

Dynamic and Exciting Living

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DYNAMIC AND EXCITING LIVING

Scripture: Proverbs 4:18 R.S.V.

DYNAMIC and exciting living- that is the topic we wish to discuss for a little while. *Dynamic, exciting.* Those are two of the greatest power-packed words in the English language. We hear them everywhere today, especially on television where Madison Avenue skill is employed to devise language that grips and communicates.

But those two words, *dynamic* and *exciting*, really don't long to the church, for the real essence of living is characterized by those words. And in the church are the values to which they refer.

Let me ask you a question, honest question. You don't need to answer it to anybody but yourself - certainly not to me. Do the words *dynamic* and *exciting* in any way or to any degree characterize your life, your thoughts, your attitudes? Are there other words that

would be more appropriate: apathetic, dull, gloomy, negative? Which words really describe you? It is my simple belief - for what it is worth - that no human being needs to live an uninteresting, lackluster existence. Nor do I believe that any human being needs to be continuously tired, listless and worn. Nor does any person need to be sunk in the slough of depressiveness. Not at all.

In the Book of Proverbs is a wonderful statement: "The path of the righteous is like the light of dawn, which shines brighter and brighter until full day."* What is meant by "the righteous"? Does it mean the good? Yes. But it also it may be taken to mean the right-thinking; people who think right and who live right. For them their path is like the light of dawn, which shines brighter and brighter until the perfect day. Which is to say that when a person really lives in a way that is motivated and governed by Jesus Christ he comes alive. He lives a life that is dynamic and exciting.

*Revised Standard Version

Let me tell you about an interesting experience I had when attending the Pawling, New York, Rotary Club recently. This club is a small one made up of about 30 to 35 leading citizens of this beautiful little community in Dutchess County. The meeting was held at Holiday Hills, a beautiful 600-acre center operated by the Y.M.C.A. of the City of New York. Also gathered at Holiday Hills were some 350 to 400 top-drawer American athletes, holding a week-long convention under the auspices of the Fellowship of Christian Athletes.

The speaker at the Rotary Club that day was one of these athletes. He came clad in an extraordinary manner, as though he had just come off the tennis court. I gather

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he had lived a rather desultory existence after college until, as he put it unashamedly and in he-man style, he "found the Lord Jesus Christ." He didn't care that his rather sophisticated audience was a mixture of Catholics, Jews and Protestants. He was telling how he got dynamic

I wish I could do what he did during his speech. He is an expert juggler and all the time he was making his speech he was tossing balls high in the air and catching them again. He didn't miss a one. Yet everybody was listening to what he said. He told about how his desultory life became exciting and dynamic because something came into it that gave it new meaning. I looked around the room and was held spellbound by the expression on the faces of these men. They were of all ages: some were old, tired, sick; others young, vital; but all had the same expression, an exalted, fascinated wistfulness, as they listened to this vigorous man talk about Jesus.

I was at the end of the table with an insurance man and a motel operator. When the speaker finished, the insurance man said (and I quote his exact words), "What's that guy got that makes him that way?"

"What's he got that makes him that way?" the motel operator responded. "I'll tell you what it is. He has been injected with an enormous dose of real Christianity. Boy, that is what I want, too."

"That is what I want," I said.

And the insurance man said, "That is what I want."

And that is what you want. That is what everybody wants. That is the secret of all of the restless activity of our time: the longing for dynamic and exciting life. Where do you get it? The text tells the story: "The path of the righteous is like the light of dawn, which shines brighter and brighter until full day."

What are some of the essential factors in a dynamic and exciting life? I have given a good deal of thought to this and have come up with a couple of points. No doubt if we were talking it over together you could make suggestions as good as the ones I will give you, but I am sure the following would be in among them somewhere.

First, have power over life and over yourself. When you feel that life is pushing you around, or that you are being pushed around by a variable self, you are not happy or excited or dynamic. But when you get to the point where you are master of your life there is no joy in the world equal to it, no excitement to compare with it.

Then, other day I was reading a magazine article by a man named A. Alvarez, an Englishman who has lived a lot in this country and seems to like it. He is a mountain climber, and mountain-climbers are great people.

All my life I have wanted to be a mountain-climber. In Austria, in Italy, in Switzerland, I have watched men scaling these enormous peaks. They are a rare breed. It is said of the mountain guides of Grindelwald in Switzerland that they look old in their youth and young in their old age. They are timeless people.

In this country too, thank the Lord, we have thousands of people climbing mountains. Mr. Alvarez mentions, for example, that every weekend the Shawangunks, a long cliff about fifty miles from New York City, is covered with sweating and straining climbers. From there you can graduate to climbing in New Hampshire and then to the Rockies and there are even those who scale the 3,000 foot perpendicular rock forming the Nose of El Capitan in the Yosemite - which they say is the desert raised vertically.

So, while we may have among us a lot of softies, the cock-

tail-lounge boys, we also have some who are tough, rugged individuals. helps you you are bound to become dynamic, you are bound to get excited. So keep up the struggle.

This article by Alvarez tells about the author and a companion being stranded overnight on a little ledge 1,500 feet up on an overhanging rock wall in the Italian Dolomites. A storm had overtaken them. They had no food, no extra clothing. Their outer clothing got wet and froze. There they were, sitting on a ledge 1,500 feet above the dim landscape below. Both of them feared they would freeze to death, though they avoided mentioning this to each other. They knew they must not go to sleep because when you sleep your body temperature goes down. So they stay awake they told stories, recited poems and sang. Now and then they would slap each other on the back and chest taking great care as they did so because of their precarious position.

When morning came they were still there, but they had 500 feet of rock overhang yet to climb, difficult under any conditions, and now it was sheeted with ice! Of the concentration and sustained effort it took to do it Alvarez writes that it "wrung us dry." When they finally made it to the top, exhausted, battered, famished, they were at the absolute end of their endurance. "But," he says, "that in itself was something. To know how much you can take is a form of self-knowledge." And he adds, "At no point did we feel we were fighting the mountain; the battle was only with ourselves . . . The pleasure is in doing something difficult," he continues, "something that extends your concentration and effort and resourcefulness, without ever losing control."

- That is it. We all have problems, difficulties. You allow yourself to be beaten down by them. But when instead you struggle with them in the knowledge that God

Maybe you think, "I am sick of struggles." Well, there have been times when I haven't been so enthusiastic about them myself. But to let yourself get discouraged is the wrong thing to do. When you find yourself on the verge of that, remember what makes a real person: struggling with something. What do you have to struggle with? A weakness, depression, nervousness, tension? Strive in the Lord's name to conquer it. This is an essential part of what makes life dynamic and exciting. This is a part of the secret of it, the struggle for self-mastery.

ANOTHER reason why dynamic and exciting life passes many people by is that they are not contributing anything. Like a man who told me that he had read all my books. Naturally that pleased me and I asked, "How many have you read?" He told me he had read eight. I said, "You haven't read all of them because there are fifteen."

"Well," he remarked, "all you have ever said is probably in those eight."

"It is probably in one!" I countered. "All we ever say over and over again is, 'Put your life in the hands of Jesus Christ and He will see you through.' So actually it is all in one sentence. But in order to make it impressive we write it in different ways."

The man then said, "But I haven't any sense of excitement like you talk about."

"Well," I asked, "what wrong have you done?"

"I knew you would get around to that," he answered, "and I haven't done a thing wrong. I got all that cleaned up."

"Well then," I told him, "if you aren't doing anything wrong, then you aren't doing enough right."

"What a switch that is!" he exclaimed.

"That's right," I said. "There are people who are good but good for nothing. And being good means you are good for something. You've taken the bad out, but maybe you haven't put enough good in." So I went over to him with a fine-tooth comb. And what do you think I finally found? When I asked him how often he went to church he said he went at least once a month. "That is a start," I said. Then I asked him how much he was giving to the church.

"I give every time I go," he replied.

"And how much do you give?"

"Each time," he answered, "I put a dollar in the plate."

"That makes about 25 a week when you average it out. What do you give to the Community Chest? What do you give to the hospital campaign? What do you give to other charities and good causes?"

"No more than I have to," he said. "They are always after you for more, so I give them the smallest amount possible, knowing that if they come after me again I will have to build it up. I start low."

"I think I see what your trouble is," I informed him. "You are not giving enough."

"What do you want me to do?" he inquired.

"I want you to go home and go right to your desk, get out your checkbook, write a check for \$1,000 to your church and send it. If you have any left, send \$1,000 to Marble Collegiate Church at the same time! Then go to the minister of your church and tell him you want to get on his team and go to work for it. Go and join the Chamber of Commerce, or the Rotary Club, or a political club, or

something. Get into things and give of yourself."

Well, he reports to me now that this was the key that opened up for him the way from desultory living into living full of dynamism and excitement.

So there you have two things: first, struggle and overcome; second, give. And, finally, have the right thing happen to you: get to know Jesus Christ. People who are listless, apathetic, tired and dull have never met that dynamic Giver of Life. When you get Him into your life, then life sparkles.

LET me close with this illustration of what can

happen to a person. I went one time to speak at a luncheon of about two thousand salesmen in the big ballroom of the Conrad Hilton Hotel in Chicago. During the luncheon a man came up to me and said, "Dr. Peale, I've invested \$200 in your speech."

"That is an enormous investment!" I said. "How come?"

"I brought one of my salesmen to hear you," he explained, "because he is dopey and dull. It will cost me about that much to get him here, feed him, house him and send him back. But this man has intelligence, a good education and a pleasant personality. He has everything except energy, vitality and excitement. What I want you to do is to build a fire under him."

"A fire under him won't do him any good," I said. "The fire has got to be in him."

"All right, then," he replied, "build it in him."

"And what are you going to do?" I asked. "You've got to help me. You be praying for this salesman of yours and you start visualizing him being the man he ought to be." "Very well," he agreed. "I will, because he could be a terrific producer if he could just get some enthusiasm."

So I made my speech. I glanced at that salesman from time to time, for his boss had pointed him out to me. He did look dull and apathetic. And when my speech was over he came up and said to me, "I am Listless Carl. They call me Listless Carl. I'm the man Mr. -- invested \$200 in, to get me here so a fire could be built under me. He asked him how he knew that. He answered, "He's been telling everybody that you were going to build a fire under me.

Well, I was really on the spot. I took him up to my room. He was a tall, lanky fellow, and when I asked him to have a seat he didn't sit; he practically lay in the chair with his legs stretched out and his hands hanging over the sides. I said, "Carl, that is no way to sit in a chair. Sit up straight, so that your backbone touches the back of the chair all the way up. Let me see you do that, will you?"

Pulling himself up, he objected, "It seems to me this is irrelevant to the discussion."

"No," I disagreed. "You're listless. That is why they call you Listless Carl!"

"Dr. Peale," he said, "I think really I am a pretty good man. I go to church. I even go to Sunday School. I belong to a Men's Class. I love my wife. I've been true to her ever since I met her. I have lived a pretty clean life."

"Well," I said, "that is good. I gather that you are a follower of Jesus." He said that he was. I asked, "What does Jesus teach us?"

"He teaches us to be good people," he said.

"But what else does He teach?"

"I don't know," he replied.

"I'll tell you what else He teaches. He teaches us to be energized. He teaches us to be vital. He teaches us to be alive. He was constantly talking about life, life, life."

Life! And what is life? Life is vitality. Life is vigor. Life is energy and excitement."

It so happened that the hotel manager had written me with a basket of fruit, and it was not one of the tired-looking variety, but an imaginative one. In it was an apple that was a work of art; a beautiful orange; and a great big grapefruit; and a long banana.

Carl, look at that basket of fruit. Just look at it. Did you ever see such an apple? Isn't it a beauty? That apple must come from the highlands of Oregon where the cold nights firm the flesh and make the fruit juicy. Or maybe it was grown in New York State where the apples are great. And look at that orange. It's got all the sunlight of Florida in it. And the banana; has all the beauty of the tropics. Isn't that basket of fruit worth talking about?"

"Yes, it is," he admitted. "But why do you get so excited about it?"

"Because when you have Jesus in the heart everything is beautiful, everything is wonderful, everything is hopeful. Get Jesus in the heart."

"You really believe that, don't you?" the man said.

"I sure do."

"All right, lead me to Jesus," said big old listless Carl.

He was led to Jesus and he found a new life. Later I went one time to his town to make a speech. He met my plane. "Glad to see you, boy!" he greeted me. "Let's get busy. Lots to see around here!"

"Look, Carl," I said. "I'm tired. I want to go to the hotel and rest. I have to make a speech."

"What do you mean 'rest'?" asked Carl. "Where's all that energy, vitality and excitement you talk about?"

Sheepishly agreed, "Let's skip the hotel. Where do

we go first?"

He had found it. He became one of the righteous whose pathway is like the light of dawn growing brighter and brighter until the perfect day. Oh, yes. Life with Jesus Christ is life full of dynamism and excitement. And it is for you. He offers it to you. Take it.

Prayer: Our Heavenly Father, we know that you want us to be not only good and decent, but also alive and vital, struggling for victory over all that is contrary to life at its best. You want us to live with a dynamic and excited attitude of mind all our lives so that each of us may be a creative influence in the life of our time. Help us to come to know Jesus, that we may know this great secret of dynamic, exciting living. Through Jesus Christ our Lord.
Amen.

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