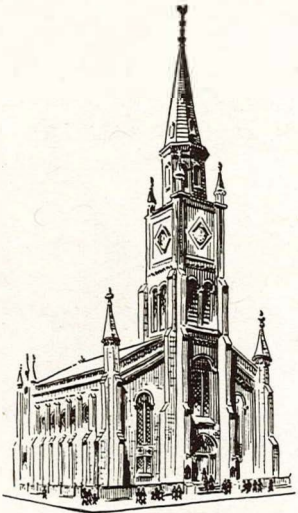


# *;How To Keep On Keeping On*



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## HOW TO KEEP ON KEEPING ON

Scripture: Philippians 4:13; John 3:7

What will you do when the going gets rough in your life, as almost inevitably it will? Have you got what it takes to handle the more difficult vicissitudes of human existence when the days of good fortune run out and the dark hard days begin? Sooner or later everybody has to face the fact that life is indeed hard, very hard; that it is sometimes almost harder than one can handle, yet it *has* to be handled.

I heard the other day of a gentleman who had really hit bottom financially. He'd had a business failure, and practically everything had gone to pay off his debts. As signment was made even of his personal belongings. Officers came, by order of the court, and took away his car leaving him without transportation.

That evening, bound for home, he was standing on a street corner with the thought in mind of hailing a taxi; but it occurred to him that he was so reduced financially that this would be an undue extravagance. He was unfamiliar with public transportation, but as he was standing there in deep discouragement, wondering what to do, a great big truck drew up to the curb and a fine-looking friendly truck driver asked him if he would like a lift. (One marvels at the way God works sometimes. This truck driver was exactly what the bankrupt man needed at that moment, but who would ever have thought he would come along?)

As they drove down the street the businessman sensed something in this truck driver that aroused confidence, and he opened up and poured out to him in detail all the difficulties which he faced, finding comfort in unburdening his heart in this way.

The truck driver like many such men was, to a degree at least, a philosopher. And he said, "Well, my friend, it's too bad. That's life. It can treat you real rough." And then he used a phrase which I've adopted as the title of this sermon. He said, "Sometimes you've got to learn how to keep on keeping on."

This indeed is one of the basic ~~arts of knowing~~ how to keep on keeping on. And everybody can do that. One of the greatest truths I've discovered in this life is that when you want to create a mental condition for handling some ordeal or difficulty you can do it if you will meditate and concentrate on it day after day. Your mind is a powerful instrument. If it controls you, you will not be victorious. But if you control it, you will be.

However, I don't believe that a human being by his own unaided strength can accomplish this. Something else needs to be added. The distressed man to whom I have referred held steady and made his way hack up with the help of a wonderful dynamic thought that changes everything. This thought is one of the greatest you and I can ever get hold of. It is embedded in the wise old Bible, and, given what little I know about human beings and about the Bible and about God, I will guarantee that this thought can help anybody under any circumstances to keep on keeping on. Everybody would do well to hold it in consciousness until it absorbs into the unconsciousness and live by it. It is found in Philipians, the fourth chapter, verse fifteen. And this is it: "I can do all things through" - myself?

No. "I can do all things through Christ which strengthen me." Christ will help you keep on keeping on. The way this works out first-off is in what you do with defeat. Everybody at one time or another suffers a defeat.

"You can't win them all," somebody said. What then do you do about the ones you don't win? What about the harsh defeats that come to you? Physical defeats, for example, are where you have trouble with your health, where your body begins to give up on you. What do you do with pain, sorrow, suffering and hardship? And what happens when you are defeated in some objective or some ambition? Or when you see that some fond hope that you cherished is not going to be realized? What happens when life seems to flow away from you, rather than toward you, when things get mixed up and become unhappy, when you are having trouble with yourself and trouble with everything else? What do you do?

The greatest measure of a human being isn't how he handles himself when things are going well, but how he handles himself when things are going badly, when defeat comes. The attitude a person has in defeat is one great issue of his life, for it determines whether he will be able to overcome his difficulties and be victorious again.

I have in my library a book entitled *Success Through a Positive Mental Attitude*, Stone and Hill. It's a good book. And in it is a story that fascinated me and which I think I will retell here. It's a story about a race horse and a horse race. I suppose there are people who would never expect to hear about a horse race from the pulpit. Well, you never know.

When I was a boy the greatest race horse in the United States was Man' War. There had never been a race horse to equal him. I saw him race once. It was a

poetry in motion. What a magnificent animal he was!

And the jockey who rode him almost seemed to be part of the horse, so that the two moved as one. Watching Man o' War was an unforgettable sports experience, like the time years ago when I saw Jackie Robinson, at Ebbetts Field, steal three bases including home. These are things you never do forget. Well, at any rate, Man o' War had it all his own way. But then there was another horse that began to challenge him. And it is the story of this other horse, named John P. Grier, that is related in the book by Stone and Hill. You say you never heard of John P. Grier? That is not surprising, for he had only a fluttering, momentary fame.

Well, this John P. Grier looked pretty good. People said, "He's a great horse. He can rival Man o' War." So they finally got the two of them in a race. They both got away cleanly at the starting post. They were even at the first quarter. They were even at the second quarter, they were even at the third quarter, they were even at the eighth pole ... Then the crowd leaped to its feet, electrified. John P. Grier was edging ahead. Man o' War was facing the challenge of his life.

But the little jockey sitting up on top of Man o' War did some thinking. He had never hit Man o' War with a whip. The great horse always had sufficient motivation without the whip. And the jockey wondered, "Shall I hit him with the whip?" The thought came to him, "No, don't hit him, he's going to be second." So he hit him with the whip. And this startled Man o' War. He had never felt the touch of a whip before. And under the shock of it he became a ball of fire. He surged across the finish line seven lengths ahead, still the champion.

Well, so far so good, but that is not the main point of

the story. The point is what happened to John P. Grier.

That race was to be his one moment of glory, but he was defeated. Now, I'm no authority on the psychology of a horse. I don't know too much about the psychology of people, for that matter. But it must be so. This horse John P. Grier never challenged any great race horse again. Apparently his defeat by Man o' War left him hurt inside. Deep down he was a soft horse. He couldn't take it. His performance after that was weak, half-hearted, apathetic. If he had been a positive thinking horse, he would have said to himself, "I almost beat that Man o' War. Next time I'll really take him over." But he was soft. He didn't have in him the making of a champion. He was the victim of his weakness. He let defeat defeat him.

What are you going to do with defeat? Are you going to let it defeat you? Or are you going to make it a positive, creative experience from which you can extract much know-how and wisdom and from which you will gain strength to proceed? The individual who has placed at the center of his thinking the wonderful affirmation, "I can do all things through Christ" can recover from any defeat and handle creditably any situation.

One time at a convention in Chicago I got into conversation with a man who had been awarded an honor that year as the leading producer in his industry. This man was an outgoing extrovert if I ever saw one. He said to me, "I want to tell you something, Norman. I've read all these books about how to get ahead. And, believe me, I've got it ahead. I'm now the biggest producer in the industry. And I'm on my way to realizing my great ambition."

"What is your ambition?" I asked.

"To make a couple of million dollars."



"Fred," I ventured to remark, "It's all right to make some money, but you don't want to make that the big ambition of your life."

"Now don't give me any of that religious stuff," he retorted. "I'm going places."

There was something engaging about this man even though he had his ideas and values mixed up. And after meeting him that day in Chicago I would hear from him from time to time. And he would tell me, "I've done this. I've sold this, I've accomplished this," and so forth. But then I noticed in his letters that the effervescence had begun to die down. And he finally wrote me saying, "I don't know what's wrong with me. I've messed everything up. I've made one mistake after another. I've lost a lot of money. I'm a long ways from that two million." And in an access of self-pity and self-blame he went on, "I'm no account. I don't amount to anything. I'm stupid. I'm a fool."

I decided this called for strong talking on my part. I got Fred on the telephone. "Fred, when you let disappointment and defeat get you down just make things that much worse for yourself." And I suggested a series of steps for him to follow.

"Number 1. Stop running yourself down. There's a lot that's right in you. You have the same capacity you had before. Clean your mind of your failures and mistakes and start respecting yourself."

"Number 2. Stop the self-pity. Start thinking of what you have left instead of dwelling on what you have lost. List your assets on a piece of paper."

"Number 3. Of whom have you been thinking? Yourself or others?"

"That's easy. It was myself."

"You will not have a continuing flow of abundance," I told him, "if your thought is only for yourself."

"Number 4." I quoted Goethe: 'He who has a firm will molds the world to himself.' Almighty God put a tough thing into human beings called the will. Use it.

"Number 5. Have a goal and put a timetable on it."

"Number 6. Last, but not least. Every morning and every night of your life articulate these wonderful words: I can do all things through Christ which strengtheneth me."

Quite a while later Fred called me and said, "I want to tell you I realize I never lived until I started living with Jesus Christ. He has given me new abilities and insights and shown me how to turn my defeats into victories."

Fred, I'd say, had constructively handled defeat. He had learned to keep on keeping on.

I was thinking this morning of an old friend of mine who died only recently. He was the manager of a big hotel in Chicago, the Sherman House. His name was Gus Bering. And he once told me a significant story that began at a Barbers' Supply Convention at the Sherman House. The leading barbers of the country were there. And they decided, on the advice of their publicity department, to put on a stunt. They went down to Madison Street, which is a kind of Tenderloin street in Chicago, and found a derelict, the most unpropitious specimen of humanity they could find. They took him to the Sherman House, gave him a bath, a massage, a haircut and a manicure. Then they bought him a suit of clothes, fine quality. They put an expensive cravat around his neck and beautiful shoes on his feet. They gave him a fine overcoat and a hat that set jauntily on the side of his head; also gloves and a walking stick. They took his picture before and

after and put it in paper as an example of what the barbers could do to change a man. He made quite an impression at the Barbers' Convention. He was living high!

Then the convention ended and everybody forgot all about this man, except Gus. Gus didn't know. Gus saw a man transform. He thought, "This is wonderful. I will follow through." So he said to the man, "You have been a bum, but now you are a gentleman. Would you like to remain a gentleman?"

"Oh, yes, Mr. Bering, I sure would," the man assured him.

"All right," said Gus, "I'm going to give you a job, right here in this shop. You and I and God together will make a man of you. When are you willing to go to work? I'd like you to go to work right now."

"Well," the man said, "I tell you, Mr. Bering, I've got a couple of things to add to. How would tomorrow morning at eight o'clock do?"

A shadow of doubt crossed Mr. Bering's mind, but he agreed. And, of course, at eight o'clock the next morning the man wasn't there and he wasn't there at eight o'clock at night. So Mr. Bering, like the Good Shepherd hunting His lost sheep, went down into the alleyways off Madison Street and there he found the man, dead drunk, lying on some newspapers, his hat off to one side, his clothes rumpled - this barbers' specimen of a changed man. So Mr. Bering picked him up, brought him back to the hotel and put him to bed. The next morning he said, "Now, my friend, I'm not going to let you go. There is a man here in this hotel, a bell boy who has been through an experience similar to yours. I want him to talk to you."

And the bell boy told the story, "I was as you were, but I found the secret: I put my life in the hands of Jesus

Christ and I asked Him to take me and make me new. Anybody really gave myself to Him. Only a bell boy but I have a wife and child and a home that's paid for. "And" Mr. Bering put in, "I love and respect of everybody on the staff as well as of the guests who come in."

The clerk looked at that bell boy and said, "I'll do what I do."

"Just say, 'I can do all things through Christ which strengthen me'."

And it happened. The man was changed inside. He is no model of style now, but he is clean and decent and successful and respected. What you are inwardly determines how you can handle things outwardly. Inside you are strengthened, come what may of pain, sorrow, trouble or death, you can keep on keeping on.

Prayer: Our Heavenly Father, we know that we must have something within us that gives the power to meet life and overcome it. How many times have we given up, retreated, been defeated, because we were depending upon our own strength alone! We pray that of us may build into our personalities living relationships with Jesus Christ by which always, under all circumstances, we can keep on keeping on. For this we give Thee thanks through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.

## :Books I have enjoyed reading

One of the best ways to improve our lives is to see how others have met problems and made life more meaningful. For this I recommend reading a wide variety of books.

Listed below are two books I have found particularly interesting and helpful.

### TRY GIVING YOURSELF AWAY, by DAVID DUNN, (Prentice-Hall, Inc., \$2.95)

This is a remarkable book which I have read many times. It contains one of the greatest secrets of a happy and energy packed life. Dunn's discovery of how to give yourself away means an exciting new outlook on life. This book shows how to follow your friendly impulses and to gain new love and understanding. You can find courage and hope through the dynamic Christian principles in this book.

### MY SHADOW RAN FAST by BILL SANDS (Prentice-Hall, Inc., \$4.95)

This is a most fascinating true human story. I could hardly put it down. A young man of fine family, after numerous escapades, finds himself in serious trouble and in prison. A wise warden helps him to make a complete turnabout in his life. His adventurous activity plus his prison background enabled him to get through to prisoners in a way not possible for an outsider. He has helped many to return to upright living. It is a most interesting book.

Good Reading! *Norman Vincent Peale*