

*More Power
To You*



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deal with whatever life brings us, whatever vicissitudes it entails. And for this we need more power.

The otherday a man and I were having conversation on the street. It was not relevant to anything in particular, just a friendly passing of the time of day. But as we separated the man said, "More power to you, man." Well, that is a rather commonplace expression, fairly often heard, especially among men. "More power to you." I myself have said it. But it is possible to use a common phrase constantly without ever stopping to think about its implications.

As I walked away I asked myself, "What does that mean 'More power to you'?" I suppose you could find many different connotations in it. One, however, struck me forcibly. It could be like saying that there is more power available to you than you've ever tapped. It could mean that if you really want to live a life of achievement, and of dignity and of victory, you should lay hold on more power.

Now there *is*, in my humble judgment -- and I know that you agree with me - an immense power within our reach. It is so great that when you get it and use it nothing in this life can defeat you, nothing whatsoever. That is saying a good deal, it is a fact. With this power you can rise above one of the worst plagues of human nature, the plague of fear. With this power you can rise above your own divided personality. With this power you can rise above all the sorrow and all the troubles that life will ever bring to you. And what is this power? It is the power of your religious faith.

But you may say, "I have religious faith. I believe in the Bible, I believe in the church, I believe in God, I believe in Christ. But I never get any power like

that out of my faith. If there is power of that kind why don't I have it?"

Well, the reason could be that your religion is only the formal kind. There are two kinds of religion. I think this is not oversimplifying to say that there are just two kinds of religion in the world. One of them is formal religion. I don't care whether you are a Protestant or a Jew or a Catholic - formal religion is all the same. It acknowledges belief in the Creator - in God. It acknowledges belief in the church or the temple. And if you believe the doctrines and the creeds and the dogmas and perform the ceremonies, whatever they are, you think you have it. That is formal religion. Now this does make for nice, respectable, decent people, who don't steal money or run off with anybody else's wife or husband. So it is good as far as it goes. But it is superficial.

The other kind of religion is what we may call the religion of experience. It is where God becomes a dynamic part of your life. It is where Jesus Christ really takes hold of you. It is where you are thrilled to your soul by the relationship between yourself and the divine. Through this kind of religion you receive a power that overcomes all the frustrations and the defeats of human existence. You ought to ask yourself sometimes, "What kind of religion do I have? Have I ever opened up my heart so that I deeply *experience* religion?"

Constantly I am meeting people who ask me, "Why is it I do not have a sense of power that stays with me when the going gets hard?"

Well, the Bible says that "as many as received to them gave he power to become the sons of God."

Those words are in the Gospel of John, first chapter, twelfth verse. And what a tremendous sentence that is!

It is all there. Everything is offered to you. To as many as receive Him - that is, accept His guidance and help - to them He gives the power to become - that is, to grow, expand - to become the sons of God.

Now what is a son of God? We believe that Jesus is the Son of God. But in degree we all become sons of God. Every human being is a son of God. God at his creation breathed into man the breath of life and he became a living spirit. Man is more than flesh and blood. He is of the divine. He came, as Wordsworth said, "trailing clouds of glory ... from God, who is our home." And when he passes from this world he passes to an eternal glory with God.

Every human being is a child of God. And I don't know anything greater for a human being to say to himself every day of his life when he faces temptation or difficulty than, "I am a child of God." When you do that, then you begin to have power - not merely a little power that only just sees you through, but tremendous power that takes you over every difficulty.

One day I was riding in the subway with a man who seemed to know all about subways. This makes two subway experiences in one sermon. Please don't get the idea that I compose my sermons in the subway. It isn't exactly the most propitious place.) And during our ride this man kept showing off his knowledge about subways. I never knew a man who knew so much about everything. He even told me how much power it took to carry a subway train from 125th Street to 42nd Street. And he told me the weight of a car and how much power was required to overcome its inertia. He told me all about the financial condition of the subways, which has always been bad. And as he was giving me all this information

I became increasingly impressed with the phenomenon of all these subway trains hurtling along underground at an immense rate of speed, carrying many hundreds of people. The great train we two were on was thundering along when all of a sudden somewhere near 72nd Street it stopped and stood stock still between stations. The lights went down until there was practically no light at all. And I said, "Well, you know so much about subways what seems to be wrong?"

"Some trouble has arisen," he observed.

"Even I could have told you that," I remarked. "What kind of trouble?"

"Well, we'll have to find out;" he said.

And at length we learned what the trouble was. It seems that a subway train - if I understood correctly - is powered by means of bars or rods that project from the side of the cars and connect with the electrically charged third rail, which has a wooden covering above it. These rods have shoes which make the contact with the third rail and as the subway train goes along it draws power through these shoes into the rods and this is the power that sweeps them along. Well in this particular instance one of the shoes apparently became bent and instead of staying on the third rail it jumped up over the wooden covering and all the other shoes, like sheep, docilely followed suit until only a couple of shoes remained on the third rail, drawing sufficient power to break the darkness with a feeble light, but not enough to keep the train moving. So the train wasn't able to continue in its swift, efficient movement because the power contact was insufficient.

It occurred to me that this could be taken as a very good simile of what happens in people's lives. How man

human being trying to cope with the responsibilities and difficulties in their lives, find that they've only got enough power to sustain a feeble and not enough for getting anywhere? Maybe they have the formal kind of religion, but they haven't got the powerful motivation that would be sufficient to carry them successfully through all the vicissitudes and difficulties in their lives.

Now that is no way to live. That is miserable. That is pathetic. And you, as a child of God, should never live that way. More power to you. More power is available than you've ever dreamed. Spiritual power. And if you get it then your life will become much greater than it has ever been. "But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God."

Without that power every human life tends to run down. The more things hit you, the less your energy, your vitality, your resistance make. There is a constant draining away of zest and energy, and your life runs down. I read the other day in the mao-zine THINK which is published by my friend Dwayne Orton of the I.B.M., a very interesting article by the president of a great corporation, one of the most thoughtful articles on business I have ever read. I read lots of business articles because as a minister I am interested in what makes businesses succeed, for I myself am in a business, the biggest business in the world, God's business. Well, this corporation president said that every business organization should have a "department of constant renewal." He maintained that every business tends to become static, tends to get into grooves, tends to lose its inventiveness. So he thought there should be a vice-president in charge of a department of constant renewal so that the business would always be asking itself questions about

itself. Then it would constantly be seeking new and better ways to do its job.

The minute I read that I became very excited. I said to myself, "This is what the church needs - a vice president in charge of constant renewal." Because the church is one of those institutions that tends to get into ruts. Moreover, church ruts, unlike other ruts, become sacred ruts. The impression develops that if you've always done it this way you must always do it this way. Well, that's a rut - and a rut, profane or sacred, is a good place to bury yourself. Why, why in the world should a church assume that it has all the wisdom of the ages and that there are not better ways of transmitting the Gospel of the Lord Jesus Christ? Maybe that assumption is the reason that there are so many dead churches in the world. They die because they have no department of constant renewal.

If this is true of business and of the church it is also true of individuals. You had better set up your own vice-president in charge of constant personal renewal or you will run down and get old before your time and get into a rut.

A man who lives in Connecticut and is one of the most dynamic Christian laymen in his part of the country called me up one day - on a Saturday it was - and said, "Norman, I was thinking of coming down to your church tomorrow. But it means traveling a hundred miles and I don't want to go to the trouble unless your sermon tomorrow is going to be one that is worth traveling a hundred miles to hear. What can you guarantee me?"

"Well," I replied, "you'll have to take a chance, boy. That's about all I can say."

"And the reason I'm coming down to your church,"

he then said, "is to get batteries recharged."

I hadn't heard it put that way before, but that is exactly what we do. This man once had at Marble Collegiate Church a tremendous spiritual experience whereby he was lifted out of a condition of desultory failure in life.

He got his batteries recharged. He discovered a department of constant renewal. One of the most wonderful things about Christianity is that it renews people. We speak of being reborn, of the new birth. That is exactly right. That is exactly what happens when you get this "more power to you." You become a different person.

So don't you go on being the way you ~~are~~ know you may be thinking, "That is all very well, but life is hard." Sure, life is hard. Life sometimes (if I may use a slang phrase) throws the whole book at a person. Every last one of us suffers blows during life, hard blows.

But we have within our reach the power to meet these blows triumphantly. I have seen so many people get this "more power." It is thrilling indeed to see it happen.

Some weeks ago I unexpectedly ran into a man whose history illustrates this availability of more spiritual power in a really dramatic way. He is a man who has been known for several years. When I first met him he was doing spectacularly well in business. In fact he had just received an award as one of the star producers in his industry for that year. He was making money hand over fist and was supremely confident that he would soon be a very rich man. He was riding high. In talking with me, he informed me he was "the personification of positive thinking."

While I couldn't help liking him I did get the impression that his values were somewhat superficial. I ventured to remind him, "Jack, there are more important

things in life than simply making a lot of money." But he was in no mood for that line of thought. He knew what he wanted. And for another three years, by working hard and playing his business opportunities for all they were worth, he continued to push his income up at a very impressive pace.

But Jack was too cocky. He over-reached and made some bad mistakes, lost a lot of money. And before he knew it he was almost broke. It was a staggering misfortune. His first reaction was a grim determination to recoup his losses. But he found he could no longer count upon all of his old connections. He found conditions decidedly tough. And his confidence in himself was badly shaken.

At the point he wrote me an extremely gloomy letter about himself. He was profoundly discouraged and full of self-blame and self-pity. I decided that this called for some strong talking on my part. I got him on the phone.

I said, Jack, when you let difficulties or disappointments get you down this way you just make things worse for yourself - you actually keep yourself down. Remember that you are a child of God. God offers you more than enough power for rising above the toughest difficulties.

The trouble with you is that you are not close enough to God. All you've wanted to do was make money. But the thing that really matters is to be a sound, dynamic, positive person handling your problems with courage and intelligence. Material success will come to you then in whatever measure God deems good for you." And I suggested a kind of personalized thought-conditioning program he could use to get himself in harmony with God and have more power over difficulties.

Well, at a luncheon of business and professional people some weeks ago in a city where I had no reason to expect to see him, I looked around and there was Jack, with a huge smile on his face. I said, "Well, this is an unexpected pleasure. How are things with you?"

"Wonderful!" he answered. "I'm on the receiving end of that power you are always talking about." And he added, "I'm trying to share some of it, too. I've realized that the more you give, the more comes back to you."

Anyone who knew him before can tell from Jack's demeanor today that he is a new man. Now he can handle the blows life brings him serenely and creatively. He is a living example of what we are told in John 1: 12: "But as many as received him, to them gave he power to become the sons of God."

Add up all your troubles, all your disadvantages, all your difficulties - and you can still be greater than all of them put together; not by your own unaided strength, but by the power that can be yours through faith in God. More power to you.

Prayer: Our Heavenly Father, we are so grateful to You for all the wonderful blessings You pour upon us. You gave us life and the chance to live in this wonderful world. But so often we spoil our opportunities through living by something formal rather than by something in depth. Give us, we beseech Thee, this day the wisdom to turn to that inner power which is God in our lives, by which we are able to meet and overcome all the difficulties of life on earth. Through Jesus Christ our Lord. Amen.