

Enthusiasm that Never Runs Down



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Scripture: Romans 6:4; John 1:4

ENTHUSIASM is one of the most important attitudes of mind that one can possess. "When a man dies," said the great inventor Thomas A. Edison, "if he can pass enthusiasm along to his children, he has left them an estate of incalculable value." The sage of Concord, Ralph Waldo Emerson, asserted, "Nothing great was ever achieved without enthusiasm." Steel magnate Charles A. Schwab, who worked himself up from the bottom to the presidency of United States Steel Corporation, once remarked, "A man can succeed at almost anything for which he has unlimited enthusiasm." I really think I like that one better than the first two statements, because it comes not from a literary giant but from a famous businessman. "The real secret of success is enthusiasm," said Walter P. Chrysler. "Yes, more than enthusiasm, I would say excitement. I like to

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see men get excited. When they get excited they make a success of their lives."

We could go on and on drawing from the words of great thinkers and men of action testifying to the value of enthusiasm. And when you get into the Scriptures you find the Bible is full of it. God knows how vital enthusiasm is to human beings. He makes the new-born baby just packed full of enthusiasm. Everything in this world is full of wonder and excitement, everything is new and interesting, to a baby. In the old days, before America got so sophisticated, this state lasted up through high school and college days. Now it seems it is washed out about age eight. But it is meant to endure forever. I think it was William Henry Huxley who said that the secret of genius is to carry the spirit of the child into old age. That is to say, you are to carry all through and even into old age this vital enthusiasm put into you by God when you were created, and not let it erode away, not let cynicism take its place, not become dull and lifeless, losing the fine flush and flavor of excitement.

How is your enthusiasm today? Is it high and strong or is it sagging? Are you getting old and tired? Charles Lamb said, "We grow gray in our spirit long before we grow gray in our hair." And I've seen many people who exemplify the happy opposite of that: people with gray hair, or no hair at all, who never did grow gray in their spirits.

St. Paul wrote to the Romans that we should walk - you know, this is really great! - that we should walk all our lives "in newness of life." Life should never grow dull or flat to us - should never lose its lustre.

"Well," you say, "that's great. I'm for that. But how do we achieve this happy state? That is the question. You

know as well as we do what terrific assaults life makes upon the human spirit. You know how adversity and sorrow and heavy difficulties take it out of you."

Yes, I know. But I'm not talking about having it taken out of you. I'm talking about putting it into you. The church of the Lord Jesus Christ is where it isn't taken out, but where it is put in. So if you want enthusiasm that never runs down, then (don't walk) to some nearby church. Have a care what church you go to, because the preaching you hear in some churches will do just the opposite of replenishing your enthusiasm. It will take it out of you with a vengeance. But in most churches, where the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ is believed in and preached, people learn to walk in newness of life.

WHAT a wonderful concept this is - newness of life! It means a renewal of the life force. The life force is the greatest thing you have unless it be the immortality of the soul which is integrated into it. The life force. This God built into us when we were created. You should never let it run down. But if it has run down it can be rejuvenated. It can be reactivated, it can be built up again, it can be enhanced with a powerful new upthrust. And when this happens, this thing that we call rebirth, then a person becomes perpetually enthusiastic and excited. It is where a man comes alive. It is where he comes up out of death and decadence into life and vitality.

I've seen this happen to people a good many times. I recall one day a couple of springs ago I was in Toledo, Ohio, where I spoke and was scheduled in the evening of the same day to speak in a small town in the southeastern part of the state. At the luncheon I sat next to a very vital, happy character to whom I incidentally mentioned my des-

tinuation for later in the day. He asked, "How are you getting down there?"

"I've engaged a drive-it-yourself car from one of the car-rental services," I replied.

"You're going to drive down there by yourself this afternoon and make a speech?" he asked in surprise.

"Yes. What's wrong with that?"

"Oh," he said, "I'll drive you there myself."

"Why, you'll do nothing of the kind," I protested.

"You're a busy man. You run a big plant. You can't take the time to drive me all that distance. And if you drive me down, you've got to drive back. And furthermore, if you take me down you've got to listen to my speech a second time. You can't take that, can you?"

"Well," he said smiling, "I'm a long-suffering man."

And this is an opportunity for some Christian fellowship, and I just wouldn't miss it."

"How many people do you employ in that plant of yours?" I asked.

"Six hundred," he answered.

"You're going off and leave them?"

"Certainly," he replied. "The place runs better in my absence than it does when I'm there!"

Well I can't think when I ever had a more enjoyable ride. This man really had something. He was excited. It was one of those days in spring when winter is not giving

way easily and spring is having its trouble with a winter day of kaleidoscopic variety, of vagrant clouds sailing

with bursts of sunshine, with warm breezes, with cold breezes, and with now and then a spate of rain. And as

we drove, my companion waved his arm at the sky and said, "Look up there at that sky! Isn't it wonderful? Look

at those rugged clouds! You know, there is something

absolutely inspiring about clouds surging down the sky." who have come up with what they call an anti-God or a God-is-dead theology would actually meet Jesus. Then they I was impressed.

Presently the sun cut through those clouds, like a huge never would think God is dead. I realize that people who knife, with a great long spotlight on the earth, moving harbor that point of view are really in inward conflict; across the green hills and fields. And he exclaimed, "Just that they are struggling with God even to the point of look at that! It's like a light from heaven, isn't it?" Then rejecting Him and that those who reject may, by some we passed one of those oldtime brick houses you see in kind of divine ambivalence, ultimately love Him. But the that part of the country, a stately residence set well back of people who meet Him they know that in Him is life - from the road, with a long winding driveway flanked with pine trees. "Look at that!" said my friend. "There is life that is "the light of men." Get the life force activated Americana at its best." Then he saw a flock of sheep in a life you will walk in life that is perpetually new. That is field. "What is prettier than a flock of sheep etched against how it is meant to be until the day you die? When the a green background?" he mused. "Sheep, gentlest of the hand of death rests upon your eyes, it should be to take animals. Jesus loved sheep. And He especially loved lost new life into newer life.

sheep. And I know a lost sheep mighty. (Which gave me a little insight.) To have enthusiasm that never runs down you have to have the life force in you activated and then you have to

Then we came to a little bridge, with a wild stream of water surging under the bridge and over a rocky bottom. He stopped and pointed to it and said, "Look how clean and fresh its, how that water foams over those clean rocks. That water must be deliciously cold." practice enthusiasm. And how do you do that? Much depends, for one thing, on what you say the first thing in the morning. That is one good place to start practicing. What did you say the first thing this morning? One winter morning early this year I went and looked at the thermometer which hangs outside my window in the city and it read eighteen above! I thought of our house up in the country and reflected that up there it wouldn't be eighteen above - it would be eight above, because there is always that ten-degree difference. I said to my wife, "Wouldn't it be great to be up at Pawling this morning? It would be eight above!" Well, her reaction was mixed. Ordinarily my wife has more excitement and enthusiasm to the square inch than I have to the pound. But I knew how it would be up there in the country that nothing fields all covered with white snow, with the tall, bare trees reaching into the clear sky and the hills of Dutchess County stand-

The hundred miles passed very rapidly, I can assure you. Finally, as we approached our destination, I asked, "Look, how did you get this way, friend?"

"Ah," he said, "you know who touched my life. I didn't used to be this way. I was dying. Oh, not physically. But I was dying deep inside. Then I met up with Jesus, it really met up with Him, not just as an idea, but met up with Him as a transforming agent. And I've felt like this ever since. And," he said, "that passage in Romans is one I go for: 'Walk in newness of life.' "

You know, parenthetically, I wish some of these people

ing out like cameos against the all-enveloping mystic blue.
But New York City is all right too. Central Park that morning was bare. The buildings across the park were etched against the sky. And to get out and walk on a crisp winter morning, that is something on which enthusiasm can build up.

So say enthusiastic things, think enthusiastic thoughts, have enthusiastic conversations, tackle the job enthusiastically, and gradually you become enthusiastic. You can talk yourself into becoming enthusiastic just as well as you can talk yourself out of it. You can develop by practice any emotional attitude you want to have.

Down south one time I had dinner with a group of about twenty men, about ten of them ministers and ten laymen, in whose company I heard some of the best storytelling I ever heard anywhere - clean, powerful stories that were just full of humor. And there was one man in particular, one of the laymen, who really was a master storyteller. He remarked to the minister sitting next to me, "This character really has something."

"He surely has," the minister replied. "He's a member of my church. And he's one of my Exhibit A's."

"What do you mean your 'Exhibit A's'?"

"Well, you should have seen him a few years ago. He was so gripey and crabbed. And then he got sick - or thought he was sick. He had pains around the heart, he had pains up the arm, he was short of breath. In short, he became a hypochondriac. And he haunted doctors' offices one after another. He had more pills than anybody in this town. But they didn't seem to help him. He had built up a very fine business. Yet he was never happy. Finally one of these doctors shipped him off to a specialist

in Chicago. And this Chicago specialist was a wise man.

He told our friend here, 'These pains of yours are pseudo pains. They do not come from any physical origin; they are induced by wrong, unhealthy thinking. Get your thinking changed; start living a vital, enthusiastic life - and you'll be well. That is my prescription. Fifteen hundred dollars, please.'

Our friend exclaimed, 'Fifteen hundred bucks! For what?'

"For knowing what to tell you. You charge plenty for your business. So do (The doctor later explained he knew this man wouldn't value advice unless he had pay for it.)"

So it seems this maladjusted man went back home to North Carolina and went to his minister and said, "That doctor up there in Chicago told me to get my thinking straightened out. You know, that fellow is a highwayman! He charged me fifteen hundred dollars. So how do I get my thinking straightened out? I'll get my fifteen hundred dollars' worth if it kills me. (Which is precisely what the doctor had foreseen.)"

The minister sat back and said, "Okay, Jim, (or whatever his name was) how far do you live from here? Five miles? I see your chauffeur sitting out there in your car. Call him and dismiss him. I want you to walk home. And as you walk thank God for those feet of yours, thank God for your legs, thank God that you went to Chicago and see how you have a mind and body. Walk along home practicing enthusiasm for life, for yourself, for the pine forest you pass on the way, for all your friends, for your church, for God. And tomorrow I want you to walk back here and tell me how you feel."

And eventually the man got wise and asked the minister

to walk with him. The minister walked with him in a uniform and the two jobs they gave him were to wash good twenty-five miles, until one day he challenged the man, "Why don't you let go and let the Lord Jesus Christ take over?" And he did.

"That is your storyteller," the minister told me in conclusion, "Exhibit A. He learned to practice enthusiasm." "I've been thinking. I've been wondering about you. Take myself, for example. I have no religion, I don't want any

Now, why don't you start practicing it? When you walk out into the great outdoors take a deep breath, feel your good physical body and say to yourself, "I'm in God's world and isn't life great! I'm going to have the time of my life with the Lord!" "You get that never runs down."

"Well," you object, "this all right, but you don't know how much trouble I have."

Now if you have a lot of trouble and that is why the enthusiasm has been dulled, I congratulate you - because the enthusiasm that really lasts is the enthusiasm you get by digging deep into trouble. There is a man who

in Atlanta, Georgia whose story I have told before. At age twenty-seven he was next in line to be president of the biggest bank in the Southeast. Everything was propitious. But instead of being made president he was fired for excessive drinking. He'd become a drunk. He couldn't handle himself any more. He would go to a cocktail party and get drunk. Things would be said to him he wouldn't remember the next morning. After losing his position at the bank he went from one job to another, down a descending scale until he finally hit the curb. No money, broke, his wife filed for divorce. His friends rejected him - crossed the street to avoid him when they saw him coming.

But he still had intelligence. So he got himself committed to a state institution for alcoholics. Here he wore a

life. That is it. Enthusiasm that never runs down is the gift of Almighty God through the Lord Jesus Christ to those who want it and who reach for it and take it.

Prayer: Our Heavenly Father, we thank Thee for the wonderful truth of what You are able to do for human lives. You would give us life, vibrant life, life that would never end, life full of excitement, of enthusiasm that will never run down. Help us to believe in it with all our hearts and to take it with everything we've got. For this we give Thee thanks through Jesus Christ our Lord.
~~Ameh.~~

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