, this morning in his Name I am reminding you of the greatest favor that even God can grant to you. The favor of being allowed to share with a needy world your substance and yourself.

"It is more blessed to give than..."
Paul is excited. He is as enthusiastic as a cheerleader at a ball game whose team has just made a touchdown. He is so full of his exciting good news that he lays all but violent hands on the members of this Corinthian church to tell them his amazing tidings. He has just passed through an experience that has made him so joyful that he cannot keep his joy to himself. Therefore, he said, "I have to tell you of the grace of God bestowed upon the churches of Macedonia."

The situation is this. Paul has just come back to visit the church in Macedonia where he has been privileged to labor in other days. He has been back to greet old friends, to be cheered by the faith of his sons and daughters in the gospel. There are few finer privileges than that of a pastor's revisiting his beloved congregation. It renews sweet associations and deepens religious convictions. But what had gladdened Paul most as he made this visit was the fact that he had no more than reached the church before he found himself literally besieged by beggars.

Now, beggars do not always thrill us. Years ago when I stepped off the boat at Porte-Prince, Hayti I was immediately accosted by a beggar. As I set out down the street I was joined by others. By and by I had grown into a troop. I reminded myself of a snail ball rolling down a hill. The experience was not altogether pleasant. Had I responded to all I should soon have had to appeal to them. Even mothers get tired of being everlastingly tugged at, and some stingy husbands, who haven't sufficient judgment to treat their wives as equals, even resent being begged by those who have a right to share equally in their income. But these beggars brought the great apostle vast joy. This was the case because of the kind of beggars they were.
For what were these shameless and insistent beggars asking?

To begin negatively, they were not asking for donations. Of course, Paul was accustomed to such requests. Not only so, but he welcomed those requests when they came. There come times in the life of most of us when we need material help. If you have never been beholden to anybody for anything, then you are an exception to the rule. As a college student I went hungry for many long years because I was too timid to ask for a hand-out. If I had it to do over again I would swallow my pride in order to get to swallow some food. But these folks were not asking for donations.

No more were they asking for exemptions. They were not in easy circumstances. Paul tells us they were in deepest distress of poverty. They were passing through a depression that would make the one through which we passed a few years ago look like a wave of prosperity. It would have been quite natural, therefore, for them to have said to the great apostle, "We are not asking for material help but we tell you frankly that we are not going to be able to help others. Do not expect any contribution from us."

Now, there might be times when we should have to make such a request. I was pastor of First Church, Birmingham, during the worst years of the depression. A fine couple came to me one day and said, "We feel that we ought to give up our pew." They were constantly present at services of the church, both morning and evening. "We are no longer able to pay anything," they continued. "To take up room makes us ashamed." But I answered, "You are making a contribution. Your presence, your sympathy, your prayers are of genuine worth. Because you cannot give money, do not let that prevent your giving anything." They had to ask for exemption. These Macedonians might
have made the same request but they did not.

No more were they asking Paul for some position in the church. I have become through the years increasingly afraid of the churchman who seeks something for himself. Such seeking usually takes something fine out of the seeker. It usually adds to his arrogance if he wins. It often makes him sour if he loses. The question of preferment has no place in the church of Jesus Christ. I think we are usually happy in our religion in proportion to the honors that we do not seek. Bud Robinson prayed an exceedingly wise prayer when, after sight-seeing a whole day in New York City, he bent his knee in prayer to say, "Lord, I just want to thank you that I ain't seen a single thing that I want."

What, then, I repeat, what then was the favor for which these churchmen were asking? Here it is. They were asking for the privilege of making a contribution to the needy church at Jerusalem. They fairly laid hands on Paul and said, "We hear that you are receiving an offering for the church. Don't pass us by. We want to share in it. We insist upon it. Thus they looked upon giving, not as a horrible chore that they were somehow to put through with wry faces; they looked upon giving as a privilege. Thus they fairly thrust their offerings upon their former pastor. Their conduct made the heart of Paul to sing for joy.

II

Why was this the case?

1. Paul rejoiced in receiving their gifts because he knew that with the money thus given he could help the needy saints of Jerusalem. Paul never despised money. Neither did Paul's Master. They both knew that money is
power. Instead of being the root of all evil, it may be a means of im-
measurable good. Money can fling open the door of opportunity to a promising
youth. Money may be bread for the hungry, clothing for the naked. It may
be healing for the sick. Money may enable you to reach a hand across the
seas and even across the river of death to help your fellow. He rejoiced
in their giving because money is a means of carrying on the work of God.

I am not forgetting that the church is a religious organization,
but it is an organization, nonetheless. It is an organization that cannot
be run without money. What a blessing that is. Any church that can be run
without money would not run long. It would die of its own selfishness.
If some multimillionaire were to endow this church so that its membership
would not have to give another penny, you might as well dynamite it. Money
is as essential to the work of the church as it is to any other organization
in the world. In giving, therefore, these people were helped and Paul re-
joiced.

2. Their giving made his heart sing because such giving indicated
the kind of men and women they were. What your attitude is towards giving
is a test of character. We read that Jesus sat over against the treasurer
on a certain Sabbath when the offering was being received. Why was he
doing this? Because he is forever interested in our financial program.
He knew, as I have come to see more fully with the passing of the years,
that a man's attitude towards money is an acid test of character. Every
opportunity to give is a test of a judgment day.

This eager giving on the part of these Macedonian saints indicated
that they had become vital Christians. Such giving was not natural. Such
giving did not belong to everybody in general. It belonged to them be-
cause, as Paul tells us, they had first given themselves to the Lord. Having
given themselves, they had been remade. Having given themselves, they had dedicated their possessions.

If you are a genuine Christian to how much of your income does the church lay claim? The usual answer is a tenth. Certainly we ought to give a tenth as a minimum. But we are to use the other nine-tenths under the guidance of his spirit. Having given themselves to the Lord, they had come to see giving through their Master's eyes. Therefore, they recognized it as life's supreme privilege. Such an attitude showed that they were truly Christian.

Now, I have known men here and there who were quite liberal who were not Christians. Sometimes they made no claim to any sort of religious faith. It is possible, therefore, for one to be fairly liberal and not be Christian. But it is utterly impossible to be truly Christian and to be stingy and grasping and selfish. If you are offended by every opportunity to give, it would be well for you to re-examine your guide post, for the chances are that you are on the wrong road.

3. Paul shouted for their eagerness to give because he knew that such giving was a sure road to enrichment. The man who shuns the privilege of giving is seeking his own impoverishment. It was Jesus who said "It is more blessed to give than to receive." How did he know? He had tried it out. Of course, it is a great privilege to receive. That we all know. How well I know it. What a receiver I have been across the years.

It was my privilege to be born into a Christian home. I received a training in my young and tender years that gave me the finest moral support. I went to schools established by the church. It was the church that consecrated my marriage. It was the church that buried my dead. The church has been my spiritual mother as it has been yours. It is a great privilege
to receive.

But to give is a yet greater privilege. Giving is a privilege because it gives meaning to our getting. Merely to get has no meaning if we cannot share. Such giving keeps getting from becoming a curse. I have reminded you of what makes the Dead Sea dead. There were two seas, you remember, here together in the Orient. One looked out and saw a river coming and said, "A river is coming to me today." That sea received this river and said, "It is too good to keep." So it passed it on down the valley. It is known as the Sea of Galilee. It retains its beauty to this day.

But another sea looked out and saw that same river coming and said, "There is a river coming to me today." And when it received it, it said, "It is mine. It is all mine. I will not let a single drop of it go for the watering of a baby's lips or the moistening of a flower." So what? They say that the laws of nature, which are the laws of God, said of that sea, "Earth to earth, ashes to ashes, dust to dust." To get without giving is deadly.

But the opposite is true. The hand that is open to give is the only hand that is capable of receiving. I read some time ago of a little chap who got his hand fastened in a very fine antique vase. At last he called in help. His father tried to extract his hand and could not. Then he got his hammer to break the vase. But it was a very expensive article. So he said to the lad, "Now open your hand wide and make one more effort." And the little fellow, looking at him in amazement, said, "If I open my hand like that I will drop my penny." But it is only the wide open hand to give that is wide open to receive. Paul rejoiced over the giving of these because he knew that such giving indicated Christlike character and would lead to greater Christlikeness.

III

Now, how did these saints give?
1. They give voluntarily, eagerly. There are those in every church who give only when they are prodded and pushed. They give when some man just as busy as themselves seeks them out and makes an extraction. There are others who give when they like the man who approaches them or when they approve of the pastor.

But did you ever think of how small a part of the contribution you make to the church goes to the pastor? Did you ever remember than in giving to the church you are not giving to some individual, but you are giving to a cause and to him who is back of the cause? If your pastor, though, is one in whose ability you have great faith, a man strong enough to get along quite well perhaps without your help, then you will give. But if he really needs it, you will be a little more slow.

The first big promotion I ever had sent me to a church that was paying almost twice the salary that I was receiving. I had been preaching only six years and I was following a man who was then regarded as the outstanding preacher of the state. The first thing the Board did upon my arrival was to cut my salary. Now, the salary they paid was far more than I had been getting. Having never been a money lover, I was able quite well to live off what they were paying. But my task was made far harder by the fact that in thus lowering the salary, they told me, they told themselves, they told the congregation that they had an inferior man. That is not good church business.

These people were eager to give because they believed in the cause. I am thankful for those out of whom their friends can extract a few dollars, but thank God for the self-starters. I shall never forget the first self-starter I ever drove. I was going to a wedding in the country. In the middle of a muddy creek I killed my engine. I had a clear vision of how I would look at the wedding after wading knee deep in that black mud. Then I remembered that
I was driving a self-starter. I stepped on the right mechanism and lived happily ever afterward. These, as many of us, were self-starters. They gave voluntarily.

2. They gave systematically. Haphazard giving is better than none at all, but systematic giving is better for the giver. It is better for the institution to which you give. For a church to run its business in a business-like way it must be able to know with some degree of accuracy what it is going to receive and when. If you exercise systematically, if you eat and sleep in the same fashion, you will have better health. If you have a sane technique for the practice of your religious life, you will have better spiritual health. These people gave systematically.

3. They gave proportionately. The man who had one talent did not give as much as the man who had five. There are those in every church who contribute, but who contribute only a meager fraction of what they ought to give. Few things are more disgusting than to hear some man of wealth say, "I will give a mite." When the widow gave her mite it was everything.

If you desire some day a little thrilling reading, look over certain church pledges; some of them will bring a mist before your eyes. They are so liberal in proportion to what the giver possesses. There are others that will fill you with a kind of shame and indignation. There are people listening to me now who have given this year about the same that you did ten or fifteen years ago when money was worth three times what it is today and when you were getting far less. Blessed is the man who insists on carrying his part of the load.

Finally, they gave sacrificially. Listen to what Paul says of them: "In proportion to their ability," he declares. "Yes, and beyond their ability they gave. Of course, our Lord can use our prudent conservative gifts, but such giving never thrilled him. But when he saw a widow give all she had, when
he said of Mary, "She hath gone what she could," then he stood up to cheer. It so happened that our religion is a religion with a cross, red with sacrificial blood in the center of it. It calls for the denial of self. That denial of self must express itself in our giving as in all else. Give me the man who gives voluntarily, systematically, sacrificially, and I will show you a man who is happy in his church life and is headed towards abundant living. For to give is in reality to live. To refuse to give is surely to die.
"How to Get Rich."

2 Corinthians, 8: 9.

Hear the text: "That you may become rich." What an arresting sentence this is! I wonder if it quickens your pulse beat. I wonder if it does not thrill you into intense eagerness. I wonder if it will cause you to lean expectantly toward the speaker as if you were about to hear something of life and death importance.

Possibly not. The reason is you are saying to yourself, "Oh, he is not talking about getting rich in wealth that is tangible. He has no recipe for obtaining riches that you can put into your pocket and transport into bacon and beans. He is only talking about wealth that is spiritual and abiding. He is only going to talk to us about those riches that will be riches when the sun has grown cold. He is going to tell us something about the treasure that thieves can not break through and steal. He is going to talk to us about that gold that death can not tarnish and that will shimmer and shine in eternal beauty when this old world has been a wreck for a million centuries. Of course I am not interested in that. Therefore I will nod and drowse or think of something else."

No, the tragedy of this moment is that the big sentence of this poverty stricken old world is in material wealth. How to get rich, - why, if this grasping age of ours believed that I had a real recipe for the obtaining of material wealth there would not be a building in the wide world large enough to hold my congregation. There would not be a voice loud enough to reach the sager ears of those who wanted to learn the secret. Rheumatism, Sunday headaches, - these seven day sicknesses to which so many of us are victims, would all be forgotten. We would hurry to the meeting at the risk of being crushed to death in order that we might learn how to grip in this failing human hand the fleeting and unsatisfying wealth of this world.

But real wealth, - I wonder if we are not interested in that. I wonder if you would not like to become genuinely and truly rich. Believe me, it is possible. The wealth of this world is not within the reach of all of us. Financial success many of us will never attain. Life for a great many is going to be one long battle with the wolf. And believe me, poverty is no disgrace. It is a great inconvenience at times, but that is all. And sometimes it is a great blessing. But spiritual poverty, that is never a blessing, and need never be endured.

I read sometime ago of a man who walked away one night from a palatial home. He owned that home. Its luxuries were all his. Its servants were ready to do his bidding, but he turned his back on it all. He became a wanderer and a beggar. As a tramp he went from house to house, hungry, unwashed, sleeping in the open, taking the stale bread that was sometimes reached grudgingly to him at the back door. And yet the man was immensely rich. Then why did he leave it all to become a tramp? He had lost his mind. That is the secret. He was insane.

And I read another story. It ran like this:

"There was a certain man had two sons. And the younger of them said unto his father, Give me the portion of goods that falleth to me. And he divided unto them his living."

"And not many days after the younger son gathered all together and took his journey into a far country."
You have heard that story. I need not read it. You remember how he spent all and found himself by the swine trough in utter want. Now, the question is how did this young man come to give up the wealth of his father's house for the want of the Far Country? How did he come to turn aside from the fellowship of his father to share in the fellowship of the swine? It was not because his father drove him away from home. It was not because he found a larger happiness away from home. Christ gives us the secret. He is very tender in His judgment of this young man. He says that he "was beside himself." He was insane. When he came to himself you know what happened. He turned his steps back towards home.

So the wealth that I wish to commend to my own heart and yours this morning is wealth that is riches indeed. It is a wealth that is really able to meet the needs of men and women that have to do business not in one world, but in two worlds. Let us not forget that. We must get hold on treasure that is legal tender here and legal tender also in eternity.

We would all like to be rich. That is, we would like to possess that something, whatever it is, that makes for real well being. We would like to get hold on that treasure that would mean to us rest and peace, happiness and contentment. But the tragedy of this present hour is just this, that so many of us turn our search in the wrong direction. We think to find our wealth in the realm of things. We bend our energies and waste our lives and break our hearts trying to win the wealth of the world. And that way failure lies. History and revelation and experience have all demonstrated that and fact a million times over.

We can never become really rich in that direction, in the first place, because the accumulation of the world's wealth is an impossibility for most of us. Most of us are not good financiers. I confess that I do not count myself a Rockefeller in that direction. For a great many of us life will be one long battle with the world. We will never live in a palatial home. We will never have any large bank accounts. We will never cut any big figure on the marts of trade. The wealth of this world is beyond our reach forever more.

We could never win in that way, in the second place, because even though we should become rich in things, things never satisfy. The farmer was rich in things. He had magnificent barns and they were overflowing, but he was not satisfied. He could not hush the clamor of his soul. His soul refused to be satisfied with the same food that he fed to his donkeys and his cattle and his hogs. And the story of the Rich Farmer is the story of every godless man that has ever lived.

It is said that the novelist Balzac built him a magnificent palace but did not have the money to furnish it. Its great and splendid rooms were empty, but here and there was a little card on the floor with the name of a rug that he would like to have had there, and here was a card on the wall with the name of a great masterpiece that he would like to have hung there. But his furniture, his carpets, his tapestry, all the marvelous decorations that would have made his palace complete, were wanting. They were only imaginary.

And that is ever true. More things never satisfy. They promise
much but never keep their promises. You may be rich in fame, rich in intellect, rich in position, rich in money, and yet be poverty stricken beyond all words.

("I'm an alien, I'm an alien", etc.)

Then, to seek wealth in the realm of things means failure, in the third place, because even though the wealth of this world could satisfy, it will not last. Here is a favoring old man and he is walking through a marvelous picture gallery. There are the masterpieces of Michael Angelo and Raphael and Titian. He loves them more than all else in the world. But he rubs his lean palms together and says, "I must leave all these. I have only two months more to live."

Yes, he had to leave it all. That is what every man has to do sooner or later. That is what the first Mohammedan conqueror of India had to do. He is dying upon a bed of ivory. He has had brought in to be displayed before him the wealth that he has accumulated by his conquests. There are gems, rubies and diamonds of value almost untold. And the dying man gazes on them for a moment and then says, "Oh, the paths that I have been to to accumulate them, and now I must leave them all behind." (Eva Bell White.)

Why follow the road that has always led to disappointment? There is a way that is sure. We through His poverty may become rich. Jesus Christ brings to us a wealth so great that He was glad to endure the agonies of the cross to make it available for us. In Him we find the true riches. A wish we might consider for a little while some of the real wealth that is brought to us in Christ Jesus, our Lord. It is wealth that is made available for every single one of us.

First, Jesus makes us rich in life. He says, "I have come that you might have life and have it in abundance." The big impression, we are told, that Christ made upon those who knew Him was that He Himself was a live man. And when men wanted to know how to get hold on life they asked Him: We see a young man running to Him. He has the vitality of youth. He is yet in the morning tide, but he kneels in the presence of this young man Christ and asks Him for the secret of life.

Yonder is Jesus being deserted by the multitude. He turns to Peter and the rest of His disciples, and says, "Will ye also go away?" And Peter tells the anchor that holds him: "To whom shall we go? Thou hast the words of life." Peter knew that He was the Bread of Life, that He was the Water of Life, that He could give life and could give it in abundance.

And life, - that is the big thing, is it not? That is the one eternal treasure. If you have life everything is possible in a measure, but without life nothing is possible. We hate death. There used to be an old hymn that our fathers sang that ran:

"Ah, lovely appearance of death, What sight upon earth is so fair? Not all the gay pageants that breathe Can with the dead body compare."

But the sentiment is false. It is utterly untrue. Death is ghastly. We love life. We hunger for it.
How to get rich

How then, say I to get hold on life? I shall only get hold upon life as I lay hold upon Jesus Christ. "He that hath the Son hath life, and he that hath not the Son hath not life." This life means abounding energy. It means vitality and power. It means keen enjoyment. Most children are happy they are so full of life. It is when our vitality runs low that wretchedness so often comes upon us. Most people who commit suicide are people who have got short of life. Abundance of life means abundance of joy, abundance of activity, abundance of rest.

Jesus also, because He makes us rich in life, makes us rich in Love. I do not mean that He makes us rich in the joy of being loved, though that is true, and that is a wonderful treasure. How men loved Him! And there was the man that wrote the text, Paul. How men loved Paul! He tells us that the Galatians would have gladly plucked out their eyes for him. He tells us of a man who sought him out in his disgrace and was not ashamed of his stain. He makes us to hear sobs from a distant seashore where men can not leave off clinging to him because he has told them that they would see his face no more.

But that which marks Paul as genuinely rich was the Christlike love that beat in the heart of him. What a lover he was! And remember he had not always been so. He had once been a narrow and self-centered Pharisee. There had been a time when no man was allowed to differ from him except at peril of his life. But now read over the list of his friends. You find among them obscure women. You find among them runaway slaves. You find men of almost every rank in society and all sorts of nationalities gathered together in the roomy spacious of the men's hig heart.

Believe me, when Christ really gets possession of our lives He makes us into cosmopolitan men and women. As we come to realize His loving interest in all that interests us we learn more and more through His grace to be interested in all that interests Him. There comes a new richness of love into our hearts because there has come a new richness of life.

"Old sorrows that sat at the heart's sealed gate Like sentinels grim and sad, While out in the night damp, weary and late, The King, with a gift divinely great, Waited to make me glad;"

"Old fears that hung like a changing cloud Over a sunless day; Old burdens that kept the spirit bowed, Old wrongs that rankled and clamoured loud - They have passed like a dream away.

"In the world without and the world within He maketh the old things new; The touch of sorrow, and stain of sin, Have fled from the gate where the King came in, From the chill night's damp and dew.

"Again in the heavens the sweet stars shine, On earth new blossoms spring; The old life lost in the Life divine, 'Tay will be mine, my will is thine,' In the new song the new hearts sing."
And because Christ makes us rich in love, He also makes us rich in service, rich in good works, as we find it written in the Word. Love longs to serve. Love's heart breaks when it can not serve. How rich was this man Paul in high and holy service! He tells us that though he was poor, he made many rich. He entered into the cell of a wretched Roman jailer over in Philippi. And though he entered in with empty pockets and bleeding back, he left the jailer rich. He met a poor poverty-stricken slave named Onesimus and in his fellowship this slave became rich. He entered into the spiritually impoverished precincts of Caesar's palace, but when he wrote a letter from that unpromising field he sent the greetings of the saints that had been there enriched by him. "I will bless thee", said God to Abraham, "and thou shalt be a blessing." And that blessed privilege is a part of the wealth that may belong to every one of us.

Jesus Christ makes us rich in the fellowship of Himself. He is saying to us today what He said to the dissatisfied Elder Brother, "Son, thou art ever with me and all that I have is thine." And what a wealth unspeakable is a sense of the divine presence! How rich it made Paul on the wrecking vessel, that day on the Mediterranean! How abounding in wealth he was in the long dreary days in the Roman prison, rich in divine fellowship.

I was visiting in a Texas town some years ago and a preacher friend of mine asked me to go with him to see an old lady who was a member of his church. And as we went down the street he told me about her. He told me how her loved ones had died one by one, how she had lost her husband and her children. He told me how she had lost her property. He told me how she had lost her health and that now she was living in a little cabin practically alone, and that all day she sat in an invalid's chair.

And then I began to think of some consolation I might be able to bring to this tired and troubled heart. I set in to prepare a little sermonette that I might preach to her upon my arrival. And at last we came to her house right at the end of the straggling street. There were a few cheap flowers growing in the yard among the rock. We entered through a low door and came face to face with the woman who sat alone in her invalid chair.

The preacher introduced me and the old lady smiled and greeted me warmly. And as I saw the face of her and heard her voice my speech ebbed away into thin air and I listened to her talk. What a wonderful conversation that was! She told us about her neighbors, how good they were, how kind and considerate. And you can form a pretty good opinion of how good a woman is by how good her neighbors are to her.

And then she passed on from speaking of the friends that lived close by to that other friend "that sticketh closer than a brother." She told us how He had been with her in her sorrows. She told us how near He was. She told us of how when the terrible weakness and loneliness came with the loss of husband and child she had felt round about her and underneath her the Everlasting Arms. And her face was bright as she spoke as with hidden sunshine, and her voice was glad with the gladness of deep abiding joy.

And as she talked I glanced away from the radiant face to the surroundings in which she lived. There was only one room and a little
shed room. The walls of the room in which she sat the whole day through were absolutely bare except for one little placard up over the door. That was gaudy and smoke begrimed and ugly. You would have called it "tacky" and doubtless would have put it in the attic or burned it up.

I looked at the little placard and read: "Christ is the head of this house, the unseen guest of every meal and the silent listener to every conversation." And I knew from the very face of her and the very joy that sparkled in her eyes that it was literally and absolutely true. I knew that though she seemed alone, she was not alone. I knew too why she talked so well. She had a sense of the divine Christ bending over her and listening to her. That was the reason why her conversation was as musical as a summer brook and as sweet as the perfume of a flower.

I have thought of her many a time since then. Since then also I have gone into many other homes. Some of them are homes of great wealth, but I have never found one single one that was richer in the treasure that really counts than was this in which the faded old invalid lived waiting for the sunset and the evening star.

Then, Christ makes us rich in the hope of eternity. You lost your baby last year. How much would you give to be absolutely sure that one day you should find your own again? Christ makes the life eternal sure to us. He plucks the sting of death. He makes the grave to be only a narrow ditch over which man steps into the radiance and beauty of God's eternal Summerland.

Here, heart, is a hope that makes you rich. You have buried many a treasure.

"There's a magical isle up the River of Time, Where the softest airs are played; And a song as sweet as the vesper chime, And the Junes with their roses are straying.

"And the name of this isle is the Long Ago, And we buried our treasures there. There are brows of beauty and bosoms of snow, And heaps of dust, — Or, we loved them so!

"There are trinkets and tresses of hair, There are fragments of songs that nobody sings, And parts of an infant's prayer; There's a lute unswept and a harp without strings, And garments the loved used to wear."

Yes, there have been sweet and gracious and tender hearts that have passed on into that Land of Eternal Springtime. I might sell you some things this morning, but I would not sell you my hope of Heaven for the wealth of ten million worlds like this, and the guarantee of a million million years to enjoy it. Christ plucks the sting of death. Paul was not afraid of the axeman. He looked away to the crown. Paul was rich. How much richer than poor Queen Elizabeth who, with an empire upon which the sun never set, begged for an hour in which to get ready for eternity.

Yes, heart, I repeat Christ solves the riddle of eternity. He
makes sure to us that blessed Home of the Soul.

"He makes the dying bed
Foul soft as downy pillows are,
While on His breast we lean our head
And breathe our life out sweetly there."

Christianity works. It works in life. It works in death.

CCG:BR
OUR HANDICAPS

II Corinthians 13:7

"There was given to me a thorn in the flesh."

I

Here is a man who made history. There are whole nations that have influenced the world less than he. He has put his two hands on all the continents and pushed them into new zones of light. He made the channels in which the theological thought of nineteen hundred years has flowed. He was therefore a man of amazing power. Yet this text calls attention to the fact that he was not one hundred per cent efficient. He labored under a handicap. There was a restraining hand put upon him that he was sure made it impossible for him to do what otherwise he might have done.

Now when we speak of the handicapped folks we speak of a great company. Many of them won positions of vast usefulness and power. We think of Milton with his blindness feeling that "the one talent which was death to hide" was lodged within him useless. Yet he saw more through those blind eyes than we see with our eyes wide open. We think of Beethoven, unable to hear his own music, yet leaving behind him treasures of harmony that the world will never let die. We think of Phillips Brooks who, because of the handicap in his speech, was told that he must never choose a profession that required public speaking. Yet he became one of the greatest preachers of his century. We think of Stevenson, with his tortured and diseased body, and the gifted Sidney Lanier in his hopeless fight with consumption. Yet these all wrote well in spite of their heavy handicaps.
Then we think of that innumerable company of ordinary folks whose names are not known. They were ordinary in their ability, but extraordinary in their courage. How many there are who feel that if they only would be relieved of some particular handicap, how well they might run the race if some tragic ball and chain were only taken from about their ankles. Yet these often carry on with a fine high gallantry that makes us proud of our kinship with them.

II

What was the nature of Paul's handicap? Nobody knows. He did not see fit to tell us. Scholars have been guessing at it for centuries. Some have thought it weakness of eyes. Some have thought he was subject to epileptic fits. One guess is as good as another. He speaks of it as a thorn. It was something that tormented him. It was something that filled his days with torture and his nights with restlessness. It was something that he felt sure impaired his usefulness and made it impossible for him to attain his best.

Just as we do not know Paul's handicap, so we do not know yours.

1. Yours may be economic. You may have lost your wealth. You may have lost your position. You may have capabilities to sell but there is no market for them. You may be some promising youth with your years slipping by, but you are handicapped by some financial obligation or lack. You feel that it will be said of you as of the youth of whom Gray speaks in his Elegy.

"But knowledge to their eyes her ample page,
    Rich with the spoils of time, die ne'er unroll;
Chill Penury repressed their noble rage,
    And froze the genial current of the soul."
3. Maybe it is some physical handicap. You are hampered in health. You are sentenced to fight through the long years with some annoying disease. Maybe you realize that the fight you are called upon to wage is a hopeless fight. Possible your physician has passed sentence upon you, the sentence of servitude to suffering first and death at the end.

3. Maybe it is some grim domestic tragedy. Maybe you have inherited poisoned blood, evil tendencies, gnawing appetites born of a sin not your own. We read of one of the bravest heroes of the Old Testament this pathetic sentence: "He was a mighty man of valor and his mother was a harlot." He was not simply a child of shame. He was a fragment of a home that never was. The mother eyes into which he looked were those of a professional outcast.

Maybe yours is some grim tragedy growing out of a foolish marriage. You find too late that life's most beautiful relationship has been for you only a tragic blunder. Maybe you are compelled to feel that someone very near to you whom you should love and whom, under proper circumstances you would love, is yet only a ball and chain to hamper you in the race of life. But whatever may be our handicaps, most of us have them. Few of us indeed are one hundred per cent efficient.

III

What did Paul do with his handicap. He did not allow it to defeat him. When he realized its presence he did not turn coward, throw down his weapon and take to his heels. You have heard of that soldier who found himself fighting with a broken sword. He said, "I can do nothing with this," and threw it down and slunk away. By and by his prince and leader came to the spot. He had no weapon at all. He looked down and found this old broken sword and seized it and won the fight.
There are many who surrender to their handicaps. I knew a woman in Tennessee years ago. She was engaged to be married. Guests were gathered. Everyone expected to have a part in the ceremony was present except the bridegroom. He never came and the disappointed girl surrendered to her embarrassment. She accepted her humiliation as a final disaster and went out to sell herself to a life of shame. Yes, you may look at your handicap and say, "This makes any worth while achievement impossible for me," and lie down and give up the fight.

Or you may fight your handicap grimly with clenched fist and square jaw. You may fight it and win a certain victory and come out at the end harsh and hard, cynical and bitter, but tough fibered and with thows of steel. But this is only another way of being defeated. There are certain men who call themselves self-made men. They have fought against odds and have won, but in the process of winning they have lost all tenderness, all sympathy for weakness. A most successful man in our city spoke the other day against an institution whose purpose is to care for orphan children. He did not believe in such institutions. It only encouraged weak men and women to bring children into the world that they could not support. His doctrine was the doctrine of the jungle, the survival of the strongest. He is a rocklike man, but not like the shadow of a great rock in a weary land where weak and battered souls may find shelter. He is rather like the rock on which good ships wound themselves and go to their death at the bottom of the sea. What shall it profit a man if he gain the whole world and lose all the Godlikeness out of himself that constitutes his real worth.
Instead of whining, instead of becoming bitter, Paul took his handicap to God. He went eagerly and confidently into God's presence, telling Him frankly how hampered he was, telling Him that it was for His glory that he desired the removal of his thorn. He told Him, no doubt, that his thorn was a handicap in the presence of pagan nations that he sought to win; that therefore he just must have it removed. This request he presented not once but three times. And what response did God make? It was a response that leaves some of us bewildered. It was not what Paul expected. It was not what we should expect. Paul's thorn was not removed. God flatly refused to grant his request. In spite of all his praying Paul still had his hampering thorn.

This is often God's method with us. Many times we stand bewildered and perplexed because we cannot get into a thornless world. We are so eager for such a place that some of us claim to have arrived when we are only blinding ourselves. There are those who tell us that they have discovered a painless, sinless, deathless world. But these still suffer and sin and die, even as you and I. Strange as it may seem, thorns and heavy handicaps seem to have a part in God's program. This fact offends some of us. Why did God put us in the world where we are subject, for instance, to the heavy handicap of temptation? Why are we capable of falling? Why are we capable of making such a tragic mess of life. Well, for one reason, the man who cannot fall cannot rise. The man who cannot make a choice of evil cannot make a choice of good. The man who cannot be tempted downward cannot be tempted upward. The man who cannot be tempted at all is no man. He is a mere machine.
Even so keen and loyal a soul as John the Baptist blundered. After a brilliant and spectacular ministry he was shut in jail. To him, amidst the gloom of the prison, there trickled in rumors of the doings of Jesus in the great outer world. He was opening blind eyes and cleansing lepers and even opening graves. Why then, if He had such power, did He not deliver one who had been His loyal servant and friend? Why did He allow him to undergo the terrible handicap of a term in prison?

Why, a little later, did this same Jesus leave his own disciples to face the handicaps that were put in their way by a hostile world. Yet such was the case. When Jesus prayed for them he did not pray that they might not have any handicaps. He did not pray that they might have it easy. Here is what He says, "I pray not that thou shouldst take them out of the world, but that thou shouldst keep them from evil." As strange as it may seem, Jesus did not believe that an ideal world was a world where everything would come to us right side up. He believed that a world of handicaps was the best possible world.

But if He did not remove Paul's thorn He still answered his prayer. He answered it in a far better way than Paul himself expected. This great saint must have had this experience in mind when he said that God was able to do exceeding abundantly above all that we could ask or even think. He did it here. Paul's prayer was this, "Lord, give me an easier time, give me a lighter load." The reply of Jesus was this, "I will not lighten your load, but I will do something better. I will increase your strength. Your task will still be heavy, but you will always be equal to your task. My grace is sufficient for thee."
And what God did for Paul he promises to do for every one of us. There is absolutely no exception. There is no situation that He cannot use for our enrichment if we will only give him a chance. After long years of experience Paul declares triumphantly, "We know that all things work together for good to them that love God." All things, our advantages and our disadvantages, our handicaps and our helps, our losses and our gains, our joys and our sorrows, - all things.

What is your handicap? Whatever it is, if you will bring it to God He will remove it if he thinks best. But it is far more likely that He will enable you to bear it and thus bring to you a nobler strength and a richer courage. This has been the case with an innumerable company that no man can number. How many there are who have discovered that what they thought was going to work their ruin has been their salvation. How many today who recognize the fact that the supreme sorrows of their lives have given birth to their sweetest joys.

Did you ever read "Gwen's Canyon?" Gwen was a red-haired, passionate, wild young creature who reveled in the great out of doors. She was tempestuous and willful. One day when she was giving way to her temper her wise friend rebuked her. "I will do as I please!" she answered with a stamp of her foot. "I always did as I pleased! I always will do as I please!" "Some day, Gwen," was the solemn answer, "you will not do as you please." Her friend proved to be a true prophet. A few days later her horse fell and she became a cripply for life.

And now she lies in the cabin of her father at the head of the canyon. Her friend, who is the sky pilot, goes to see her. She is unspeakably bitter. And then he tells her the story of the
canyon. "One time," he declares, "there were no canyons, but one wide monotonous plain. The lord of the plain cleft it to the heart with a thunderbolt and for a long time it seemed to bleed from the black wound. But by and by a little stream began to sing in the depth of the canyon and forest and flowers clothed its sides. And the canyon became the master's finest resort. What a cool, sweet place it was with all its sights and sounds and silences. And Gwen learned that the sweetest flowers of character, the rare blossoms of love and joy and peace and longsuffering, are to be found in their richest profusion in the canyons in the hearts that have been broken, in the souls that have suffered from some vexing handicap.

So it happened to Paul. So it may happen to you if, with his faith, you will bring your handicap to God. We hear his shout across the centuries, "Most gladly, therefore, will I rather glory in my infirmities, that the power of Christ may rest upon me."
HANDLING OUR HANDICAPS

"There was given to me a thorn in the flesh..." II. Corinthians 12: 7

I.

Here is a man who made history in a big way. He used life grandly. He knew
the inside of many prisons. He was on speaking terms with a good many whipping posts.
He went about his ministry often with a price on his head. But in his own day, he put
his hands on two comrades and pushed them up into new zones of light. Since then, his
influence instead of diminishing has increased with the passing of the years. It would
be next to impossible to over-estimate the powerfully good that he has brought to the
world.

Now you would naturally suppose that a man who was so strong, one who was so
abundant in labors, one who wrote about one-third of the New Testament must have been
a man who knew nothing of the hindrances that vex so many of our lives. But in this
you are mistaken. Paul had a handicap. He calls it a "thorn in the flesh." It was
something that hampered him, vexed him, caused him no doubt many a trying day and many
a sleepless night.

There are many views we get of Paul that seem to divide us from him. He seems
so magnificently great that we hardly realize that he is touched with our infirmities.
But when we hear him bewailing his "thorn," we begin to feel closely akin to him.
Handicaps are a familiar human experience. There are few of us who are one hundred
percent fit. There is possibly not one present but what has said, "If I could only
get rid of this then I could do something.

II.

What was Paul's handicap? We do not know. He did not see fit to tell us. I
am quite sure that it is wise that he did not. Had he told us whatever it was, we
should have been likely to have minimized it. We would have thought it very small in
comparison to our own. We have a tendency when we get up against it to think our situation is harder than that of anybody else. It may have been weak eyes. It may have been that he was an epileptic. At least, it was something that annoyed him and that he felt hampered him in his work.

Just as we do not know Paul's handicap, we do not know yours. They vary widely in different personalities.

1. There are those who are handicapped by their circumstances. They were born among scenes of poverty. Every day is a battle to keep the wolf from the door. There are many lovely things they would like to do. There are many books they would like to read. There are many friendships they would like to make. But they are bound to the monotinous task of fighting the wolf from the door. Sometimes they are even deprived of an education. They feel the poet was speaking to them when he said,

But knowledge to their eyes are ample page
With the spoils of time did never unroll
Chill poetry repressed their noble rage,
And froze the genial current of the soul.

But if poverty is a handicap, too much wealth is an even greater one. We may find it in our hearts to be sorry for the poor people who have to get up early in the morning and work late in order to get on, but they are not so much handicapped as the young chap who has nothing to do but drive his daddy's automobile and spend his daddy's money. A young millionaire blew his brains out over in North Carolina two or three years ago. He had a handicap that he was not strong enough to overcome. He was submerged in an avalanche of gold!

There is an old story that says that when the Goths came to besiege Rome, they bribed a woman to open the gate. She did it under the condition that each soldier would give her the bracelet which he wore on his arm. As they passed, each loosened the bracelet and threw it at her till they literally crushed her to death. Poverty can be a real handicap, and so can wealth.
2. Then there are those who have physical handicaps. They are lame, blind, deaf - how many have had to do their work through a poor wreck of a body. Think of John Milton feeling with his oncoming blindness that his one talent would soon be gone and he would be of almost utter uselessness. Think of Beethoven with celestial melodies in his heart but unable to hear them with his outer ear. Think of Sidney Lanier as he fought with tuberculosis. Think of Robert Louis Stevenson laughing like a happy child, writing like a genius while he suffered like a martyr.

It may be that you face a physical handicap. A weak heart, weak lungs, a warning from the doctor that you will have to be careful always and conserve your strength or cease to live at all. I had a good friend who had this sentence passed on him not long ago. At first, he was a bit bitter, but now he goes cheerfully along way a most gallant and helpful man.

3. Sometimes it is a tragic domestic difficulty. "An old maid died last night," one remarked to another as a funeral train went by. But those who knew that old maid spoke of her with reverence. When she was young, wooers would come, but she would turn the deaf ear. She had an old father and an imbecile brother on her hands. She was kept away from making a home of her own by nearer duties. When these two had passed and those dependent upon her were gone, she was too old and her best dreams never came true.

Maybe your marriage was only a mistake. Maybe the deepest and sweetest secret of human blessedness has whispered itself to you and then passed you by. Now, though you are still young, you feel that life is over before you have hardly begun to live.

How many there are who are hampered by tragic domestic handicaps. Sometimes these are none to the world - more often they are not.

III.

What are we going to do with these handicaps? When we find some ball and chain clinging to our ankle that we feel makes the running of the race next to impossible, how are we to race up to it? Those who are handicapped usually take one of
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three ways.

1. Some surrender. They tell themselves frankly that it is no use - life can never mean anything to me. There is nothing to do but to give up. These sometimes die quickly or they experience a living death that makes them a burden to themselves and others.

Back in Tennessee years ago, there was a young girl engaged to be married. The wedding cake was on the table, the guests had gathered, the minister was present, the bride was decked in her bridal attire. Only one thing was lacking - that was the bridegroom. He never came. She felt herself disgraced. From that experience she went to throw herself absolutely away.

You have heard the old story of the soldier who was fighting with some degree of courage till he broke his sword. Then he said to himself, "I cannot fight with this old broken sword. If I had a weapon like a prince, it would be different, but this is good for nothing." So he threw it down and took to his heels. By and by the prince, hard pressed with no sword at all came to this spot. He found this broken sword and with it won the battle. That happens again and again. Some of us throw away what others use.

2. There are others who while they do not surrender in weakness to their handicaps, are soured and hardened by them. They fight, but in the process they overdevelop their pugnacity. Often those who have fought against odds become hard and unsympathetic.

In the city where I was pastor some time ago, a man spoke bitterly against an orphans' home. He had himself been an orphan. He had fought difficulties and overcome them, but he had no sympathy with weakness. He would not give a cent to these fatherless and motherless children. "It only encourages weak men and women to bring children into the world they cannot take care of," he said. He had triumphed over his handicap in a way, but in so doing, he had allowed them to rob him of the milk of human kindness. This strikes me as only another way of surrendering.

3. Then there are those who use their handicaps. Paul was an artist at this.
He was eager to go to Rome, but instead he was arrested and kept in prison for long months. By and by, he was carried to Rome to stand trial. Writing to his friends, he says, "The things that have happened unto me have fallen out to the furtherance of the gospel." ‘The thing I thought was going to hurt me has helped me’ - that was his constant experience. "We know," he said, "that to them that love God, all things work together for good."

How then are we to go about overcoming and even using our handicaps?

1. If we are to deal wisely with our handicaps, we must not suffer them to absorb our attention. We must allow ourselves to be forever thinking about what we have not instead of what we have. Once a young chap caught two quails in a trap. He put them down in each of the pockets of his overalls, - tail first. He did not wish to smother them. Suddenly there was a tickling in one of his pockets and the bird was out and gone. He slapped both hands on that empty pocket and looked so wistfully after the lost bird that the other got away as well.

You have heard of that wise dog who found a delightful piece of meat. On his way home, full of congratulations for himself, he crossed a foot-logged on a beautiful clear stream. On looking down into the water, he saw another dog who had a piece of meat far better than his own. He forgot what he had and jumped after what he had not, and lost both.

Some of you will remember George R. Stuart who at the time of his death was possibly the best platform man in America. Once he came to preach for me while I was in Washington. He had two of his upper front teeth missing. He looked so horrible as to be almost ghastly. I wondered how he would ever overcome such a handicap, but upon introducing him, I soon found out. He stepped to the front saying, "Two or three months ago, I took a hurting down in this shoulder. I went to see the doctor and he said, 'It is your teeth.' I said, 'It is no such thing, they don't reach down that far.' But I had to have them out and he made me a beautiful plate. Just before I
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started up here, I broke my beautiful plate. My wife didn’t want me to come, but I said, ‘Thank the Lord, I still have my tongue left. When I get up there, I will explain it to the folks. The simple people will understand and it doesn’t make any difference about the fool’s anyhow.’ So, I am here with my tongue. If any of you are not interested in my tongue, just look at the hole.” He later swept the audience off its feet by using what he had left.

One great weakness of my debating days has been a source of thanksgiving in later years. When I began to debate, it was fashionable for everybody to have notes. I, of course, followed the time honored custom, but I shook so that I could not hold them in my hand. Therefore, I had to learn to carry my speech in my head. what was once a handicap has become a source of great convenience.

2. If you are to use your handicap, you must make it minister to the pity of others instead of the pity of yourself. Of all the disintegrating emotions, there is none, I daresay, more destructive than self-pity. When you begin to get sorry for yourself and talk baby talk to yourself, then you are about at the jumping off place. Instead of pitying yourself because of your handicap, let it give you pity and sympathy for others who are equally handicapped as yourself.

Those of you who have read The Man That Played God, will recall the great pianist who lost his hearing. At first he was embittered. To his old sweetheart he read, “Are not two sparrows sold for a farthing? but not one of them is forgotten before God. That is not true! I used to believe it, but I don’t believe it any more. God is cruel.” In his bitterness he tried to commit suicide but was thwarted by his valet.

By and by he reluctantly studied lip reading and became very skillful in reading what others were saying. One day, standing at his window, he looked down into Central Park. He heard a consumptive boy tell the girl he loved that the doctor had ordered him rest under penalty of death, but that it would take a thousand dollars and he had no money. Then the great musician saw him pray. He sent his servant to answer
that prayer and his sorrow turned into joy as he forgot his own handicap helping the needs of others.

Over in India there was a young woman left a widow. To be a widow in India is almost the worst possible handicap. The fact of her widowhood is proof of unfaithfulness in a former existence. She is a beast of burden and allowed only one meal a day. But this woman instead of pitying herself, pitied the widows about her. Under the impulse of that pity, she gathered five widows into her home, then ten, then fifty, then one hundred. Stanley Jones, who tells the story, said that when he visited her she had two thousand widows in her home. That is, she multiplied her handicap two thousand fold and thus multiplied, she overcame it.

3. Do what Paul did. Bring your handicap to God. When Paul did this, God did not see fit to grant his request, but he did answer his prayer, and he said, "My grace is sufficient for thee, My strength is made perfect in thy weakness." Paul came to rejoice in what had once been his greatest hinderance. He changed his wants into wealth. He shouts, "Most gladly will I glory in my infirmities that the power of Christ may rest upon them."

It will be so for you, if in faith you bring your handicap to Him and one of two things will happen. He will either remove it or give you strength to see it through. The latter course is far the more likely. It is also, as a rule, far better. That is the reason our Lord chooses it, but when we are at our best, we do not wish an easier task, we rather yearn for strength equal to our task. We do not ask that the law of gravitation be turned away, we rather ask that power of the spirit to mount up on wings as eagles. And all sorts and conditions of men have received this power and have come to thank God for their handicaps and have counted them among their chief blessings.
A STRANGE PATH TO POWER

"When I am weak, then am I strong."
--II:Corinthians 12:10

(Please Note: This is a sermon)

What a strange paradox! It speaks of a strength that is born of weakness. When we are seeking for the path that leads to power, the roadway of weakness is about the last that we are likely to select. But Paul tells us that it was the path by which he arrived. This word is intensely autobiographical. The great apostle is letting us into an inner secret of his heart. Speaking out of his own vital experience, he makes this amazing declaration: "When I am weak, then am I strong."

I

"When I am weak!" Paul, then, had a sense of weakness. That in itself takes us by surprise. Weakness is not a feeling that we are accustomed to associate with this intellectual and spiritual athlete. He seems always so fit, so adequate, so marvelously strong. Yet we hear him saying, "When I am weak." There were such periods then. He had his seasons of weakness, even as you and I.

1. Sometimes we are weak seemingly for no reason at all. I read sometime ago of an idiot who spent all his time spinning tops. Every day he would begin early in the morning, and all day long he would give himself diligently to his task. The wise writer who told the story said that there were doubtless days when the top did not spin well and when the poor weak-minded fellow went to his rest with a sense of failure. I dare say the author was correct.
But whether he is or not, this I know—that there are times when
my own top refuses to spin. There are times when I cannot get up a
sermon in my heart. Then, there are times when, having achieved what
I care to believe is some degree of success in this matter, I cannot
deliver the sermon. Struggle now I may, everything seems to go wrong,
and I go home at the close of the service with a depressing sense of
failure. I dare say that, whatever your work, you know the meaning of
this experience. There are days of weakness when everything seems to go
deep wrong.

2. Then, there are times when we are weak because of some physical
handicap. Paul knew the feeling of that. He was harassed by a thorn in
the flesh. Just what that thorn was nobody knows, but this we do know—
that it was a source of acute pain, constant embarrassment, and annoyance.
He was thoroughly convinced that he could carry on far better, be far more
useful, if that thorn were only removed. He made its removal a matter of
earnest prayer, but his request was not granted.

Most of us know something of this experience. We are not one hundred
per cent fit. Sometimes the doctor tells us we must ease up, that we are
going at too high a speed. But we feel ourselves the victims of our
situation. We cannot let up, we feel, except at a loss to ourselves and
to others. Therefore, in spite of physical infirmity, we carry on. But
we deliver ourselves with only a fraction of our possible strength.

3. Sometimes our weakness is born of spiritual weakness. We have
been untrue to our heavenly vision. We have failed to listen to the
voice of our own oracle. Sometimes our failure may be open and obvious.
Sometimes it may be the inner failure of the heart, some secret disloyalty
that no one knows but God and ourselves. Yet, it weakens us. It is only
fidelity to the highest inward purity that is really strong.

"My sword blade carves the cart of men, 
My quick lance thrust is sure, 
My strength is as the strength of ten 
Because my heart is pure.

4. Then, our weakness may be voluntary. It may be born of our carrying the burdens of others. We may in a sense handicap ourselves by taking upon ourselves the heartaches, the needs, the problems of others. This was one great source of Paul's weakness. He had chosen to humble himself in the eyes of men by taking upon his shoulders the burdens of others. "Who is weak," he asks, "and I am not weak? Who is made to stumble and I do not turn with inclination?" He had made the woes of others his. Their weakness was his weakness.

II

What did Paul do with this weakness? When I am weak, then what? How is it with ourselves? These times of weakness are critical times. When I am weak! That is a period when the worst may happen as well as the best. How much of tragedy is born of sheer weakness! How much of triumph comes from the same source! When I am weak, what then?

1. When I am weak, I quit. I give it up. I lie down and literally wallow in self-pity. I cease to lift and begin to lean. I cease to be an asset and become a liability. I face a needy world. I face my fellows, many of whom have handicaps that tower above as Pike's Peak above an ant-hill. But all I have to offer is an alibi. How many people who once counted in the cause of righteousness count no more because in an hour of weakness they quit.

2. When I am weak, I not only quit, but, since nature abhors a vacuum, I degenerate into the positively bad. Many of our worst criminals began their career, not because they were vicious so much as because they were
weak. Weakness so often ends in wickedness. This is the lesson that George Eliot sought to teach in her greatest novel, "Middlemarch." The central character in this book, you remember is Tito Balisse. When he first comes on the scene, he is so winsome and gracious that he is all but irresistible. But he has this fatal defect: When he stands at the forks of the roads, instead of asking which road is right, he only asks which is the easier. Thus, he grows weaker with the passing of the years. At last, having betrayed every trust, he dies with the fingers of one to whom he has been desperately disloyal, clutching at this throat. When I am weak, then I go to pieces morally and spiritually. That might be said by some.

3. But Paul makes of weakness a pathway to power. For him, weakness is not a curse but a blessing. It is not a liability; it is an asset. "When I am weak, then I am strong," some of us say. When I am weak, then I grow cynical and sour and wreck myself and help to wreck others. But Paul took the high course. "When I am weak, then am I strong." Weakness for me comes as an open door into the palace of power.

III

Why was this the case? Let it be understood at once that there was nothing inevitable about it. Weakness may be a roadway to strength, but it is not necessarily so. It is only so when we make the right use of it.

When, then, is weakness a help rather than a hindrance? When does it bring a larger strength rather than weakness?

1. This is the case when we use our weakness as a pincushion for the sharpening of our muscles. If the choice were left to ourselves, most of us, I am afraid, would choose an easy path. We might choose it for ourselves. We would even more likely choose it for our children.
many times I have heard some rugged father say, "I am going to see to it that my boy does not have as hard a time as I have." Thus he robs his boy of the rugged training that made the father what he was.

Now, the truth is that, though Easy Street is very popular, it is a very dangerous street on which to live. Easy Street very readily runs into Rotten Row. How do you account for the fact that all strong peoples have lived where life is hard? Why do you not find the rugged races, as well as the staunch individuals, in kindly climates, where life is easy, where one has nothing much to do but to smoke a flip-tree and go back to sleep. This is the case because we become strong only through conflict.

You may pity the youngster that is having to get up early in the morning and give hours to physical labor in order to educate himself. But the one you should pity is the young fellow who has nothing to do but to spend his dad's money, honk his dad's car, and inherit his estate.

It has been my privilege to attend some of the best educational institutions in America. I can honestly say too that I did not attend them as a loafer. I took what education I got pretty seriously. But my best training came from the farm. Frankly, I did not like farming. I used to look over a field, red with sassafras sprouts and say to myself, "I don't know what I'm going to do when I become a man, but I know what I am not going to do." But having to stick to a job that I did not like has been worth more than all the ease that I have ever known.

2. Then, weakness may be a source of strength when it drives us to a higher power. There are some folks that in their self-sufficiency feel that they are able to carry their own load, to solve their own problems; at least they so feel at certain periods. But sooner or later, there comes to all of us, I think, that intense conviction of weakness that makes
God an absolute necessity. All of us need Him, but those of us who are
burdened with grief, or with responsibilities to heavy for us, or with a
sense of guilt that poison our cup of happiness, must have Him. We can
sing with the psalmist, "as the hart panteth after the water-brook, so
panteth my soul after Thee, on God."

A friend told me sometime ago of witnessing a wrestling match between
a famous Russian and a Japanese. He said the Russian was a great hulk of
a man, while the Japanese looked pitifully small and insignificant. The
Russian walked into the ring with great muscles standing out on his arm
as if to burst the skin. As the spectators watched him, they became down-
right sorry for the little Japanese. But when the combat started, the
Japanese employed jiu-jitsu, and soon had the big giant beaten into a pulp.
What is the meaning of "jiu-jitsu"? It means to conquer by yielding.
That is certainly the best mode of conquest in the realm of the spiritual.
Paul gathered strength by yielding to God as Jacob gathered strength in
his transforming experience by the brook-side. Weakness becomes power when
it leads to surrender.

3. Finally, weakness is a source of power. And that weakness is born
of voluntary bearing of the burdens of others. Paul's handicap, as I said
before, was in part due to the fact that he was carrying the other fellow's
load. That constituted the burden of Jesus. What a handicap was the cross!
Paul tells us that Jesus was crucified through weakness. But this weakness
was not unavoidable. It was not a weakness that relentless power thrust
upon Him. It was a weakness that he accepted for the sake of others.
Jesus makes it very plain that he did not have to go to the cross. He
did not have to lay down his life. "No man taketh it from Me, but I lay
it down of Myself." He endured the weakness of the cross for the sake
of others.
Now, it is just in thus living in the spirit of the cross that we come to our best possible strength. It is thus living that we exercise the greatest power in helping others. In thus leading, we bless. Who are the folks that have done most to take captive our hearts and to win us to unselfishness living? It is always those who for love's sake have taken upon themselves our weakness. The people so burdened are always the most joyous people. They are always the most helpful.

There is a legend that tells that the birds once had no wings. They walked the common earth just as the beasts in the field. One day God, winds down upon the ground and commanded these birds to pick them up. They obeyed, though the task, they felt, did work for them a heavy handicap. To have to bear about those annoying wings all the time would be a source of tragic weakness. But as they obeyed for love's sake, they found that the burden they thought was going to be a handicap became a help. They found the weight that they had assumed at his call was changed into wings. So it ever is:

On Cross, that liighest up my head,
I dare not ask to fly from Thee;
I lay in dust life's glory dead,
And from the ground there blossoms red Life that shall endless be.
"Then am I strong." This "then" is a backward looking word. It points back to times of peculiar strength, of power beyond the human. When were Paul's days of greatest strength? The answer at first seems shocking. "When I am weak, then am I strong." Why was this the case? It is only as we are conscious of our weakness that we seek God's strength. It is only when the heavy hands of a great need grip our shoulders and crush us to our knees that we really pray. Perhaps the most difficult barrier that God has to cross in getting into our lives is the barrier of our own self-sufficiency.

Thou hast taught us, O Lord, through many a failure our powerlessness to save ourselves and to save others. Give us therefore to offer our weakness for Thy strength.

Amen.