

Don't Settle for Your Limitations



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DON'T SETTLE FOR YOUR LIMITATIONS

Scripture: Luke 4:18

I would like to ask you an embarrassing question, and not as though I were addressing it to a whole congregation, but to *you* as one single individual. And the question is this: What are you doing with the marvelous abilities Almighty God built into you? What are you doing with the extraordinary potential the Creator gave to you? Now there's a question for you! And only you can answer it.

Experts on human nature pretty generally agree that the average person uses but a fraction of the potential capacity which he possesses. Some experts fix this at about ten percent. A few, a very few, raise it to twenty percent. Which is to say that, at the highest, most of us are using no more than one-fifth of the potential capacity which is ours. Now this, friends, is a tragedy. And what is the reason?

I suppose one reason is that we just haven't adequately developed the potential which is ours. But a second reason is this: We do a terrible thing to ourselves; we actually clamp down upon ourselves self-imposed limitations. A person tells himself, "Beyond this point I cannot go." And then, an even greater tragedy, having established these limitations we come to the point actually where we're supinely willing to settle for them. "This is what I am," one says, "this is the way it is. Might as well accept it and try to be content." Some people even go so far as to say, "It's God's will" — which is blasphemy if ever I heard any, for God never willed that anybody should be less than he can be.



Thus a truly tragic fact which we must face is that many people settle for their limitations. Indeed, they actually practice their limitations. They practice them so constantly and for so long a time that the limitations become habits. A person comes to be frozen into his limitations like a polar ship frozen into the arctic sea so that it cannot move. A great advertising man, the late Lynn Sumner, who was a friend of mine, used to say, "Some people spend their whole life perfecting their faults." It's a significant thought. You have a fault or a weakness and instead of reducing it you spend your whole life justifying and explaining it until after a while you have perfected it to a point where you never amount to much.

Oh, how we do build up our limitations! Occasionally you do run into a person who impresses you as an egotist, and this is not pleasant, but neither is the self-depreciation you hear from so many people. How they will explain and re-explain how little ability they have! How they will affirm their lack of talent! They will even declare that they haven't any brains.

I wish I had kept count of all the people across the years who have told me they had no brains. And I knew it wasn't so. For example, I talked with a college student who wasn't getting very good grades. His marks were around D plus and C minus, which was about as low as he could get and not flunk out. And he'd come to see me at the suggestion of his mother, who was worried about his not amounting to anything education-wise. I asked, "Well, why *do* you get poor grades? You seem to have a good mind."

"Oh," he said, "you're just an optimist, Dr. Peale. You try to build everybody up. I haven't any brains."

"How do you know you haven't any brains?" I inquired.

"Well," he informed me, "I've known for years that I don't have brains. Now, for example, I have a brother, Harry, and he gets all A's. My mother says that Harry takes after her and I take after my father. And I have to work awfully hard to get a C, even. I just haven't got the capacity, that's all."

"Now, listen, my boy," I told him, "I'll guarantee that you've got plenty of brains, and I'll guarantee that you're going to be a great success in life. Don't be overawed by the bright student. Some of the bright students don't do very well in life and some of the students who get only ordinary grades find themselves late, and they become extraordinary men. What you've got to do," I said, "is stop mentally competing with your brother Harry. Let him get all the good grades he wants to get. There's only one person you should compete with and that is yourself! So if you got a D plus this term, aim your sights high for a C minus next term. And then the term after that make it a C. And then a C plus. And then a B minus."

"Oh," he demurred, "you're getting too high for me."

But the last time I talked with him he *was* up to the B minus level. And he admitted happily, "I never thought I had it in me."

"That," I replied, "is just why it didn't show up. You never *thought* you had it in you. You'd been putting clamps of self-imposed limitation upon yourself."

Oh, the varieties of self-imposed limitations are legion. Particularly widespread, for example, are those that have to do with growing older. I seem to have been hearing a great deal of this lately: people remarking that they are fifty, fifty-five, sixty, sixty-two — so they are "coming

to the end of the road.”

In the Orient the older man is venerated. People listen to him carefully because he has had so much experience and is mature. In our civilization, on the contrary, it's the bright young man who is considered wise. Maybe that's partly what's wrong with us.

Somebody sent me a book entitled HUNZA HEALTH SECRETS FOR LONG LIFE AND HAPPINESS. Since I'm no longer thirty myself, the title aroused my interest. Now where is Hunza Land? Well, it's an isolated little country way off in the Himalayas, a kind of upland valley all surrounded by high mountains. And the people there frequently live to be a hundred or a hundred and ten. A man of ninety would easily give the impression of being forty-five. They have no automobiles; they have no airplanes; they have no motion pictures. They have wholesome foods enriched by the organic chemicals of the mountain soil. Nobody steals — so there are no locks on the doors. Nobody gets mad at anybody else. There is no jealousy. There is no tension. So these people live to be a hundred and ten.

“We in this Western world,” writes Renee Taylor, the author of this book, who lived for a time in Hunza Land, “are so conscious of our age that it is one of the first questions we are asked . . . when we apply for a job. From earliest childhood, age is a topic invariably discussed everywhere — among old and young alike — and dreaded as poison.” And she contrasts this situation with the views of one of the older Hunza men with whom she talked:

“The number of years we live,” he said, “is unimportant. The kind of years we live is important. Eternal life is a quality of life, not a quantity . . . To think about age is to become a slave to it. Why should we consider

adding twenty-four hours to our bodies because the earth has made another revolution in its eternal path around the sun? . . . If man could live without clocks and calendars he would be better off! . . . The true keynote of life is growth, not aging. Life does not grow old. The life that flows through us at eighty is the same that energized us in infancy. It does not get old or weak. So-called age is the deterioration of enthusiasm, faith to live and the will to progress.”

“Well,” you object, “what can these people off in Hunza Land really know scientifically about the process of aging? All they've got is just some theoretical, poetic idea about it.”

All right, here is an item from the New York Herald Tribune. It appeared some months ago, but I still have it. The article is headed TIME IS NOT TOXIC and it says, “‘Time is not toxic’ was the conclusion reached by a group of medical specialists and surgeons in a staff conference at a Midwestern clinic in discussing the problems of disease in the aging individual. Years alone, they decided, have no effect in bringing about degenerative disorders.

“Anyone who thinks that because he or she is getting along in years and that loss of vigor, debilities or degenerative disorders should be experienced is suffering from a time neurosis, which may be more effective than physical conditions in producing the effect they fear.” In other words, they have a psychologically sick idea that they insist upon perpetuating, that you have to become old and infirm. This is a self-imposed limitation.

Furthermore, some people even settle for the limitation of the idea, “I can't live a good, moral, spiritual life — I haven't got it in me.” Whatever you do, don't spend

your life telling the world and yourself that you do not have within you the capacity to live a good life. Jesus Christ is the greatest expert who ever lived at showing people what they have within them. He has struck the shackles off more people than any other influence in all history. He is a master at breaking limitations.

I stood in a little synagogue at Nazareth not long ago reading the fourth chapter of Luke to a group of friends who were with me. This was Jesus' first sermon, one of His greatest, in which He read to the people from the Scriptures: "He hath anointed me to preach the gospel to the poor; he hath sent me to heal the broken-hearted, to preach deliverance to the captives . . ." What captives? Those who were in jail? Ah, it means far more than that. People build their own prisons, forge their own chains. Held by their self-imposed limitations, they are captives who wither and die.

But Jesus sets them free. He implies to each of us, "There is a giant within you." Have you ever seen the giant that is within you? Have you ever felt him trying to burst his way out of the prison house you have made for him? Why don't you let him free? Let Jesus help you let him out. No child of God should ever be a slave either to his passions or his ambitions or his hates or his weakness or his self-depreciation. Accept the truth that Jesus Christ has come to set us captives free. There is glorious joy in true freedom. Don't settle for your limitations.

One of the most frustrating of the limitations I personally have had to contend with — though a minor one, I admit — is fear of seasickness while traveling by ship; and not only fear of seasickness, but seasickness itself. Seasickness is certainly one of the most miserable states

known to man. When you first get it you think you're going to die. And when you've had too long a siege of it you almost fear you won't die! It's that miserable.

I have taken all kinds of pills. On one transatlantic liner a steward told me that you could overcome seasickness by drinking ginger ale and eating baked potatoes. So that is what I did all the way from Southampton to New York — and I was seasick anyway. I used to ask myself, "Why is it that this miserable seasickness must prevent my ever enjoying a trip by sea?"

Then one time I was on the S. S. Constitution coming from Naples to New York, and in the South Atlantic we encountered a hurricane, one of those Ethels or Mabels; and she was a wild and tempestuous lady. The waves were rolling high, causing those long swells, which are the worst kind: when you go down you don't think you're ever going to come up. I'm humiliated to have to say so, but I went to bed and just lay there feeling the boat roll, listening to the creaking.

But the stateroom across from mine was occupied by a friend of mine who happens to be a Christian Scientist. And in the morning he came rapping on my door.

"Time to get up, Norman!" he exulted. "It's a glorious day!" And he opened the door and came in.

"You know," I grumbled, "it's no fun traveling on a ship with a Christian Scientist. You look so miserably healthy."

"Why, what is there to be sick about?" he asked. "We're on the sea, 'rocked in the cradle of the deep.' There are clouds all across the sky and the wind is blowing and there is light bursting through the clouds and we feel the vastness and surge of the mighty deep. This," he declared, "is one of God's great demonstrations."

"Great!" I said. "You go on out and enjoy it."

"Norman," he told me, "the trouble with you is, you're thinking wrong. You are limiting your physical capacity because you're thinking wrong. Let me read you something." And he got out a little pamphlet and read several paragraphs. The passage he read really inspired me.

"Say, that's great stuff," I admitted, "where did you get that?"

"It's from one of your own sermons," he informed me. And he actually shamed me into getting out of my bed and staggering up on deck with him. He said, "We'll do three or four turns around the deck. Then we'll have a go at deck tennis. Won't that be wonderful?"

I replied, "That will be pre - wonderful!" I had started to say "preposterous."

As we swung around the deck he said, "You want to get into the rhythm of it. Roll with the deck." And the ship was tossing like an egg shell. But the sea was a glorious sight: the majesty and wonder of the mighty deep, the waves coming at you like great crowds of white horses with their manes flying. You could breathe the cleanness of it. And pretty soon I actually felt much better. I did play deck tennis with him and had the time of my life. "The reason you were lying down there in that bunk was because you didn't think you had the capacity to get along with the storm," he said, "but now you think you do have the capacity and consequently you have been freed of that limitation." And I've not been seasick since that time. It's a rather trivial illustration, I'll grant you, but the point is you and I need never settle for any kind of limitation.

Oh, we cannot conquer the big limitations by our own unaided strength. But Jesus comes to set us free. He has

freed people from shrinking; He has freed them from self-doubt; He has freed them from their sense of inferiority; He has freed them from shyness; He has freed them from being overawed by life's difficulties; He has freed them from their lusts, from their dishonesties, from their sins. He has freed them from limitations of every kind. He was anointed to do this, to set the captives free. What are you a captive to? You name it, then turn your life over to Jesus Christ, surrender yourself to Him, and He will set you free. He surely will.

Some time ago I was speaking at an insurance convention held in a Palm Beach hotel. The agents attending were those who had achieved a certain volume of sales. So you had to be pretty good to go to this convention. It was a wonderful crowd to talk to: marvelous men who were dynamic, alert, vigorous and outgoing.

After the speech I was standing in the lobby shaking hands with a lot of people when a young man (maybe thirty-five years of age) walked up to me and said, "I listened to your talk this morning. I want to tell you about myself, if you don't mind." He was an attractive looking person, rather the country-boy type. "I was a salesman, but I couldn't sell," he continued in a booming voice. There were people standing all around us, but he didn't seem to care who heard him. "Every time I got with a prospect I'd freeze. Here I had something to sell that people needed, but I couldn't tell them about it. I knew the trouble with me was that I had clamps on me of shyness and self-doubt. And I had some sins that were clamped on me too. These things held me tight and I couldn't get free of them.

"Well, I wanted to get to this convention, and as you know you have to sell a certain volume to attend. I didn't

know what to do. So I went to my pastor, a Baptist preacher in a little country town in Louisiana. And he said to me, 'Bill, you can never get free of your weaknesses on your own. Why don't you turn to the Lord Jesus and ask Him to set you free of these things? If you give your life to the Lord, He will give Himself to you. He has been setting people free ever since He was born in Bethlehem of Judea in the days of Herod the king.'

"So," Bill continued, "I did — I gave myself over to the Lord. And one by one my difficulties loosened up. Those clamps fell away. And I was able to sell. But by that time I had realized that the big thing that had happened to me wasn't that I could sell insurance, but that I was free inside. It was as though I had moved out of a little cell into the big wide world."

The man's face positively glowed. People who had stood listening had misty eyes, for they were seeing one of the greatest things in all the world: a man who no longer settled for his limitations, but had been set free by the power of Jesus Christ.

So don't you settle for your limitations. Go to Jesus and ask Him to set you free from them, whatever they may be. And He will do so. He came to set the captives free.

Prayer: Our Heavenly Father, we thank Thee for the blessing of knowing that we do not need to be captive to anything, that we do not need to be victims of our limitations, do not need to be bound tightly within ourselves, but were created to be free. Help us to put ourselves in Your hands and never again weakly settle for supposed limitations. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.