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## ESCAPING THE "IE" GENERATION

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## ESCAPING THE "ME" GENERATION

If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit which dwells in you. Romans 8: 11

There is growing evidence that millions have discovered a new hero. That hero is themselves. So say that the new interest in self is caused by disillusionment with society, with the political system, with the world itself; these seemed flawed and dangerous. Others say that with nuclear warfare a possibility, there is a subconscious realization that the future is extremely uncertain. Besides, money is becoming less and less valuable so you might as well spend it.

Whatever the cause, there is a new turning inward and a deliberate dedication to the realization of self-fulfillment. Self-gratification and self-improvement are gaining in popularity though sometimes the two goals are incompatible.

Evidence of the trend toward self-service is the growing disinterest in children and in families. Professor James Coleman, a University of Chicago sociologist, has explained this development by saying: "It's because the value system that used to hold families together has been turned upside down. Now the husband and wife typically put their own individual interests first, their joint goals second, and any family interests beyond the couple third. That is a reverse order from the traditional ranking that placed family concerns first and individual goals last. Because the fundamental reversals of priorities lead to more divorce and parental neglect, it has serious implications for stability of the family."

Indeed, children are out of the picture for many of the young marrieds these days, and one of the

advantages they gain from their childlessness is the combined income that flows in. Plenty of money is what some of these marriages are all about. A SN&WR article called "Career Couples: Quick Route to Prosperity" quotes one woman who had a child and took three years out to care for it and then returned to work. She was glad to be back and said that "money has everything to do with .. their marriage. She explained, "It's not like just very spiritual people. It's our standard of living."

That's about right. Many of the "me" generation are not "very spiritual people." And their lifestyle shows this in more ways than one. For some there is a deliberate search for new sexual adventures. One divorced executive who sits a dub where promiscuous sex is regularly practiced says: "I'm out seeking my own pleasure and satisfying my needs." Others flock to discotheques while still others pursue their own lifestyles. Some soak for hours in hot tubs while others explore expanding techniques. Whatever the method, the goal is the same: self-discovery, self-ratification, self-fulfillment. This is the goal of the "me" generation. The "me" generation comprises not only the young people between 25 and 35, for the same ideas are found among the middle-aged as well, though perhaps not expressed quite so openly. Gail Sheehy's book *Passages* presents the case for the middle-aged. She painstakingly examines the life histories of a host of people and assures the middle-aged crowd that their problems are shared by millions. She urges this group to be realistic and if necessary to break away from some of the things they built up for themselves earlier, things like family and marriage. She too emphasizes the importance of a person coming to the point of self-acceptance and self-service.



At any rate, the new emphasis is leading to a sometimes nearly furious drive for self-fulfillment, and this drive leads to all kinds of frenzied activity. As one publication puts it, "Some go to discos and some go to orgies." And as mentioned before, others are into more restful forms of activity such as soaking for hours in hot tubs. Still others simply invest in as much property as they can to insure that their future will be carefree. No matter what form it takes, all of this seems to be a great effort at breathing some life into bodies and minds that many suspect don't amount to very much.

The strong emphasis on self with deliberate disregard of others, including family and even one's children, has to be the result of a point of view that says there is really nothing more important than my own enjoyment. The "me" person says, "I'm going to do things my way."

I don't know where you stand in all of this, but there is a possibility that you have got yourself tangled up in these new trends. Maybe you are bored with your marriage and sick and tired of your family responsibilities, and you want out, the sooner the better. Maybe you have loved the idea that money and the things money can buy are terrifically important, and you are prepared to settle for a lifestyle that satisfies you in terms of what you can purchase. Maybe you have come to the point where you are satisfied with physical attention that you've purchased too. If you've become involved in this "me" generation, there is something you should know that is this: you don't have to go the route you're going. There is an alternative to simply being a part of the "me" generation. You can have life, true life, you can have enjoyment, you can have fulfillment, your life can have meaning—all this but by a totally different route. That alternative is described in the Bible.

I am quite aware that for many people the Bible is not really the most exciting book in the world, and for some the mere mention of it awakens memories of boring hours spent in Sunday school or perhaps of brief moments of crisis in early youth when they found themselves praying. The Bible, though, is extremely interesting when seen again in the light of what the "me" generation is trying to achieve. For the Bible provides a real alternative to the sometimes frenzied "Saturday night fever" some people are smitten with on their way to self-fulfillment.

To show you what I mean, I point you to several sentences from the 8th chapter of the book of Romans, one of the impressive books in the New Testament part of the Bible. Please notice that it talks about the possibility of life in the Spirit and it contrasts this to life in the flesh. Spirit and flesh—please remember that contrast. It provides the key to understanding that the Bible has a truly fascinating alternative for the "me" generation's life style of merely catering to one's personal desires.

This then from Romans 8: "There is therefore now no condemnation for those who are in Christ Jesus. For the law of the Spirit of life in Christ Jesus has set me free from the law of sin and death. For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do: sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit. For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. To set the mind on the flesh is death, but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace. For the mind that is set on the flesh is hostile to God; it does not submit to God's law, indeed it

cannot; and those who are in the flesh cannot please God.

"But you are not in the flesh, you are in the Spirit, if the Spirit of God really dwells in you. Any one who does not have the Spirit of Christ does not belong to him. But Christ is in you, although your bodies are dead because of sin, your spirits are alive because of righteousness. If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit which dwells in you" (vv. 1-11).

Now it seems to me that anyone who is the least bit interested in self-fulfillment should be intensely interested in what Romans 8 is talking about. The passage concluded by describing a possibility that is thoroughly astonishing and exciting. "If the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit which dwells in you." This, you see, is about a mighty action of God which can enter a person's life and change him so fully that he becomes as alive as Jesus Christ was after His resurrection.

Let me explain what this means. The Bible is about Jesus Christ of Nazareth, the only begotten Son of God. Jesus came to this world and took His place among us; He was like other human beings in all things with the exception of sin. Jesus died on Calvary's cross, and with His death He paid for human sin. This is what Romans 8 refers to. Jesus' suffering and death was enough to prepare the way for the salvation of all those who believe in Jesus, and He accordingly did not remain in the grave, a victim of death; but He arose on the third day, fully victorious. Forty days after Jesus arose from the grave He ascended into heaven, and that's where He is now.

But the Bible's story does not stop there, leav-

ing us alone in the world with Jesus in heaven. No. Jesus lived, died, and rose again so that He would have the right to send His Holy Spirit into the world, into His church. This is what happened on Pentecost. Jesus' disciples were together in a room in Jerusalem when the Holy Spirit came with the sound of rushing wind, with tongues of fire. Jesus' followers were transformed so that they could speak about the great things of God in the ordinary language that was spoken on the street in many cities of the world. These special signs were proof positive that Jesus was alive and He was carrying out His promise: "Before many days you shall be baptized with the Holy Spirit" (Acts 1:5). So Jesus sent His Spirit back into the world and the Holy Spirit is so closely identified with Jesus that in Romans 8 the Holy Spirit is called the Spirit of Christ. But in addition to this, the Holy Spirit is called the Spirit of life and the Spirit of God. So you can see that the Holy Spirit sent from the Father and the Son is a most remarkable personage in terms of His relationship both to the Father and the Son and to us.

Now the great message of the Bible is that the Spirit of the living God is now present in this world. He lives in the hearts and the lives of those who make up the church of Jesus, those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ as their Savior. Ephesians 2 calls the church the temple of God in the Spirit. Besides the Bible indicates that those who believe in Jesus have the Spirit within themselves, so much so that their bodies can be called temples of the Holy Spirit (I Corinthians 6: 19).

Now all this, you see, lifts the Christian faith out of the realm of the abstract and the theological. Christianity is not just about churches and Sunday school and prayers-it is about those things, too; but most of all Christianity is about the presence of the living Christ in the hearts of those who believe



in Him through the power of His Holy Spirit. This is a reality for believers. And what we read from Romans 8 ends with the absolutely triumphant declaration: "For the Spirit of him who raised Jesus from the dead dwells in you, he who raised Christ Jesus from the dead will give life to your mortal bodies also through his Spirit which dwells in you." It is impossible to be filled with this Spirit of Christ and still be mortal. Those who have the Spirit of Jesus will one day experience the reality of life now and forever.

I have a feeling that one of the main reasons so many these days are joining the "me" generation and concentrating on fulfilling their own desires first of all is that they just don't know the possibilities that exist for those who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ. They must think that life is hopeless and empty. They must think that there really isn't much beyond the grave, only dust and worms. So they feel that they have to make the most of their short lives one way or another. That's why they sometimes try frantically to take in every experience they could possibly desire. That's why they spend their money for things, things, and more things. They try to breathe a spark of life into their dead lives. And they are not succeeding.

The only way life can be breathed into our lives is that God does the breathing; He breathes His Holy Spirit into us. And that can happen only when we turn to the Lord Jesus Christ and acknowledge Him as our Lord and Savior. This means that a person must confess that he is a sinner, and he must plead with Jesus to save him. He must believe that what Jesus did on Calvary is enough to pay for his sins, and he must turn away from his sins and wait upon Jesus to lead him daily. Those who wait on the Lord will not be disappointed.

But there is not much chance of experiencing this Spirit-filled life so long as a person continues to try

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to gratify his own desires all the time. Such a life style is the life of the flesh, which is so roundly condemned and rejected in Romans 8. This chapter contrasts these two lifestyles this way: "For those who live according to the flesh set their minds on the things of the flesh, but those who live according to the Spirit set their minds on the things of the Spirit. To set the mind on the flesh is death but to set the mind on the Spirit is life and peace" (vv. 5, 6). That's the difference, and it's an absolute difference. This is why it is so sad when people are part of the "me" generation. They will never find the fulfillment they seek. What is more, so long as they are a part of the "me" generation, they cut themselves off from the advantages that could be theirs if they believed in the Lord Jesus Christ.

But it is possible to change, and I want to tell you a true story about how that happened in the life of a couple who were part of the "me" generation but who became Spirit-filled people.

These two young people started out as members of the "me" generation in a certain sense. Their names: Sheldon and Jean Vanauken. Sheldon always called Jean "Davy". They determined to live the way they wanted to and let nothing come between them and their love. Sheldon writes: "We rejected separate activities, whether bridge or shooting or sailing, because they would lead to creeping separateness; on the other hand, if one of us liked anything, the other, in the name of sharing, must learn to like it too. ... We would not have children. Nor would we allow any career, unless we pursued it together, to become dominating." And so it was for them. Their life together was full of adventure. They flew together. They sailed their schooner the Grey Goose together.

As they planned their life together, so they planned their death. "We would die together," Sheldon writes in his book *Severe Mercy*. He ex-

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plains: "We were pagans, not compelled by any religion, expecting only the dark. We had only each other and our lovely love.

'Until the lilacs close  
Beneath the deathly snows.'

If we shared this love, should we not share this death? We resolved-deeply and intensely resolved-that, be our days long or as brief as a shooting star, we would go together. If one were killed by sudden chance, the other would instantly follow. Or if one were mortally ill or when both became too old and frail to enjoy life (perhaps about thirty, we may have thought initially), then we would go. We would take a plane up, up into the high pure sky, and put the nose down, thundering straight downwards, a bright arrow in the sun light, in the last long dive. A bit later, when we began to plan our schooner yacht, the 'last long dive' (as we still called it) changed; we would take our little ship to sea and then one night, with the stars shining upon the heaving waters, we would open the seacocks and go down together."

These dear people became Christians, though, and all their building of their lives around themselves and on their selfishness was changed. Davy became a Christian first, and Sheldon describes what she went through this way: "Thus, though her mind, too, asked the intellectual questions-questions to which answers were flooding in through our books-Christianity was offering consolation and assurance and, even, absolution. It fell into her soul as the water of life. One evening after a lively discussion of the faith . . . I asked Davy if she felt that she was near to believing that Christ was God. She said, 'Well, I think He might be.' And I said that 'thinking' he 'might' be was not the same as believing. She put this exchange in the Journal; and then she wrote: 'Underneath I kept

wanting to say, "I do, I do believe in Jesus-Jesus the Son of God and divine".'

"She was on the brink, indeed--and then she leaped. Only two days later she wrote: Today, crossing from one side of the room to the other, I lumped together all I am, all I fear, hate, love, hope; and well, DID it. I committed my ways to God in Christ" (pp. 96, 97)

So it was that Davy became a Christian and shortly after, her husband became Christian, too. Not long after, Davy died and now Sheldon has written about their voyage from a selfish self-centered love to faith in Christ and then beyond the very barrier of death itself. But the point you see is this: it can happen. When those who are all wrapped up in themselves are met by the power of the risen, ascended Jesus, their lives can be turned around. Sheldon's book *A Severe Mercy* is a modern chronicle of the journey through the wasteland of selfishness to the new land of life of Christ.

Jesus is coming to you today. He is coming to you in this message imperfect as it is; but this message is about Him and His life-changing power. If you have become a victim of the bleak state of mind that is now so prevalent, a state of mind that turns people into self-servers, I now invite you to consider this great possibility through Jesus Christ. If you are serving yourself alone, you are in slavery to the most cruel taskmaster of all. But if you turn to Jesus and seek to serve Him, He will revitalize your life with His Spirit, and He will give you abundant life now and forever.

The "me" generation is acting as it does, you know, because its members are desperately afraid of death. Jesus gives hope for this life and freedom from the fear of death, for He gives us His Spirit. And those who have the Spirit of the living Christ will be raised from the dead just as He was. I can't think of anything better than that. Can you?

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