

Help Yourself To Life



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Scripture: I Timothy 6:19

There is something very inspiring about a great congre-
gation, especially when a deep spirit of dedication and
joy is present, as is always the case in Marble Collegiate
Church. I have been studying this congregation and
would like to report my findings.

From where I stand I can see everybody except those
who are in the overflow rooms, and I can tell you that
everyone here is alive. I realize that I may have missed
some but this is the way it appears from here. However,
having thus felicitously appraised the situation I must
add that there are some people here, on the basis of the
law of averages, who are much more alive than others.

There are some people who are merely alive physically.
They can make their way around all right. They can
breathe the atmosphere, eat their three meals a day and
go about their business. But there is something more to
life than just the functioning of the wonderful machine
known as the body. There is the vital life of the mind and
there is the vital life of the spirit.

A famous philosopher said that one's degree of alive-
ness may be measured by the number of points at which
one touches life. Some people touch life at many more
points than do others and when the mental life and the
spiritual life are stepped up, then the physical life itself
responds and the whole man - body, mind and soul -

came to a new level of dynamic vitality. One of the pathetic things about human existence is that there are so many people who think they are fully alive but who aren't really.

My text is 1 Timothy 6:19 "Take hold of the life that is real and that will last forever. It is as though a generous host is saying, 'Help yourself, there is an abundance here.' But people don't take very much. There are other people who really help themselves to life."

The other day in North Carolina, I saw a man telling his own story, a story of victory and achievement through the grace of God. He is now a prominent businessman in his area, has a remarkable gift of expression and can convey to others something of the wonder of his experiences.

The story opens with a ten-year-old boy sitting in a vacant room on Eighth Street in Roanoke, Virginia, on the side track of the Southern Railway. Having no parents, he was made a homeless orphan and, although the people here were kindly and took good care of him, he felt rejected. He had gone down to this vacant lot, and at twilight to watch the setting of the sun and the twinkling of night with the stars blossoming out in the heavens. And he felt very much alone.

Suddenly there came by in front of him a long passenger train. This was back in those days when there was a great romance to railroad trains. The long, low whistle of the train among the hills bespoke adventure far away places. As the train passed by he saw that there were two diamond-shaped signs and white-coated waiters were

seeing happy, contented people. All the windows were ablaze with light. It was as if a removed orphan boy sitting in a vacant lot. His eyes were wide and his soul expanded as he saw this bright light shining through the night. He exclaimed "O God, will I ever be in that great world outside? Will I ever be a part of that wonderful life?" And the taillights of the train disappeared around the curve and went west in the darkness.

Years passed. The boy grew up and became a man but he was never happy, never really organized. He was conflicted and always reaching for something that he never found. He was somehow self-defeating. According to his own admission, he fell into "eyes in the catalog." He took to heavy drinking, lost control of himself completely when he drank, became an alcoholic. He also became an insatiable gambler.

Then the wonder happened, following a night of gambling. There had been a poker game that lasted through the night. And about nine o'clock in the morning he was driving home. It was Sunday morning but of course he had no thought of going to church - that was no part of his world. He wanted to get home and fall into bed and sleep it off. He was tired, he was sick, he was despondent, he was utterly discouraged.

To escape from his own thoughts he turned on the radio, thinking to get the news. And he heard a voice say "Are you satisfied with your life? Are you tired? Are you sick? Are you conflicted? Are you discouraged? Listen, there is life for anyone who will take it. And the speaker talked of life as a gift when it is lived with God and the Lord Jesus Christ. The man was so inclined to dial the program out but it gripped him.

And then, he says, a tremendous thing happened. All of it. And the other fellows asked, "What's the matter, of a sudden he found himself saying, "God, O God, this Jack?" They were incredulous, astonished. is what I've always wanted. I know it now. I see it. I feel "Ah," he said, "I'll tell you about it. I'll tell you of the it. Help me accept it. I give You myself. O God, I need glory and the wonder that God can put into a human life." Your help. Give Yourself to me. Help me to change." And When you truly take hold of life it is life indeed. There then his weariness suddenly fell away, all the blackness are thousands of similar experiences of human beings, left his mind. It seemed that he flowed together and although perhaps not all equally dramatic. And there are his heart-hunger was caught up in a feeling of new life. people everywhere trying to find life. Here is where you Though he had been up all night, he was filled with great find it. So help yourself to life. There is a generous supply energy and vitality and peaceful calm. And at that minute for you. Take hold of life which is life indeed. he was delivered for good from the disease of alcoholism. When you get that life, you begin to develop a subtle He thought to himself, "This is my birthday. I am born insight; your mind gets sharpened up. You get what is today. All of the past is gone. This is my natal day." known as God's guidance and you develop perceptiveness .

Only a few weeks before my recent meeting with this man, at around the time of his tenth non-alcoholic birthday, he was invited by the president of the Southern Railroad, along with other leading businessmen of his community, to go on a special train trip upcountry some where on some business or celebration. And he went down to the Roanoke railroad station at twilight. There was a gleaming train at the station. He went into the Pullman car and took his seat. Then he went forward with three other men into the dining car for dinner. They say you can tell a fine oriental rug from a machine made rug by its curious variations of pattern. In the Middle Eastern villages where each rug is hand-produced by men and boys under the direction of a master weaver, it often happens that a weaver forgetfully makes a mistake. But when this happens the master weaver; instead of pulling the work out to correct the error, will find some way to incorporate the mistake into the pattern. He makes a new interpretation of the pattern. And experts will tell you that the exceptional beauty of complex design in the rugs is due to the skill of master weavers at turning mistakes into a work of art.

He happened to look out the window. They passed Third Street, Fourth Street, Fifth Street, Sixth Street, Seventh Street. Then he saw it coming up: the vacant lot and the spot where he had sat as a boy of ten looking into this world. Here he was in this world and as they passed that lot at Eighth Street he could see in imagination the little boy out there dreaming about life. Suddenly Similarly, the person who has become a master of life the wonder of it overcame him and he started to cry - knows that in every difficulty there is an inherent good standing there in the dining car, tears rolling down and that when you are faced with a difficulty, it means the Lord is trying to guide you to the inherent his cheeks. He was all broken up from the sheer wonder.

good which you would otherwise miss. If you are living on this level of life, when you are having trouble you walk around the trouble and say, "Now there must be something in this that the Lord has planted here, and if I have what it takes to find it I will come up with something wonderful." Help yourself to this kind of life. It is offered you.

I happen to be a great reader of the sport pages. You that's a good thing, too. When you get so you cannot stand reading any more of the front pages, turn to the sport pages and you'll later be able to go back and live with the front pages. There are some wonderful things on the sport pages and in sport books. I don't care what the sport is - whether baseball or football or skiing or what ever. Well, I was reading recently about a man whom I remember seeing pitch many times in the old Ebbetts Field in Brooklyn. I used to go there especially to see the fellow pitch. His name was Clem Labine. Clem was one of the greatest. Now Clem Labine had had an experience that made him great.

When he was about twelve years old Clem was already dreaming of being a pitcher in big league baseball; nothing less would satisfy him. He had a powerful arm and he had a wonderful big hand that could grip a ball. He could deliver it with power. But at the age of fourteen he had an accident. He broke his index finger. And an index finger is very important to a ballplayer. Although they set the broken finger and it healed, they didn't set it very well, for it was left with a decided crook between the first and second, giving it somewhat the shape of a jug handle. Clem was brokenhearted. He said "My baseball future is gone."

But a coach whom Clem knew was a man with a positive philosophy of trouble. He said to Clem, "Clem, when life hands you something real tough the thng to do is pray about it and ask the Lord to tell you what He has in it for you." "What could He possibly have in it for me?" Clem wanted to know. "How can I use a crooked finger? I want to be a pitcher." "Well," the coach said, "let's see what we can do with you." And he studied Clem's hand and taught him to hold the ball a little differently. It took effort, patience, perseverance, but before long Clem was delivering the ball with power. Moreover, with that crooked finger he developed a kind of pitch that would confuse almost any batter. The ball would be coming straight and then suddenly before it got to the plate it would give a twist and a jump and sail across the plate right past the bewildered batter. Clem Labine did become a big league pitcher - famous for his "jug handle curve." And he never ceased to thank God for his jug handle finger.

Now if you want to be a baseball player, don't go out and get your finger broken on purpose. But take the difficulties you do meet up with and look for the inherent good in them. This is the only work for people who are spiritually astute: He puts life before them, but the difficulties have within them bright and shmmg pearls of great price. Help yourself to life. Take hold of that which is life indeed. Learn to be spiritually wise and find the inherent good.

In a recent book SUCCESS THROUGH A POSITIVE MENTAL ATTITUDE by Napoleon Hill and W. Clement

Stone I read about a man who was once a streetcar conductor in Canton, Ohio. That was back before the days

when buses superseded streetcars. The man's name was Clarence and he hated being a streetcar conductor. "I go over the same old route all the time," he would think, "I see the same old people. It's all so monotonous." Finally he conceived a plan for making his job more satisfying. All day and every day he strove to spread good feeling among his passengers with cheery greetings and friendly smiles and special little courtesies. The passengers loved it and, of course, Clarence himself became much happier.

But Clarence's supervisor took a dim view of this. He was one of those dour, cautious individuals who feels nervous about anything unusual or new. He thought that Clarence's unconventional friendliness must somehow be a waste of the company's time. He issued reprimands and warnings. Clarence was too happy to heed them. So he got fired.

Clarence went to Mr. Hill and asked advice. Hill convinced him that he should take his misfortune as an opportunity to change his line of work. Clarence persuaded a big life insurance company to try him out at selling insurance. And the inherent good he found in his difficulty proved to be the start of a fine career.

Not all misfortunes work out as felicitously as that, of course; but I can tell you there is no problem or difficulty in this world that doesn't have buried in it a bright and shining good.

By the words "Help yourself to life," we mean in the last analysis, "Help yourself to religion in depth, the vital kind of religion." There are various kinds of religion. There is the formal kind, where you observe the precepts and you carry out the forms. There is the doctrinal and credal kind, where you believe in the doctrine and you

believe in the creed. And for many people that is as far as they ever get.

Then there is the life-saving, life-changing kind, where you go from depth to depth of vital religion; where you come upon a power and it helps you to overcome your pain, your weakness, your sorrow, your frustrations and your defeats; where there is sparkle in your eyes and a glow on your face and elasticity in your step; where you love everybody and your whole life flows out to bless mankind. This is vital Christianity in depth.

I was on a television program in Cleveland, Ohio, run by a man named Mike Douglas. And it was quite a program. They had an audience of five hundred teenagers, and on the platform I found a man sitting at one end of a table with a young lady next, a vacant chair and then our host, Mike Douglas.

Mr. Douglas started asking me questions all ad lib. And he asked me my views on the status of religion in the United States today, how well the churches were doing, and so on. "Well," I replied, "what we need in this country is a new Christianity, a new vital Christianity in depth."

He looked to me with a bewildered air and said "that again?"

"We need a new vital Christianity, a Christianity of vitality and depth," I repeated.

"Well, isn't religion just religion?" he asked "What do you mean by 'vital and depth'?"

Now when you have five hundred teenagers sitting in front of you and you're on television and you have to explain as big a thing as that in five or six sentences, you are hard put to it to find words. Well, I happened to look at this girl who was sitting next to me. She was sitting on

the edge of her seat, her mouth slightly open and her eyes alight. She could hardly contain herself. I saw that she wanted to answer the question. And although I didn't know her at all, I surmised that this girl must have the answer. So I said, "Mr. Douglas, why don't you ask her?"

"Ah," said the girl, "I can tell you all about that. For a long time I was a nominal Christian. I went to church regularly and I got a lot out -of it. But there was no power, no vitality, no lift in it. Then I met a group of people in the church who took me through into a complete commitment of my whole self to Christ. And I was able to overcome my fears, to organize my conflicts. I was able to rise above my frustrations. I found a happiness and a delight in life that I hadn't known existed. It is simply wonderful."

We were all enthralled as she spoke, because in her words, in her face, in her eyes was that wonderful quality a person receives who has taken hold of life which is life indeed. Mike Douglas looked at me and there was a soft expression on his face as he said, "I see what you mean. She's got something that's different." And that was right. For she had helped herself to life.

I urge you to get this if you never do another thing in all your days, for until you do get it you've never really lived, and when you do - then you have laid hold on life which is life indeed.

Prayer: Our Heavenly Father, we pray that a deep spiritual experience may come to everyone. Help us so to yield ourselves that God with all His power may take hold of us and thereby we may have life in depth, life in full vitality, life which is life indeed. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.